



Culture of Disobedience: Rebellion and Defiance in the Japanese Army, 1860-1931

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Culture of Disobedience:
Rebellion and Defiance in the Japanese Army,
1860-1931

A dissertation presented by

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to

The History Department, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences,

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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History

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Abstract

Imperial Japanese soldiers were notorious for following their superiors to certain death. Their enemies in the Pacific War perceived their obedience as blind, and derided them as “cattle”. Yet the Japanese Army was arguably one of the most disobedient armies in the world. Officers repeatedly staged coups d’états, violent insurrections and political assassinations, while their associates defied orders given by both the government and high command, launched independent military operations against other countries, and in two notorious cases conspired to assassinate foreign leaders.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explain the culture of disobedience in the Japanese armed forces. It was a culture created by a series of seemingly innocent decisions, each reasonable in its own right, which led to a gradual weakening of the Japanese government’s control over its army and navy. The consequences were dire, as the armed forces dragged the government into more and more of China in the 1930s, and finally into the Pacific War. This dissertation sheds light on the underground culture of disobedience that became increasingly dominant in the Japanese armed forces, until it made the Pacific War possible.

Using primary sources in five languages, it follows the Army’s culture of disobedience from its inception. By analyzing more than ten important incidents from 1860 to

1931, it shows how some basic “bugs” programmed into the Japanese system in the 1870s, born out of genuine attempts to cope with a chaotic and shifting reality, contributed to the development of military disobedience. The culture of disobedience became increasingly entrenched, making it difficult for the Japanese civilian and military leadership to cope with disobedient officers without paying a significant political price. However, every time the government failed to address the problem, it became more acute. Finally, disobedient military officers were able to significantly influence foreign policy, pushing Japan further towards international aggression, limitless expansion, and conflict with China, Britain and the United States.

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When I first went to Japan for archival research, I encountered a tremendous linguistic problem. Many primary sources, especially documents from the nineteenth century, were almost inaccessible to me. Though I had a working knowledge of modern Japanese, these old texts were written in archaic language and often in an illegible scribble. Therefore, I owe boundless gratitude to the friends and teachers who helped me to master the primary documents. Prof. Nojima-Kato Yōko, the

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List of Abbreviations

AVPRF - Arhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiskei Federatsii (Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation)

AVPRI - Arhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiskoi Imperi (Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire)

BNA – British National Archives

CKS – Chōsen Kōshō Shiryō

CMJP-NAA (China-Manchuria-Japanese Policy, National Archives of Australia)

DC-NDL – Digitized Contents: National Diet Library

DES – A Diplomat in Japan: Diaries of Ernest Satow

DKN – Den Kenjirō Nikki

DKT – Diary of Kido Takayoshi

DNGB – Dai Nihon Gaikō Bunsho

DSZ – Dai Saigō Zenshū

HBDZ – Heben Dazuo yu Rijun Shanxi "Can Liu"

HBT – Hōki Bunrui Taizen

HSTN – Hogohiroi: Sasaki Takayuki Nikki

HULL – Harvard University Lamont Library

IKJ – Iwakura-Kō Jikki

IKKM – Inoue Kaoru Kankei Monjo

IMTFE – International Military Tribunal for the Far East (record of proceedings)

IMTFE-CJEJ- Court Papers, Journals, Exhibits and Judgments of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East

ITKM – Iwakura Tomomi Kankei Monjo

JACAR – Japan Center for Asian Historical Record

JANA – Japanese Army and Navy Archives (Library of Congress, Washington DC)

KAR – Korean American Relations

KBTK - Kuichigai Bōto Takechi Kumakichi hoka hachi-nin wa Tekiritsu Ukagai

KKN – Kido Kōichi Nikki

KKS – Kagoshima Ken Shi

KKTD – Kōshaku Katsura Tarō Den

KSS – Kagoshima Seitō Shimatsu

KTHS - Katsura Tarō hatsu Shokanshū

KTKB - Katsura Tarō Kankei Bunsho (book form, see bibliography)

KTKM – Katsura Tarō Kankei Monjo (original papers, national diet library)

KTM – Kido Takayoshi Monjo

KYAD – Kōshaku Yamagata Aritomo Den

LNA-UNOG – League of Nations Archive, Office of the United Nations at Geneva

MBZ – Meiji Bunka Zenshū

MGKM - Miura Gorō Kankei Monjo

MJPH-NDL – Modern Japanese Political History Materials Reading Room, National Diet Library, Tokyo

MNN – Makino Nobuaki Nikki

MT – Meiji Tennō Ki

NBHM – Nakno Bunkō Hōrei Mokuji

NGB – Nihon Gaikō Bunsho

NIDS – National Institute for Defense Studies (Bōeishō Bōei Kenkyūjo)

NKGS – Nikan Gaikō Shiryō

NSSS-M – Nihon Seiji Saiban Shiroku

OHKM – Ogawa Heikichi Kankei Monjo

OM – Ōkuma Monjo

OSKM – Ōkuma Shigenobu Kankei Monjo

OTM – Ōkubo Toshimichi Monjo

OTN – Ōkubo Toshimichi Nikki

RBOMR-NDL – Rare Books and Materials Reading Room – National Diet Library

RES – Rikugunshō Enkaku Shi

RC-ARTIC – Martin A. Ryerson Collection, Art Institute of Chicago

RIK - Rossiia i Koreia

SEDS – Shibusawa Eiichi Denki Shiryō

SGSS – Saga Seitō Senki

SHM – Saionji-Harada Memoirs

SHRS - Sanbō Honbu Rekishi Sōan

SIKD – Segai Inoue-Kō Den

SKTD – Shōkiku Kido Takayoshi Den

SOJT – Sources of Japanese Tradition

SOJT-B (Sources of Japanese Tradition – Second Edition)

SNKD – Sainan Kiden

SPSS – Shimpen Seinan Senshi

SRKM – Sakamoto Ryōma Kankei Monjo

SSK – Seisei Senki Kō

SSKN – Sanjō Sanetomi-Kō Nenpu

SSMD – Shishaku Saitō Makoto Den

SSN – Saga Sanenaru Nikki

SSS – Saga Seitō Shimatsu

STD – Shōwa Tennō Dokuhakuroku

STDS –Suzuki Teiichi-shi Danwa Sokkiroku

STKS – Saigō Totoku to Kabayama Sōtoku

STZ – Saigō Takamori Zenshū

TGD – Tanaka Giichi Denki

TJDH – The Japan Daily Herald

TKI – Tani Kanjō Ikō

TKR – The Korean Repository

TMJS – Tairo Mizuno Jun Sensei

TMKM – Terauchi Masatake Kankei Monjo

TMN – Terauchi Masatake Nikki

TSSK - Tōa Senkaku Shishi Kiden

TSS-KKJC – Tokyo Saiban Shiryō – Kido Kōichi Jinmon Chōsho

TTN – Takarabe Takeshi Nikki

TYKD – Tokugawa Yoshinobu-Kō Den

TWCT-DE – The Tokyo War Crimes Trial: A Digital Exhibition

UKN – Ugaki Kazushige Nikki

US IAJ: US State Department, Records related to the Internal Affairs of Japan

YAIK – Yamagata Aritomo Ikensho

YAKM – Yamagata Aritomo Kankei Monjo

YJKB – Yasukuni Jinja Kaikō Bunkō (Yasukuni Shrine Archives)

YKD – Yuri Kimimasa Den

ZSK – Zuihitsu Saionji-kō

Note on Names and Dates

All Japanese, Chinese and Korean names in this dissertation are written according to the East Asian convention. i.e. last name first (e.g. Itō Hirobumi). The only exception is East Asian authors who have published work in Western languages (e.g. Takeshi Fujitani).

For the sake of clarity, dates of the old Japanese and Russian calendars (prior to January 1, 1873 and February 1, 1918, respectively) have been converted throughout this dissertation into Gregorian dates, using the Funaba Calendar Application, <http://www.funaba.org/calendar-conversion>

Introduction

The Imperial Japanese Army is prominently associated in the Western popular mind with blind obedience to authority. Notorious in following superiors to certain death, Japanese soldiers in the Pacific War evoked among their enemies unsavory images such as “herd”, “cattle”, or “bee hive.” In one example among many, an Australian war correspondent wrote that “many of the Japanese soldiers I have seen have been primitive oxen-like clods with dulled eyes. [...] They have stayed in their positions and died simply because they have been told to do so, and they haven’t the intelligence to think for themselves.”¹

Leaving the high-blown rhetoric aside, there is some truth in this myth of blind discipline, as Japanese military ideology indeed emphasized unconditional obedience to orders of superiors. The “Imperial Rescript for Soldiers and Sailors,” a seminal document that every soldier had to memorize and be ready to recite at a moment’s notice, warned that “soldiers and sailors should consider loyalty their essential duty. [...] With single heart fulfill your essential duty of loyalty, and bear in mind that duty is weightier than a mountain, while death is lighter than a feather.”²

¹ John Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 84.

² De Bary Theodore Wm., Gluck Carol, Tiedermann Arthur E., *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (second edition, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) 2:705-7. The Japanese original is reproduced in

Officers, too, often rushed to death without thinking twice when ordered to do so, as exemplified by the relatively high rate of officers casualties in almost all Japanese wars. The penal code of the Imperial Army, first published in the 1880s, threatened any soldier or officer, regardless of rank, with severe punishment for any act of disobedience.³

And yet, the Imperial Japanese Army was arguably one of the most disobedient armed forces in modern history. Japanese officers repeatedly staged coup d'états, violent insurrections and political assassinations, a phenomenon which became viral in two peak periods: the 1870s and the 1930s. Between these periods, other officers had incessantly defied orders given by both government and high command, launched independent military operations against other countries, and in two notorious cases even conspired to assassinate foreign leaders. As Craig M. Cameron has written, the phenomenon of *gekokuujō*, “the low overthrowing the high,” was “a crucial and unique concept shaping Japanese military culture. There were many examples, and with astounding consequences. [...] Mid-level staff officers, by defying their superiors, transformed national policy, sometimes with silent support from general headquarters, sometimes in defiance of strenuous objections. Repeatedly, from Emperor Hirohito through the military high command,

Yui Masaomi, Fujiwara Akira, Yoshida Yutaka. eds., *Guntai Heishi*, vol 4. In *Nihon Kindai Shishō Taikei* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989), 172-6.

³ *Rikugun Keihō* (1881), Digitized Content, National Diet Library, articles 50, 110, <http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/794418>.

superiors tolerated insubordination [and] allowed their hands to be forced without reasserting their authority.”⁴

In 1931, a military terror organization named the *Sakura-kai* (Cherry Blossom Society), attempted to annihilate the entire Japanese cabinet with naval bombers. A few months later, Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi was assassinated by rebellious officers. This coup failed, but led to a series of further violent upheavals, both inside and outside the army. In 1935, a leading general was slashed by a junior officer due to a factional rivalry. And finally, in February 1936, all hell broke loose with a massive military insurgency. More than one thousand troops took to the streets, and several Japanese leaders were murdered in their mansions. In a classic book, written during the Second World War, the American correspondent Hugh Byas coined the term “government by assassination.” Officers, according to Byas, terrorized the civilian cabinet through repeated assassinations during the 1930s. Through their ability to inflict lethal violence, they had taken control of foreign policy, pushing timid and terrified leaders to a course of unbridled military expansion and, finally, into the disaster of the Pacific War.⁵

It is very well-known that assassinations became an essential feature of Japanese political life during the 1930s. What does beg explanation, however, is the apparent normality and widespread elite acceptance of this thoroughly abnormal situation. In 1935, the junior officer who murdered a general attempted to go on to

⁴ Craig M. Cameron, "Race and Identity: The Culture of Combat in the Pacific War", *The International History Review* 27:3 (September, 2005), 560.

⁵ Hugh Byas, *Government by Assassination* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1942), 39.

his next assignment, as if nothing had happened. The conspirators of the *Sakura-kai* were “punished” by the same people they had planned to kill with 25 days confinement to an inn. Indeed, the perpetrators enjoyed wide sympathy both in the officer corps and the general public. And yet, it is highly probable that most supporters were unfamiliar with the complicated inner-military debates and factional strife leading to some of these assassinations. Rather it were the “pure motives” of the assassins which mattered to sympathizers.⁶ In Japan of the early 1930s, the violent acts of officers, as far as they were motivated by “sincere” patriotism, were admired in and of themselves.

As a leading historian of the Japanese Army admitted recently, the reasons underlying the rebelliousness of the imperial armed forces in the 1930s are still a pending historical question, unsolved by current scholarship.⁷ The key to unlock this mystery is to shift our glance to the complicated social, intellectual and organizational developments of prior decades. Why did restive officers come to see civilian, and often military authority as illegitimate, and how did such brazen disobedience become so normal an act? Such conditions were in fact an escalation of existing tendencies, having their roots many decades into the past. In order to understand how Japan became a country in which it was normal for soldiers to rebel, to assassinate and to conspire, a history of military disobedience is necessary.

⁶ David A. Sneider, "Action and Oratory: The Trials of the of the May 15th Incident of 1932", *Law in Japan* 23:67 (1990), 51-3, 62; Richard Storry, *The Double Patriots: a Study of Japanese Nationalism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 4.

⁷ Tobe Ryōichi, "Minshūka no Shiten to Seiji no Henchō – 1930 Nendai no Nihon Seiji", Keynote address, Modern Japan History Workshop, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, October 18, 2014.

Surprisingly, such a history is still unwritten. General surveys tend to deal with cases of insubordination as part of larger narratives of political history. Often they do offer significant insights, but hardly in an organized way. Books which deal with the violent insubordination of the 1930s tend to focus on that turbulent period, summarizing everything that happened before as a “preparatory stage,” to use the definition of the political scientist Maruyama Masao.⁸ Indeed, Richard Storry, who drew heavily on Maruyama’s theories in his early accounts of the military plots of the 1930s, describes the earlier history in the same vein, explaining violent nationalism before the 1920s as an ultimately civilian affair.⁹ This, however, was far from being the case. As we shall see throughout this study, unruly officers have been part of the military landscape of modern Japan since the establishment of the Imperial army in the 1870s.

Framework and Methodology

In this thesis, I argue that such incidents of military disobedience were neither sporadic nor random but rather based on a deep-rooted historical pattern, a culture of disobedience which was an integral part of Japanese military life from the 1860s to the 1930s. Tracing the roots and the development of this culture, I demonstrate that it had four major features. First, it was made possible by structural faults in the Japanese polity, comparable to basic “bugs” in a computer code.

⁸ Maruyama Masao, *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics*, Ed. Ivan Moris, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 26. Even that term refers exclusively to the period after 1919. The preceding period is hardly even discussed.

⁹ Storry, *Double Patriots*, 42-4.

Second, its development was an unintentional result of seemingly reasonable decisions made by policy makers who were trying to achieve other goals. Third, it was two-edged, combining non-violent defiance with violent rebellion. Fourth, these two aspects alternated across the years, nurturing and recreating each other in a roundabout way.

Computer bugs are used here as a metaphor denoting basic structural flaws in a political system. Just like bugs in software they did not prevent the state from running. Only in certain situations, under specific conditions, did these bugs cause severe failures which eventually undermined the entire system. The first bug formed a perpetual niche for disobedience in the Japanese polity, and related to the essence of the Meiji monarchy. As recognized by many historians of modern Japan, the authority of the emperor, absolute in theory, was very limited in practice. For reasons we shall discuss in detail later on, the emperor, hidden from public view, could not make policy decisions of his own. Yet as his "will" was the supreme emblem of political legitimacy, a handful of leaders (widely known as the "Meiji oligarchs") were able to use the name of the emperor to govern unofficially from behind the throne. However, this ruling group faced a problem. Officially, the emperor was the one who made decisions, and the oligarchs were merely his advisors, and in order to maintain the image of imperial supremacy they could not and did not legitimize their own position as the de facto rulers of the country. This situation gave an inexhaustible source of ideological ammunition for dissenters in the military and beyond. Such dissenters could always claim that they, rather than the people who unofficially held power, represented the hidden will of the emperor. Thus, Japanese military disobedience was directed against the people who ruled the

country, but almost never against the emperor or the state. Even in its most violent forms, it was monarchic and patriotic.

The second bug, which made such disobedience harder to contend with, related to a certain feature of official state ideology. The Meiji regime had always been based on the motto *fukoku kyōhei* – "rich country and strong army." Relatively early on, above all in military circles, *fukoku kyōhei* was also interpreted as calling for territorial expansion on the Asian continent (though some members of the civilian elites preferred peaceful development through free trade).¹⁰ The movement always had to be a forward one: richer country, stronger army, bigger empire. Therefore, disobedient military elements could express their opposition by independently moving along the road of imperial expansion faster and more resolutely than the government. Often, such behavior took the form of unauthorized military operations against other countries. Because *fukoku kyōhei* was a one-way street, it did not make sense for the government to undo the "achievements" of disobedient officers, even if the political leadership abhorred the way in which they were obtained. It was also difficult to punish such "patriots," who after all were striving after the same goals as the government.

The third bug, which further radicalized this form of disobedience, derived from yet another feature of the *fukoku kyōhei* ideology: its basic ambiguity. It was clear to almost all actors involved that Japan harbored a mission to become richer,

¹⁰ I do not intend to claim that *fukoku kyōhei*, in general, equaled an ideology of endless imperial growth. Many people in the Japanese elites believed that enriching the country through free trade is more important than territorial expansion. In fact, as we shall see in chapter 7, in certain periods significant segments of informed public opinion vehemently opposed expensive plans for military expansion. However, the imperialistic interpretation of *fukoku kyōhei* was often a dominant one, both within and without the army.

stronger and larger, but it was never clear to what extent. *Fukoku kyōhei* was often interpreted as an ideology of endless imperial growth. Therefore, the thirst of disobedient elements in the army could never be quenched, and their dreams could never be satisfied. No matter how much the Japanese Empire expanded, disgruntled officers could always claim that further expansion was needed. Hence, the three bugs mentioned above created room, ideological encouragement and endless pretexts for disobedience in the Imperial Japanese Army.

However, these three bugs only set the stage. In themselves, they increased the probability of disobedience but did not make it inevitable. The actual development of the Japanese Army's culture of disobedience was an unintended consequence of numerous policy decisions taken by different people over a long period of time. Had some of these decisions been different, the development of disobedience could well have been slowed or even curbed. The different actors, whether officers, politicians, or law enforcement personnel, intended to solve problems, not foster disobedience. Yet their actions would have consequences of which they were unaware.

The disobedience unintentionally created by these actors' decisions took two forms: violent and non-violent, each dominant at different times. The alternation between violent and non-violent disobedience, and the roundabout way in which it developed, chronologically frames this study in a period of seventy-one years, from 1860 to 1931. In the 1860s, the Tokugawa regime was overthrown by a revolutionary coalition, abetted by terrorists known as *shishi* (men of high aspiration). The ideology and organizational patterns of these terrorists were adopted by generations of

disobedient officers in Japan. Most of all, they influenced violent rebels who, for various reasons, turned against the new regime in the 1870s. Disobedience in this early, formative period was unsurprising, as the regime was new and weak, and its political hierarchy was still fluid and untested. Yet, the patterns and ideology of disobedience, based on the *shishi* models of the 1860s and the rebellious experience of the 1870s, endured and migrated into later periods, even when the regime of modern Japan became more solid and established.

Ironically, it was the response of the government to the upheavals of the 1870s which made it possible for these patterns of disobedience, established when the regime was weak, to endure even after its solidification. Reforms in the army, implemented after the suppression of a major rebellion in 1877, helped to curb violent disobedience for decades, but they had an unexpected outcome, nurturing a gradually growing tendency for non-violent defiance, either in the form of unauthorized military operations (1895, 1928) or as bloodless coups d'état (1912). By "non-authorized" I do not necessarily mean operations which were launched against explicit orders, but rather operations whose initiators overstepped their authority, or undermined established government policy. This non-violent defiance preserved, in a dormant form, some of the basic features of the past's violent disobedience. Gradually, this defiance became more radical in nature, until it exploded in a new wave of violence in 1931. The beginning of this wave, opening a new phase of murderous insurrections, is where this study ends. In essence, we shall answer the question of why and how the phenomenon of violent disobedience, powerfully curbed after 1877, exploded again fifty years later, contributing to the deterioration of Japan to militarism, unbridled expansion and world war.

As a study of military disobedience in Japan, this thesis is consciously written in the form of narrative history. Following the British historian Lawrence Stone, I define narrative as "the organization of material in a chronologically sequential order and the focusing of the content into a single coherent story, albeit with sub-plots."¹¹ This is for two main reasons. First of all, this thesis is not only a historical study of modern Japan. Simultaneously, it is a case study of military disobedience and the breakdown of political authority, designed for scholars of other regions and periods, military historians, sociologists and readers with similar interests. As such, it cannot assume systematic prior knowledge of modern Japanese history.

My use of narrative history is also related to theoretical concerns. First, the development of military disobedience in the Imperial Army was a long, slow and complicated process. In order to be comprehensible, it has to be explained chronologically and in context. Furthermore, as explained above, the development of disobedience was not an inevitable outcome. Though related to structural faults in Japanese polity, it was also the result of numerous decisions rooted in specific historical moments. Thematic history, which shuns narrative, has a tendency to emphasize the long-term process at the expense of specific events, thus creating an illusion of inevitability. Only a narrative focusing on the details of the incidents, in addition to the long process, can highlight historical junctions, unique circumstances and roads not taken in this complex story of more than seventy years.

¹¹ Lawrence Stone, "The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History", *Past and Present* 85 (November, 1979), 24.

Therefore, a number of prominent incidents of disobedience will be narrated and analyzed in the following chapters, beginning with *shishi* terror in the 1860s and ending with the coup attempts of the *Sakura-kai* in 1931. These incidents are documented in more than fifteen archives in four different countries as well as in letter collections, testimonies, police transcripts, court documents, diplomatic cables, historical newspapers, memoirs, interviews and other forms of primary material in Japanese, English, Chinese, German and Russian. Some of the incidents, such as the Saga Rebellion, the assassination plots of 1874 and the murder of the Korean Queen in 1895, have been rarely studied in detail, so the primary materials are of paramount importance. Other incidents, such as the Taiwan Expedition (1874) and the Taishō political crisis (1912-13), have been analyzed by scholars in both English and Japanese, allowing me to use both primary sources and previous scholarly literature. Even these better known incidents, however, are analyzed here for the first time from the perspective of military disobedience.

Every narrative has to have clear limitations, both chronologically and thematically. This study is by no means a comprehensive history of modern Japan, and I highlight only events which are of relevance to major incidents of disobedience. Other events and developments, even those of great significance in Japanese history, are mentioned in passing or not at all. Neither is this a comprehensive account of disobedience and rebellion in the Japanese Empire. The study's subject is defiance and rebellion in the land army's officer corps and its direct predecessors in the samurai class. The navy, which encountered rebellion and defiance only in two short periods (1912-13 and 1930-32), is treated in chapters seven, nine and the conclusion. Rebellion and defiance among rank-and-file soldiers

and civilians are mentioned only when these people worked, were allied or colluded with land army officers.

In the following pages I do not tell a story that is totally unique to Japan. Military disobedience, both in form of rebellion and defiance, existed at the same time in numerous other countries, particularly in East and South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. Other countries also experienced one or more of the "three bugs", albeit in somewhat different forms.

Hazy centers certainly existed elsewhere. Tsar Nicholas II and Kaiser Wilhelm II failed to demonstrate leadership at crucial junctures, at least in certain parts of their respective reigns. Even a theoretically omnipotent dictator such as Adolf Hitler often did not interfere in key decisions, and expected his subordinates to fight and debate with each other over the "true" meaning of his wish ("working towards the Führer", to use the phrase of Hitler's biographer Ian Kershaw).¹² None of these rulers was as hidden as the Japanese emperor, and sometimes they did interfere in policymaking, but their "haziness" allowed some room for factional infighting and at times encouraged military insubordination.

An expansionist ideology which was both vague and boundless, constituting the second and the third bugs, was also far from being unique. In this respect, it is enough to mention the US ideology of Manifest Destiny and its implementation in the infamous Hawaii coup d'état. In 1893, a group of American citizens and officers

¹² Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: A Biography* (New York: W.W.Norton, 2010), 320-358; Marc Ferro, *Nicholas II: Last of the Tsars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 2; D.P.G Hoffmann., "Kommandogewalt und Kriegsminister", *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft / Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* 68:4 (1921), 740-9

conspired with the US ambassador to Hawaii to overthrow the queen of the island and establish a phony republic, in order to eventually annex Hawaii to the US. They acted independently, without asking for permission and against the will of President Elect Grover Cleveland. Yet their "patriotism" won them enormous support and made the coup extremely difficult to reverse. Five years later, Hawaii was annexed to the US.¹³

The case of Japan was therefore far from being unprecedented. And yet, the combination of the three bugs together did make Japan's story different to that of Russia, Germany or the US. The challenges Japan faced were also not the same as those faced by other countries, nor were the responses of policymakers to such challenges. The unique legacy of the Japanese past, especially the *shishi* and their ideology, also played a very important role. Japanese military insubordination, notwithstanding its similarity to cultures of disobedience in other countries, is therefore an independent historical phenomenon. How it came about is what this thesis tries to explain.

State of the Field

During the research for this thesis, I was unable to find even one book dealing with the history of Japanese military disobedience as a long-durée phenomenon. There are excellent institutional histories of the army from the early Meiji Era to the Second World War, written by historians such as Edward Drea, Ōe

¹³ Tom Coffman, *Nation Within: The History of the American Occupation of Hawaii* (Kihei, Hawaii: Koa Books, 2009), 109-145.

Shinobu, Leonard Humphreys, Tobe Ryōichi and others. Tsutsui Kiyotada produced a superb study on the social and political background of military developments. There are also ample surveys of rebellion and disobedience in certain periods, especially in the 1870s (Matsushita Yoshio, Haga Noboru, Sasaki Suguru, Takagi Shunsuke) and the 1930s (James Crowley, Ben Ami Shillony, Yale Maxon, Sadako Ogata). In addition, there are theoretical suppositions on the nature of disobedience.¹⁴ But as for a thorough history of disobedience in modern Japan, there is virtually none.

In this short survey of the field, we shall focus on studies presenting historical approaches which might be applied to the problem of military disobedience at large. Below, I shall discuss four of these approaches: the Maruyama interpretation, the empathetic approach, functionalism, and network studies. The fifth, James Crowley's approach of foreign policy realism, is more relevant for the ramifications of military disobedience, and as such will be discussed at length in the conclusion of this thesis.

The first sophisticated reflections on the nature of Japanese military disobedience were offered by the celebrated political scientist Maruyama Masao. This scholar, like many other historians at the time, examined the past in order to comprehend the disaster of the Second World War. In his pivotal book, *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics*, he endeavored to integrate military disobedience into the larger picture of the fascist takeover which led to the war.¹⁵ While doing so, he explained why disobedient officers, themselves sinister

¹⁴ See below, and in the bibliography, for precise references to these studies.

¹⁵ Maruyama, *Thought and Behavior*. The translation is based on works mostly written in the end of the 1940s.

representatives of “fascism,” attempted to fight an establishment which was “fascist” as well. In order to do so, Maruyama developed a Hegelian theory of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis: disobedient officers represented “fascism from below.” They fought the ruling elites, but actually paved their way to institute “fascism from above.”

Maruyama’s analysis is based on his understanding of pre-war Japanese society. The post-restoration state, he argued, was especially vulnerable to fascist influences due to the basic “pathologies” of its underlying structure: a lack of individualism, expansionist ideology justified by an imagined destiny to rule the world, and, most of all, the fabrication of the imperial institution as the ultimate source of moral values. The ruling elites of Japan, thus, were already prone to fascism, the signs of which had already manifested during the period of “sham constitutionalism” and party rule.¹⁶

This imperial disease, argues Maruyama, invaded “every nook and cranny of the Japanese national order” – a situation which was utilized by disobedient officers in their quest to install “fascism from below.”¹⁷ This fascism from below, like its European counterpart, borrowed some ideological elements from the left – for example, resistance to capitalism – and was practiced in recurring terrorist attacks against the Japanese establishment. The ultimate failure of fascism from below, following the debacle of the February 1936 Incident, allowed the ruling elites to institute “fascism from above,” allegedly in order to restrain the future emergence of

¹⁶ Ibid, xi, 1-23, 80.

¹⁷ Ibid, 18.

violent “fascism from below.”¹⁸ Thus, argues Maruyama, the failure of the underground politics of fascism ironically turned Japan into a fascist country, as “the fascist movement from below was completely absorbed into totalitarian transformation from above.”¹⁹ The anti-thesis combined with the thesis, creating the horrible synthesis which led Japan into World War Two and disaster.

In this context, Maruyama constantly derides the rebellious officers as daydreamers, drunkards and rascals, while their motives are hardly examined or seriously treated.²⁰ This is unsurprising, as he is less interested in disobedient officers as human beings, and much more as a means to exposing the “pathology” which led to the war. This may also explain the fact that his account is rarely footnoted, that the theoretical edifice is based on unproven generalizations, and that the definition of the term “fascism” as an explanatory category is not altogether clear.²¹ And yet, Maruyama’s insights about the dynamics of forces from above and from below are indispensable for any serious study of the subject.

Maruyama’s most outstanding theoretical contribution, however, is his approach to the role of the imperial institution as the drive and motor of Japanese military disobedience - the basis for my own analysis of the imperial hazy center, the

¹⁸ Ibid, 65-72.

¹⁹ Ibid, 72.

²⁰ Ibid, 79-80.

²¹ Maruyama himself admits that he “wishes to avoid” a “general discussion of fascism”, but he “hopes to clarify” what he means “by Japanese fascism without having recourse to any abstract a priori definition” (25). However, without an “a-priori” definition, we are stuck with a circular argument: disobedient officers are fascists, because they fit into a specialized definition of “Japanese fascism” designed especially for them.

first "bug" which nurtured and encouraged military disobedience. The emperor, argued Maruyama, had absolute power in theory but was a powerless ruler in practice. However, the illusion of his hidden power was omnipotent only due to spectators' faith. This hidden power, wrote Maruyama, motivated disobedience in the following way. As reverence to the monarch was the exclusive standard of morality in Imperial Japan, senior officers could disobey orders with impunity because they were relatively close to the absolute source of morality, the emperor.²² However, this model, fruitful as it is for our analysis in the following chapters, does not explain why disobedience came often from **junior** officers for whom the emperor and his court were far away, almost "beyond the clouds."

Maruyama has seen disobedient officers as agents, willing or unwilling, of a conspiracy transcendent to their own selves. To counter this tendency, there came the "empathetic approach." By "empathetic" I do not necessarily mean sympathy or support for the goals of disobedient officers, but rather an attempt to understand their actions through their own ideas and perceptions. According to Itō Takashi, one of the first major representatives of this school, actors in the prewar Japanese political landscape have to be categorized according to their position in two respective spectrums.

Firstly the spectrum of vision, stretched between "progressives" at the one end, and "restorationists" at the other. The former looked to the West as their model for Japan's future, while the latter nostalgically yearned for the native

²² Ibid, 13, 128-30.

“spiritual” values of the mythical past. Secondly, the spectrum of gradualists vis-à-vis radical-reformists has to do with the group’s methods more than with its convictions. While the gradualists tended to support peaceful reform, the radical-reformists mostly believed that the current order was rotten to the bone and had to be radically changed, by force of arms if necessary.²³ During the interwar period, according to Itō, the Japanese right-wing groups moved closer and closer toward the restorationist-radical-reformist corner of the matrix of the two spectrums.²⁴ The merits of Itō’s theory are considerable, mainly due to his sophisticated theoretical structure, which draws more from the ideological world of disobedient officers than from imported categories such as “fascism.” Its shortcoming, though, is in the author’s failure to explain the violent strife between disobedient officers and the military establishment, except with a passing reference to factional struggles.

Another important representative of the empathetic school is the Israeli historian Ben-Ami Shillony, who entered into the debate in 1973. Shillony, then a young PhD at Princeton University and later the doyen of Japanese studies in Israel, published his study on the coup d’état of February 26, 1936, based on numerous interviews and the extensive use of available primary sources.²⁵ Shillony basically agreed with Maruyama regarding the influence of disobedient officers on the subsequent rise of the military, but insisted that this was largely contrary to their

²³ Itō Takashi, "The Role of Right-Wing Organizations in Japan", in Dorothy Borg, Shumpei Okamoto, eds., *Pearl Harbor as History: Japanese American Relations 1931-1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 487-511.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 488-9.

²⁵ Ben Ami Shillony, *Revolt in Japan – The Young Officers and the February 26, 1936 Incident* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

own will. These officers, he argued, actually distrusted the army leadership just as they loathed the concept of a fascist dictatorship.²⁶ Thus, unlike Maruyama, Shillony does not see the different factions of the Imperial Army as sharing a common trait of “fascism.” “Like lightning at night,” he writes, “[The incident] illuminated things which had hitherto been shrouded in darkness. Intricate connections, clashing interests, ideological conflicts, and factional strife came to the fore, momentarily shattering the image of the harmonious Imperial Army.”²⁷ It is not an exaggeration to say that Shillony was one of the first scholars, both in the West and in Japan, to be interested in disobedient officers as human beings reacting to the reality around them and not only as structural nodes in a long term historical process.

Unsurprisingly, he could not share the righteous indignation of some authors, or the cool-headed indifference of others. Instead, he wrote about his subjects with genuine compassion, even occasional sympathy. The attempt to evaluate disobedient officers by their own ideas, and not according to predetermined theoretical models, is the most important contribution of the emphatic approach to the field.

A very different approach, however, was presented by a group of historians who might be described as “functionalists.” If the empathetic historians stressed intentions and motives, the functionalists shifted attention to the dynamics of events. The most prominent representative of this group in the field of Japanese military studies is Tobe Ryōichi, a highly original scholar who described the history of

²⁶ Ibid, 213-14.

²⁷ Ibid, xi.

the Imperial Army as a history of “four paradoxes”: 1. the main goal of the army’s architects was to keep a division between the military and political spheres, but the army became increasingly engaged in politics; 2. the army was built as a bastion of Western-style rationalism, and ended up as an irrational institution whose ideological bedrock was bellicose fanaticism; 3. soldiers swore an oath to obey the imperial will at all times, but this “imperial will” was in fact abstract, and had little to do with the real intentions of the living emperor; 4. loyalty to the emperor as a living god was at odds with loyalty to the bureaucratic, modern state.²⁸

These paradoxes, according to Tobe, show that the eventual development of the Japanese Army, and especially its utter failure to uphold military discipline, were at fundamental odds with the original intentions of its founding fathers. Events, he argues, have dynamics of their own, regardless of human intentions. In particular, the gradual dissolution of the “domain cliques” (*hanbatsu*) after the Russo-Japanese War expanded the military leadership, drew a rift between generals and politicians and pushed the military machine out of control.²⁹

The newest approach, undoubtedly influenced by the development of social network analysis in recent decades, has its focus not only on the dynamics of bureaucratic institutions but also on that of military rebels as a group. In the network

²⁸ Tobe, Ryōichi, *Gyakusetsu no Guntai* (Tokyo: Chūo Kōronsha, 1998), 14-21.

²⁹ Ibid, 165-76. Another important proponent of the same approach is Tsutsui Kyotada, who analyzed the dynamics of disobedience in the Japanese Army in three different dimensions: *Gekokujo*, failure to remove failed officers (motivating them to compensate for prior debacles with future adventures), and the limited nature of the military education system. All the while, Tsutsui analyzes the dynamics inside the officer corps, showing how things developed inadvertently without being planned in advance. See: Tsutsui Kyotada, *Shōwaki Nihon no Kōzō: sono Rekishi Shakaiteki Kōsatsu* (Tokyo: Yūhikaku, 1984), 81-115.

approach, links, connections and channels of information have a crucial significance to the development of events. Interestingly enough, unlike the other approaches which focus on military rebellions in the 1930s, the network approach is more dominant in newer studies on rebellions in the late Tokugawa period. It had its beginnings in Thomas Huber's study on Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration, and its worthy heirs in Chōnan Shinji's study of *shishi* information networks, as well as in other monographs and articles.³⁰ The stress on institutional and network dynamics is as crucial to the understanding of military disobedience as it is to that of any other group-related activity.

In my research, I was influenced by all four approaches outlined above. From Maruyama I adopted the dialectics of disobedience from "above" and "below", as well his ideas on the role of the imperial institution. I was also influenced by the seemingly contradicting attitudes of the empathetic and functionalist historians. While I agree with the former on the need to assign importance to motives and worldviews of actors, I balance this by the latter's stress on the dynamics of events and the gap between intentions and consequences. Above all, in analyzing disobedient officers as a group operating in a social context, I adopt the framework proposed by the network scholars. This study, therefore, was influenced by a large number of historians from various schools, holding different and somewhat contradicting approaches. Much of my analysis in the following chapters owes to

³⁰ Thomas M. Huber, *The Revolutionary Origins of Modern Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), 117-8, 150, 201; Chōnan Shinji, "Bunkyūki ni okeru 'Shoshi Ōgi' to Sōmō", *Kokushikan Shigaku* 12 (March, 2008), 36-69. In his introduction, Chōnan surveys several other studies with a network-based approach.

their insights. The responsibility for all potential mistakes, however, is exclusively my own.

Part I

The World of Yesterday

Chapter One

Men of High Aspirations

The Origins of Japanese Military Disobedience: 1858–1868

There is no present or future – only the past, happening over and over again.

Leon Uris, *Trinity*

In Imperial Japan (1868–1945), the past was deeply felt in culture, society and politics. Excavated, molded and always reinterpreted, historical precedents, old and new, frequently made their appearance in the press, the parliament, the education system and everyday life. Certainly the Imperial Army, an institution deeply reverent to Japanese past, was ever mindful of the shadows of history. Military rebels, those officers who planned assassinations, coups d'état and other acts of radical disobedience, were also no exception to this rule. They, too, were often quick to justify their behavior using historical precedents. One example from the past, however, had an especially strong currency among them. Lieutenant-Colonel Hashimoto Kingorō, a general staffer who planned to annihilate the members of the Japanese cabinet with machine gun fire, poisonous gas and naval bombers in October 1931, wrote in his memoirs that he felt he had to follow the footsteps of the

"men of high aspiration", known in Japanese as *shishi*.¹ Hashimoto's close ally, Captain Chō Isamu, justified his cohort's wild drinking habits with the argument that once, seventy years ago, the behavior of the *shishi* had been very much the same.² Why were the *shishi*, rebellious samurai active in the 1860s, more than half a century before Hashimoto and Chō, so central to their self-perception as military rebels?

Symbols are important, and in more than one way. The *shishi* had their impact felt on future rebels in three different dimensions, each of them crucial to the development of military disobedience in the Japanese Army. Ideologically speaking, some of the ideals prevalent among the *shishi*, reinterpreted and removed from their original context, inspired Japanese rebels well into the twentieth century. Additionally, some of the *shishi*'s organizational patterns "migrated" into the Japanese Army, becoming an institutional grid on which future disobedience would grow. Finally, the *shishi*'s activity gave rise to a chain of events, reactions and counter-reactions, making the army and the Japanese imperial state more vulnerable to the activity and influence of military rebels. In this chapter, we shall tell the story of the *shishi*, focusing on their ideology, organization and impact, the three factors which had crucial influence on later disobedience. History never has a clear beginning or end, but every historical study is effectively a narrative. As such, it cannot do without chronological boundaries. And for the purpose of our narrative, the *shishi* are the point where the story began.

¹ Hashimoto Kingorō, *Hashimoto Taisa no Shuki*, Nakano Masao, ed. (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 1963), 21.

² "Chō Isamu Shuki", op. cit. in Ōtani Keijirō, *Rakujitsu no Joshō: Shōwa Rikugunshi* (Tokyo: Yagumo Shoten, 1959), 45.

Before the *Shishi*: The Twilight of Tokugawa Japan

In 1600, Japan was unified after a prolonged war between numerous independent lords. In order to keep the country united, Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu and his successors redesigned it as a sophisticated mix between feudalism and central rule. Using the emperor in Kyoto as a rubber stamp, The Tokugawa governed the realm from the city of Edo, living in coexistence with a large number of lords (daimyo), each of them ruling his own domain. The daimyo had to surrender several important prerogatives to the Bakufu, as the shogun's regime was popularly known. First of all, the Bakufu held about one fourth of the country, including large swaths of land in central Japan and the strategic towns of Edo, Osaka, Kyoto and Nagasaki. In addition, it held, with several exceptions, a monopoly over the highly-limited relations which Japan had with foreign countries.³ Furthermore, the shogun was responsible for upholding peace in the country, including subjugation of violent conflicts between domains.

Each daimyo had considerable autonomy to run his own affairs without interference, but significant interactions with other domains were rarely allowed to exist without Bakufu approval. The daimyo were not allowed to enter Kyoto, even less so to approach the emperor.⁴ Internal networking between the domains was dangerous, because they could upset the balance and expose the basic weakness of

³ Ronald Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 235-46.

⁴ Nomura, Shinsaku, "Bakumatsu no Goshinpei Secchi ni tai suru Chōshū Han no Kiyo", *Yamaguchi-ken Chihōshi Kenkyū* 110 (October, 2010), 32-40.

the Bakufu. The shogun and his government, after all, did not possess enough troops, lands or funds to subdue the entire realm. In order to restrain a rebellious domain, the Bakufu had to borrow power from the other lords. Coalitions between domains, upsetting this balance, were therefore strongly discouraged.

Ideologically speaking, the Tokugawa order was based on the ideal of balance. The government in Edo, the various daimyo, and many of the period's intellectual luminaries believed in a model of harmonious stability between shogun and daimyo, lords and retainers, higher samurai and lower samurai, warriors and commoners, peasants and merchants. Each group was deemed to have its own role in the harmonious structure of the realm.⁵ But this balance, like any balance, was an ideological one, never completely in tandem with reality on the ground. Throughout the period, individuals from different domains and status groups became interconnected through common social, commercial, literary and scholarly pursuits.⁶ By the turn of the nineteenth century these circulation networks, connecting the various domains with the big cities and with one other were already dense, developed and highly sophisticated.

Samurai, officially confined to their own domains, also became increasingly interconnected as the nineteenth century progressed. The encroachment of foreign ships led some daimyo to encourage practical education in martial arts. As a result,

⁵ Yamaga Sokō, "The Way of the Samurai", *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, Wm.Theodor de Bary, Carol Gluck and Arthur E. Tiedemann, eds., (New York: University of Columbia Press, 2005), 2:662-4 (hereafter cited as *SOJT*).

⁶ David L. Howell, *Geographies of Identity in Nineteenth Century Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 24-5.

talented samurai students began to journey, with the blessings of their lords, to the renowned fencing schools of Edo. Others were sent to study various useful subjects, such as musketry, coastal defense, fortification and Western military organization. Some schools had also taught Confucianism or different strands of Japanese nativism, imbuing their students with deep reverence for the emperor in Kyoto.⁷

Technological developments, especially the proliferation of defensive equipment, made it possible to organize fencing practice bouts, a natural trend given the renewed emphasis on samurai military preparedness. These developments had dramatic ramifications on the growth of samurai networks. Suddenly, fencing tournaments became common and popular, attracting samurai from all across the realm. Both schools and tournaments gave rise to a competitive, bellicose student culture.⁸ Indeed, prints in memorial books from the late Tokugawa period vividly show how spirited, violent and sweaty this culture was, how strong the friendship bonds which it created between warriors from different domains were. These networks formed the basis on which the *shishi* movement later grew.⁹

⁷ Matsuo Masahito, *Kido Takayoshi* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2007), 4. Colin Jaundrill's recent study of military modernization at the late Tokugawa period has shown the importance of musketry studies in the transitions of the period, but it seems that this specific kind of study did not involve much inter-domainal socializing, if at all. See: D. Colin Jaundrill, *Twilight of the Samurai: The Creation of Japan's National Conscript Army* (PhD Thesis, unpublished: Columbia University, 2009), 15-66.

⁸ Hurst, *Armed*, 83-90; Rainier Hesselnik, "The Assassination of Henry Heusken", *Monumenta Nipponica* 49:3 (Autumn, 1994), 340; Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 49, 81-9, 115.

⁹ For a survey of current research in this subject see Chōnan, "Bunkyūki", 36-7. An interesting example of the way in which school connections were utilized for rebellious purposes is the case of Orita Toshihide, a Satsuma Samurai retainer and a loyalist. Orita was an expert in fortification science, who, like many other people with useful knowledge, travelled around the realm and taught his field of expertise. Therefore, he had numerous pupils and every domain, in a sense, was a private inter-domainal network which he used to gather intelligence in and around the time of the struggle against the Bakufu in 1868. In this case, a teacher-student network with an inter-domainal character was crucial to the war effort as a whole. See: Ichika, Yoshiaki, *Saigō Takamori to Bakumatsu Ishin no*

The turbulent events of the 1850s had turned some segments of this harmless student culture into a counterculture of dissent. The Shogunate's failure to stop the incursion of Westerners into Japan incensed many daimyo, who were quick to criticize the Bakufu's failure to uphold the "ancestral tradition" of international seclusion. The emperor, for generations relegated by the Tokugawa to the political sidelines, refused to rubber stamp the shogun's policy, proscribing any concessions to the foreigners.¹⁰ Anti-Bakufu elements in Chōshū, a strong domain in western Japan, used the emperor's "order" as a pretext to champion the cause of the foreigners' exclusion, leading to a series of conflicts with the the shogun and his government.

This political and social instability proved deeply unsettling to the identity of many young samurai. As the psychologist Erik Erikson has noted, in such situations "youth feel endangered, individually and collectively, whereupon it becomes ready to support doctrines offering a immersion in a synthetic identity (extreme nationalism, racism or class consciousness) and a collective condemnation of a totally stereotyped enemy of the new identity."¹¹ The arrival of the foreigners to Japan gave these restive elements an enemy to unite against across domainal boundaries. Thus, a movement of young samurai, professing hatred of the foreigners, mistrust towards the Bakufu, and increasing anger at the failure of the

Seikyoku (Kyoto: Mineruva Shobō, 2011), 313, as well as *Orita Toshihide Nikki* in *Tadayoshi-Kō Shiryō*, ed. Kagoshima Ken Ishin Shiryō Hensan Shohen, (Kagoshima: Kagoshima Ken, 1974-80) 4:544-55.

¹⁰ Donald Keene, *Emperor of Japan: Meiji and his World, 1852-1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 39.

¹¹ Erik H. Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility: Lectures on the ethical Implications of psychoanalytic Insight* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1964), 93.

shogun to protect Japan began to emerge in the late 1850s.¹² It was particularly strong among low- and middle-ranking samurai in Edo, both in fencing schools and other institutions, far away from domainal supervision and imbued with vigor and martial spirit.¹³ Finding it easy to hatch conspiracies and brave death along with friends they knew and trusted, many of the samurai students in Edo and the various domains had adopted an increasingly rebellious attitude.¹⁴

Other young samurai, who were not lucky enough to be sent as students to Edo and Kyoto, snuck out of their domains to join the burgeoning samurai counterculture in the big cities. Openly defying the rules of the realm, which strictly forbade such illegal absconding from service, they became *rōnin* or *furō*, masterless samurai, who were effectively wanted criminals.¹⁵ Others established underground cells in their own domains. In Tosa, a fencing master of low samurai status became a leader of a *shishi* organization known as the Loyalist Party (*Tosa Kinnōtō*).¹⁶ Satsuma,

¹² Rainier Hesselnik, "The Assassination of Henry Heusken", *Monumenta Nipponica* 49:3 (Autumn, 1994), 334.

¹³ Thomas Huber, *The Revolutionary Origins of Modern Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), 130; Marius B. Jansen, *Sakamoto Ryōma and the Meiji Restoration* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), 85-6. According to Jansen, some of these students of lower samurai status did not receive boarding at their domain's compound, making it more difficult for domainal authority to monitor their behavior.

¹⁴ For theoretical background on the formation of networks of dissent through prior social ties see: David Knoke. See: Knoke, *Political Networks: The Structural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1990), 68.

¹⁵ Haga, Noboru, *Bakumatsu Shishi no Sekai* (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 2003), 233-8.

¹⁶ Tōta Mitsuhiro, "Tosa Kinnōtō", *Jinbutsu Ōrai Rekishi Dokuhon* (June, 2011), 86-7. According to Tōta (87), there were 192 sworn members in this party, joined by a larger periphery.

the powerful southern domain, had also witnessed the growth of a miniscule but ultimately influential group of radical samurai.¹⁷

The movement was strongest in the Chōshū Domain, where it appeared in a private school of martial arts and Confucianism led by the young thinker Yoshida Shōin. A revered spiritual guide of many young samurai within and without his domain, Yoshida distilled the angry mood of many of his peers into scathing criticism of the Bakufu, and called his students to actively raise arms against it.¹⁸ A major attempt by the shogun's chief minister to crush the movement in 1858, achieved initial success. But this campaign, known as the Ansei Purge, ended abruptly when the chief minister was assassinated on March 24, 1860 by a group of rebellious samurai.¹⁹ This was the first major operation of the *shishi* movement.

Fools and Madmen: The Shishi Ideology

The term *shishi*, increasingly associated with fugitive samurai who used violence against foreigners, Shogunate officials and pro-Bakufu elements in the various domains, was adopted from classical Chinese sources. In the *Analects* (15:8), Confucius pointed out that “men of high aspirations would not sacrifice humaneness to remain alive. In certain instances, they would rather sacrifice their own life to

¹⁷ Chōnan Shinji, "Bunkyūki ni okeru 'Shoshi Ōgi' to Sōmō", *Kokushikan Shigaku* 12 (March, 2008), 36-6937-8.

¹⁸ Chōnan, "Bunkyūki", 36; Haga, *Shishi no Sekai*, 21.

¹⁹ Yamakawa Hiroshi, *Kyoto Shugoshoku Shimatsu: Kyū-Aizu Rōshin no Shuki*, trans. Kaneko Mitsuharu (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1965-6), 1: 4-5; Keene, *Emperor*, 42-5; Takagi Shunsuke, *Sorekara no Shishi: mō Hitotsu no Meiji Ishin* (Tokyo: Yūhikaku, 1985), 5.

uphold humaneness.”²⁰ The term *shishi*, the Japanese reading of the original Chinese “*zhi-shi*” (man of high aspirations) was familiar to many young samurai from their classical education, though originally it did not carry rebellious implications. Yet, from the late 1850s, non-conformist intellectuals such as Yoshida Shōin began to use it in explicit revolutionary contexts, praising the samurai who raised their swords against the Bakufu and its allies.²¹

In the 1860s, the *shishi* political platform was summarized by the catchphrase *sonnō jōi*, “revere the emperor and expel the barbarians.”²² The *shishi*’s opposition to the Bakufu rested on its failure to uphold both clauses of the phrase *sonnō jōi*. By his failure to expel the Western barbarians who polluted the divine Japanese realm, the shogun neglected his duty as the protector of the country.²³ And by refusing to follow the emperor’s orders, the Tokugawa house showed irreverence to the throne. Some of the more radical *shishi* thinkers, such as Yoshida Shōin, went even further and concluded that the Shogunate, by itself, was illegitimate, and the shoguns, from the twelfth to the nineteenth century, were in fact usurpers of imperial power.²⁴

²⁰ The translation from classical Chinese is my own. I decided not to use one of the available excellent translations of the *Analects*, which usually try, legitimately, to translate the term *zhi-shi* (志士) in tandem with ancient Chinese meanings or later Chinese Confucian interpretations. Thus, often they choose such translations as “gentleman,” “earnest officer” or “scholar,” which do not fully reflect the particular function of the term 志士 in late Tokugawa warrior culture.

²¹ Haga, *Shishi no Sekai*, 33; Sasaki Suguru, *Shishi to Kanryō: Meiji Shonen no Jōkei* (Kyoto: Mineruva Shobō, 1984), 111; Takagi, *Sorekara*, 2.

²² For more detail on the origins of the term and its usage see Kojima Tsuyoshi, “Chūgoku umare no Shishiteki Shisō”, *Jinbutsu Ōrai Rekishi Dokuhon* (June, 2011), 134-9, 134-9. See also: Sasaki, *Shishi to Kanryō*, 122-3. See also: Haga *Shishi no Sekai*, 233-4; Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 40, 95-6.

²³ Nishijima Ryōsaborō, *Nakayama Tadamitsu Ansatsu Shimatsu* (Tokyo: Shinjibutsu Ōraisha, 1973), 39.

²⁴ Kawaguchi, “Shōka”, 70-1.

The *shishi*, like all human actors, operated out of a complicated mix of personal and ideological motives. Self-interest was certainly part of the picture. Particularly, the *shishi*, predominantly young, lower- and mid-ranking samurai, were resentful of a social order which destined them to live in poverty and obscurity, denying them the right to influence the affairs of the realm.²⁵ Sakamoto Ryōma from Tosa contrasted, in a famous letter, the exciting adventures he had as a *shishi* with “a place like home, where you can’t have any ambition and you spend your time in stupid ways like an idiot.”²⁶

This individualism led many *shishi* to look down on formal hierarchies and symbols of authority and status. Prevailing social norms dictated differences in speech, dress and demeanor according to one’s hereditary rank. The *shishi* counterculture, which was a reaction against this strict stratification, was leveling by its very nature. Young samurai activists who escaped their domains were often wild-looking, with grown hair and disheveled clothes, expressing revulsion for normal rank and status boundaries.²⁷ Their meeting places tended to be entertainment establishments of the so-called “floating world”: restaurants, brothels, inns and

²⁵ Haga, *Shishi no Seikatsu*, 22-5, 33-4; *Dai Nihon Ishin Shiryō*, Tokyo Daigaku Shiryō Hensanjo, ed. (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1959) 3:360-1. See also Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 146; Kido Takayoshi Den Hensanjo, ed. *Shōkiku Kido Takayoshi Den*, (Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 1927)1:216 (hereafter cited as *SKTD*); Nishijima, *Nakayama*, 36. When the *shishi* finally took control of Chōshū in 1865, one of the first reforms they implemented was to end the discrimination against retainers of low rank. See Huber, *Revolutionary Origins*, 193-4.

²⁶ Sakamoto Ryōma to his sister, 22.10.1860, *Sakamoto Ryōma Kankei Monjo*, ed. Nihonshi Sekkyōkai, (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1967) 1:136 (hereafter cited as *SRKM*). The English translation is taken from Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 216.

²⁷ See, for example, the description of the Satsuma *shishi* Imuta in *Shibayama Aijirō Nikki* (unpublished) in *Dai Nihon Ishin Shiryō Kōhon*, Tokyo University Historiographical Institute (Tokyo Daigaku Shiryō Hensanjo) 79-80 (hereafter cited as *SAN*); Haga, *Shishi no Sekai*, 24-5; Huber, *Revolutionary Origins*, 119.

geisha houses.²⁸ The red light districts of big Japanese cities, whose clientele was anyway a mixed bag of samurai and townspeople, offered relative anonymity regardless of one's rank and status. There, young *shishi* could hatch plots, drink, carouse with geisha and enjoy intoxicating freedom.²⁹ Yamakawa Hiroshi, a senior Bakufu police official in Kyoto, recalled that in many cases, the *shishi* crossed the line into outright criminality. "There were many of them," he wrote, "who, paying lip service to *sonnō jōi*, robbed money to pay for alcohol and prostitutes."³⁰ And yet, many *shishi* were also idealists. The rejection of self interest in favor of public concerns, for example, was dominant in both their oral and written discourse.³¹ As even some of their sworn enemies from the Bakufu camp admitted, they "left both lord and family" and took great risks upon themselves to save the realm from an impending crisis.³²

The urgency of this crisis prompted many *shishi* leaders and activists to forgo caution and planning, resorting instead to violent direct action. In fact, lack of planning had become an ideal in and of itself. As part of the *shishi*'s protest against the established order, they did not accept the circumspect, calculated ways of domain and Bakufu bureaucrats. Excessive prudence was suspicious and often

²⁸ See for example *SKTD* 1:70-1; Sakamoto to his sister, 22.10.1862, *SRKM* 1:136,8.

²⁹ Haga, *Shishi no Sekai*, 198-9, 214; Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 98; Ichisaka Tarō, "Sake to Shishi to Bakumatsu Sōran", *Jinbutsu Ōrai Rekishi Dokuhon* (June, 2011), 178-83, 178.

³⁰ Yamakawa, *Shimatsu* 1:49. See also Tōyama, Shigeki, *Ishin Henkaku no Shosō* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1991), 17-18.

³¹ Itō Seirō, "Tenchūgumi", *Jinbutsu Ōrai Rekishi Dokuhon* (June, 2011), 106. See also Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 113.

³² Yamakawa, *Shimatsu* 1:59.

perceived as hypocrisy, while intuitive violence was viewed as proof of sincerity and purity of heart.³³ This ideology was not merely expressed in failure to plan ahead, but also in self-destructive recklessness.³⁴ When some Chōshū *shishi* raided the British Legation (then under construction) in January 1863, they spent the hours before the operation “drinking heavily and singing loudly” in a pub. The fact that they were indeed able to set fire to the legation was indicative of the inadequacy of Bakufu defenses more than of their own operational capabilities.³⁵

The metaphors often used at the time to describe such behavior were “madness” (*kyō*) and “foolishness” (*gu*), terms signifying readiness to kill and be killed without thinking twice for the sake of the final goal. A madman, explained one *shishi* thinker, “must break through the stagnation of established procedure to pursue his own version of reality.”³⁶ Sometimes this madness was quite literal. In late 1862, when a detachment of Tosa *shishi* was making its way from their domain to Edo, some members wanted to disembowel themselves to push the others to

³³ See for example *SAN*, 79-80; Sasaki Suguru, *Shishi to Kanryō: Meiji Shonen no Jōkei* (Kyoto: Mineruva Shobō, 1984), 236-7.

³⁴ Harry D. Harutoonian, *Toward Restoration: The Growth of Political Consciousness in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 193; Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 98-9, 136; Ernest M. Satow, *A Diplomat in Japan* (Bristol: Ganesha pub.; Tokyo: Edition Synapse, 1998), 71.

³⁵ This anecdote was told by Itō Hirobumi, who insisted that he, being the only one who refrained from drinking, remember buying a saw in order to cut the fence. The others, too dazzled by alcohol, had just forgotten it. Itō’s self-glorification may be doubted, of course, but his testimony is very telling as far as the general atmosphere is concerned. See: *Itō-kō Chokuwa*, ed. Komatsu Midori (Tokyo: Chikura Shobō, 1936), 104-7. For a detailed description of the legation burning operation see: Nakahara Kunihei, *Inoue-Haku Den* (Tokyo: Tōyō Insatsu Kabushiki Kaisha Insatsu, 1907), 1:195-206.

³⁶ Harutoonian, *Toward*, 221-2. And see also Ann Walthall, *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman: Matsuo Taseko and the Meiji Restoration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 183; Sasaki, *Shishi to Kanryō*, 124-5.

greater heroism, “and were talked out of it only with difficulty.”³⁷ That is not to say that all, or most *shishi* were indeed insane, and many were quite pragmatic. Often, however, even these pragmatic fighters revered the ideal of madness. Yamagata Aritomo and Kido Takayoshi of Chōshū, both of them future national leaders known for their pragmatism, had also shown their respect to this ideal by adopting the ideogram *kyō* (crazy), into their own nicknames.³⁸

The admiration of “madness” was related to yet another key component of the *shishi* mindset – the tendency to judge one’s actions based on the purity of motives, not objective results.³⁹ To borrow the catchphrase of Jean-Francois Lyotard, the foreigners’ arrival in Japan was akin to an earthquake which destroyed “not only lives, buildings and objects but also the instruments used to measure earthquakes.”⁴⁰ The forced presence of the strange, threatening foreigners, the advance of public discussion, and the paralysis of Bakufu and daimyo authorities placed a red glowing question mark over accepted values and social hierarchies. In a rapidly changing world with few certainties, one could never be sure what kind of results a specific action would bring. But even in such an uncertain world, the *shishi* still had full control over their motives. Therefore, it became natural to celebrate the

³⁷ Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 136.

³⁸ Harutoonian, *Toward*, 221-2.

³⁹ Harutoonian, *Toward*, 218; Huber, Thomas, “Men of High Purpose and the Politics of Direct Action, 1862-4”, in Tetsuo Najita and J. Victor Koschmann, eds., *Conflict in Modern Japanese History: The Neglected Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 124; Takagi, *Sorekara*, 4.

⁴⁰ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges van den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 56.

motive itself, an “intuitive sense of what was relevant and appropriate,” as the major way to assess the merit of an action.⁴¹

Itō Hirobumi, a Chōshū *shishi* later to become a celebrated national leader, wrote retrospectively that “if one speaks logically of the things [that happened then], they are impossible to understand [...] but emotionally, it had to be that way.”⁴² If one’s state of mind was patriotic, pure and free of selfish considerations, all actions could be justified *a-priori* regardless of success, failure or future ramifications. The *shishi*, therefore, was expected to act out his emotions in both expression and deed: behaving violently when angry, bursting out when feeling righteous indignation, celebrating when happy and shamelessly crying when sad – all of these reactions signified his sincerity and purity of emotions.⁴³ The emphasis on recklessness, sincerity and purity of motives, as we shall see, would retain its viability among military rebels many decades after the *shishi* ceased to exist.

Comrades: The *Shishi* as an Organization

The *shishi* gangs were never organized as a tight-knit national movement, but as one historian noted, they operated within “well-developed networks of communication that linked hundreds of their sympathizers. [...] Information moved rapidly among them in such a way as to make joint action possible,” sometimes

⁴¹ Harutoonian, *Toward*, 232.

⁴² Op. cit. in Albert M. Craig, *Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1961), 198. See also Takii, Kazuhiro, *Itō Hirobumi: Japan's First Prime Minister and Father of the Meiji Constitution*, trans. Takechi Manabu (New York: Routledge, 2014), 10.

⁴³ For a few examples out of many, see: SAN, 79-80; Shimaoka Akira, *Shishitachi no Uta* (Tokyo: Shikuma Shobō, 1942), 30-1; Aoki Shūzō, *Aoki Shūzō Jiden* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1970), 65-6.

“within hours” of major political developments.⁴⁴ Their speed stood in stark contrast to the slowness of official communication channels between domains, devoid of personal rapport and managed by high-ranking and more cautious officials.⁴⁵

Crucially, the *shishi* operated along private networks of loyalty, standing in increasing opposition to the official networks of the Bakufu and the domains. Unlike the official networks, premised on strict, vertical hierarchies of rank, the private networks of the *shishi* tend to be more horizontal, loose and voluntary. The *shishi* had leaders, too, but they were respected because of their charisma, dedication and military prowess, not due to bureaucratic, formal or inherited status.⁴⁶ In such private networks, communication took place by means of *kōgi yoron* (public discourse) and *shoshi ōgi* (private opinionating). The adherents of *shoshi ōgi* valued direct speech over the structured, polite discourse retainers were expected to use when speaking with their domain superiors.⁴⁷ Instead, the *shoshi ōgi* scene became known for ferocious political debates accompanied by enormous amounts of sake drinking. The wild drinking habits of the *shishi*, a key component of *shoshi*

⁴⁴ Huber, "Men", 108. See also Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 116. Chōnan Shinji's detailed study of the plots co-hatched by Satsuma *shishi* and Kyokawa's gang is an excellent case study of such network's working mechanism. See: Chōnan, "Bunkyūki", 42-55.

⁴⁵ For an interesting example from Tosa, see the conversation between Takechi Zuizan and the high official of his domain, Yoshida Tōyō. According to this report, Yoshida seemed to be both arrogant and misinformed. The *shishi* information channels of Takechi were evidently faster and more reliable than the official channels of communications between the domains. See: *Ishin Tosa Kinnō Shi*, ed., Zuizankai (Tokyo: Fuzanbō, 1912), 86-8. For a more sustained discussion and analysis of this phenomenon see: Chōnan, "Bunkyūki", 59-61.

⁴⁶ Sasaki, *Shishi to Kanryō*, 124-5, 234-5; Chōnan, "Bunkyūki", 36-7.

⁴⁷ Chōnan, "Bunkyūki", 36. For a specific example, see the story of Imuta in *SAN*, 80, a *shishi* who got in trouble with his superior because of "a protest using direct speech" (*chokugen kōgi*).

ōgi, contributed as well to the blurring of internal hierarchies, hereditary status and other differences between them.

Joining a group was a voluntary but binding act, and deserters risked the death penalty. The commitment was often sealed with a blood oath, a well-known ritual in classical Chinese and Japanese culture. In a solemn oath before the Gods, the *shishi* injured themselves, mixed their blood with wine and drank it together, thus cementing their inseparable bond. Accordingly, they usually referred to one another as comrades (*dōshi*), a term denoting equality in a common struggle. Loyalty to comrades, as long as they did not betray the group or the cause, was supposed to be fierce and until death. Communication was often made in encoded language, a security measure contributing its own share to the in-group feeling of comradeship-in-arms.⁴⁸

The *shishi* groups, however, significantly differed from each other in their organizational patterns. **Domainal gangs** were *shishi* groups whose membership came, exclusively or at least overwhelmingly, from a single feudal domain. Domain ancestry was very important for most *shishi*, and many of the gangs, especially in Edo, were based on such ties.⁴⁹ These gangs, however, had a larger ideological commitment, *sonnō jōi*, which made it easier for them to ally with other *shishi* gangs throughout the realm. Commitments to domain and lord were important, but only as

⁴⁸ Sasaki, *Shishi to Kanryō*, 124; Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 109; Tōta, "Tosa Kinnōtō", 87. For three examples of such oaths (the blood oath of the Chōshū *Mitategumi* and two other ones) see Haga, *Shishi no Sekai*, 228-33, as well as the text of the *Mitategumi* oath in *Itō Hirobumi Kankei Monjo*, ed. Itō Hirobumi Kankei Monjo Kenkyū Kai, (Tokyo: Hanawa Shobō, 1973-1981) 1:195-9. For further details about the code words, see Haga, *Shishi no Sekai*, 259-60.

⁴⁹ J. Victor Koschmann, *The Mito Ideology: Discourse, Reform and Insurrection in Late Tokugawa Japan, 1790-1864* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 149-52; Takii, *Itō*, 8.

long as they did not collide directly with that cause.⁵⁰ Sakamoto Ryōma, the most famous of the Tosa *shishi*, wrote in a letter that serving the realm must take precedence over both family and domain.⁵¹ The leader of the Chōshū *shishi* wrote to his counterpart from Tosa that the cause of *sonnō jōi* had to be pursued “even if both of our domains are destroyed.”⁵² These shared ideas made it easier for many *shishi* to organize themselves in **mixed gangs**, whose members came from various domains. Such gangs were more common in Kyoto, a shogunal city with relatively weak police force which belonged to no domain in particular.

An important characteristic of the mixed gangs was their relatively loose organization. As individual bravery was deemed more admirable than careful calculation, the ability of the leaders to control their hot-headed activists was very limited, especially when impromptu acts of bravery were considered. When Takechi Zuizan, a Tosa *shishi* leader who was dominant for a while in the Kyoto mixed gangs, wanted to convince some of his activists **not** to assassinate a certain nobleman, he had to resort to trickery and tiresome negotiations.⁵³ The mixed gangs were rarely limited to samurai, and were often linked with allies from across the social spectrum. Court aristocrats, affluent commoners, geisha and priests often worked with the *shishi* as spies, informers, mediators and financial patrons.

⁵⁰ Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 116.

⁵¹ Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 81,118.

⁵² Kusaka Genzui to Takechi Zuizan, 19.2.1862, *Takechi Zuizan Kankei Monjo*, ed. Nihonshi Sekkyōkai, (Tokyo: Nihonshi Sekkyōkai, 1916), 2 vols. 1:60.

⁵³ Keene, *Emperor*, 72-3; Nishijima, *Nakayama*, 34-5. See also Huber, *Revolutionary Origins*, 118.

The two patterns mentioned above, the domainal and mixed gangs, were the prevalent organizational structures of the *shishi* in their early years. Their transformation into militarized gangs, and finally into the alliance which overthrew the Bakufu, was intimately related to the rise and fall of *shishi* terror in Edo, Yokohama and Kyoto.

Heavenly Punishment: The Rise and Fall of the Mixed Gangs

In the early 1860s, Kyoto, Edo and Yokohama were certainly dangerous cities to live in, if one were a Bakufu official, foreigner, merchant doing business with foreigners or any Japanese friendly to the Westerners.⁵⁴ The thoroughfares and small streets near Edo Castle, Kyoto's narrow alleyways and Yokohama's international quarters were filled with domainal and mixed gangs of *shishi*, all bellicose and ready for a fight. They were lurking in inns, drinking and hatching plots, sometimes going around the city and picking fights with random people.⁵⁵ It can hardly be realized," recalled the British Envoy, "[...] what it is [...] for years and years, to live under a perpetual menace of assassination [...]. Never to put foot in stirrup without consciousness of impending danger; never to sleep without feeling, as your eyes close, that your next waking hour may be your last, with the vengeful steel at your throat, and the wild slogan of murderers in your ear."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Haga, *Shishi no Sekai*, 244-5.

⁵⁵ *SAN*, 81-3.

⁵⁶ Rutherford Alcock, *The Capital of the Tycoon: A Narrative of Three Year's Residence in Japan* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1863), 2 vols., 2:47.

Assassinations, declared as “heavenly punishment” (*tenbatsu, tenchū*), were usually carried out by means of an ambush at a late hour. In most cases, the attacks were designed to have a theatrical impact. The bodies or heads of the victims were exposed in public spaces with placards describing their crimes and the reasons for the “heavenly punishment.” This was “terrorism” in the literal sense of the word, a strategy of the weak “designed to harm the enemy by spreading fear, confusion and embarrassment.”⁵⁷ The American envoy, Townsend Harris, was so stricken with fear, as to “drink himself into a stupor” and hardly set foot outside his quarters.⁵⁸ Indeed, in 1860 foreigners were attacked frequently, a violent year which ended with the well-known murder of an interpreter in the American Legation. This operation was launched by a mixed gang named *Kobi no Kai* (Association of the Tiger's Tail), one of the most active *shishi* groups in Edo. Foreshadowing the reckless optimism of future assassins, these *shishi* believed that by assassinating this minor American diplomat, they would “sweep the barbarians out of Japan in one stroke.”⁵⁹

It was, however, in Kyoto, not in Edo, that the mixed gangs reached their height between 1862 and 1864. There were no foreigners in the Imperial capital, so *jōi* attacks were not an issue. *Sonnō*, revering the emperor, became instead the slogan uniting the fragile coalition of Chōshū *shishi* leaders, masterless samurai from other domains, court nobles, geisha and other commoners. Despite the emperor's

⁵⁷ Yuval N. Harari, "Terror Ma-hu? Mi-Yemei ha-Beinayim ve-ad la-Me'a ha-Esrin ve-Ahat" (What is Terror? From the Middle Ages to the Twenty First Century"), *Zmanim* 108 (Autumn, 2009), 3.

⁵⁸ Hesselnik, "assassination", 334,41; Haga, *Shishi no Sekai*, 243-4.

⁵⁹ *SAN*, 80; Nanbu Yahachirō (Satsuma Edo commissioner) to Kagoshima, 19.6.1862, reproduced in Chōnan, "Bunkyūki", 57.

distrust of the *shishi* riffraff, his famous hatred to the foreigners gave them a feeling, false as it was, that the throne was on their side. At the same time, the support the *shishi* received from a group of radical court nobles gave them indirect access to the palace. In addition, they were backed by the Chōshū Domain, the main rival of the Bakufu. Shogunal policemen could not enter the Chōshū compound in Kyoto, and it had quickly become a safe-haven for *shishi* from various domains. The Kyoto mixed gangs, loosely led by famous *shishi* such as Kusaka Genzui from Chōshū and the Shinto Priest Maki Izumi, had a ubiquitous threatening presence in the imperial capital.⁶⁰

The *shishi*, like everyone else, knew well that Emperor Kōmei's wish was to expel the Westerners, and the disregard of this wish by the shogun was considered proof of his disloyalty. Claiming they were merely enforcing the imperial will, the *shishi* proceeded to "punish" the "traitors" who failed to follow the orders of the emperor. In the spring and summer of 1862, there was certainly no lack of volunteers, as the ranks of the local *shishi* were swelled by a new influx of samurai. Journeying in southwestern Japan, one of the *shishi* leaders spread rumors that the Bakufu planned to force the emperor to abdicate. The alarm raised by this news brought huge packs of radical samurai from Kyushu to the imperial capital.⁶¹ Their influx had turned Kyoto, formerly a relatively calm community, into a dangerous, terror-hunted town, where, according to a Bakufu police commissioner, "residents were suspicious of each other and closed their doors as soon as night fell. They took

⁶⁰ Yamakawa, *Shimatsu* 1:107; Walthall, *Weak*, 187,202; Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 130-1; Huber, *Revolutionary Origins*, 118.

⁶¹ Chōnan, "Bunkyūki" 42-6.

their startled escape [upon hearing a sound], be that the hustle of the wind or the cry of the crane.”⁶²

If ordinary residents of Kyoto felt themselves in danger, then officials had much better reasons to be afraid. In Kyoto, the new terror spree, called by its initiators “a blood festival” (*chimatsuri*) was directed first and foremost toward Bakufu bureaucrats who were deemed guilty of disrespectfulness to the court.⁶³ Police officials who bore responsibility for the Ansei Purges (1858–1859), the wave of government repression against the *shishi* and other opposition forces, were especially high on the kill list, as well as moderate court officials who advocated some form of reapproachment with the Bakufu. Even dignitaries who supported the *shishi* were marked for assassination, if they dared to turn back on their commitments. Suspicion of duplicity was adequate enough to sentence a suspect to “heavenly punishment”, and even *shishi* leaders were forced at times to hide from particularly zealous activists. According to Thomas Huber, from August 1862 to July 1864, the period in which the Kyoto mixed gangs were most active, political assassinations were almost a bi-weekly occurrence, with over seventy assassinations in total.⁶⁴

The first prominent victim of the Kyoto *shishi*, a court noble accused in spying for the authorities, was murdered on July 20, 1862 in his bathtub by a mixed band of

⁶² Yamakawa, *Shimatsu* 1:44,107.

⁶³ Yamakawa, *Shimatsu* 1:12.

⁶⁴ Huber, "Men", 109; Huber, *Revolutionary Origins*, 130-1, 162, 198; Yamakawa, *Shimatsu* 1:46-8; Walthall, *Weak*, 148-9; Nishijima, *Nakayama*, 36; Keene, *Emperor*, 67.

masterless samurai. This courtier's head was displayed publically near the river bank, with a placard denouncing him as a "great traitor."⁶⁵ The head of another court "villain" was set in front of the residence of the shogun's senior representative in Kyoto. "This head," disclaimed the attached placard, "is extremely unsightly, but we offer it for your viewing pleasure as a token of the blood festival for expelling the barbarians." The hands of the victim were thrown into the compounds of two other court nobles, to terrorize them from further cooperation with the Bakufu. This ghastly theater was highly effective. Pro-Bakufu nobles were terrorized, and some of them preferred to resign in order not to end up as the next target. Radical nobles replaced them in court, working there to protect the *shishi* and lobby for their political demands.⁶⁶

By mocking and provoking the Bakfu in such a way, the *shishi* were making a statement of disdain to all established hierarchies, declaring their refusal to recognize any authority but that of the emperor. As they did not really receive orders from the throne, this new situation legitimized them to act freely at their own discretion. Official hierarchies, whether of Bakufu, domain and even court, did not count any longer – only the private networks of their own gangs. Indeed, the samurai terrorists behaved as if **they** were the government. To finance their activity they did not rely only on donations, but also levied rice and money ("war funds," or

⁶⁵ Huber, *Revolutionary Origins*, 117.

⁶⁶ Ibid; SKTD 1:216-17, 226; Walthall, *Weak*, 177-8; Haga, *Shishi no Sekai*, 257-8; Kanbashi Norimasa, *Shimazu Hisamitsu to Meiji Ishin: Hisamitsu wa naze, Tōbaku o ketsuishita ka*, (Tokyo: Shinjinbutsu Ōraisha, 2002), 119.

gunshikin) from wealthy peasants.⁶⁷ When they cut down a woman who participated in pro-Bakufu political maneuvers, they had written on the attached placard that “her confession of guilt reopened the investigation and led to her being severely punished.”⁶⁸ Terms such as “investigation” and “punishment” evoked the language of authority, stressing the *shishi*’s pretense to serve as the legitimate government of Kyoto.

An essential condition for the success of such an enterprise was neutralizing the police force in Kyoto. The outsized and overwhelmed Bakufu guard, always fearful of being attacked from the shadows, virtually dissolved, its commissioners finding refuge in the surrounding countryside. The disappearance of these “wimpy samurai” (*koshinuke bushi*), as they were mockingly called, left the entire stage open for the *shishi* and their sympathizers.⁶⁹ The Bakufu's attempts to bring reinforcements to Kyoto and even to organize pro-government gangs of *shishi* were showing only meagre results at first, and throughout 1862 the terror of the mixed gangs in the capital continued unabated.

Things began to change only in spring 1863, when the Bakufu forces in Kyoto were joined by a formidable Satsuma detachment, eight hundred men strong.⁷⁰ The regent of Satsuma, Lord Shimazu Hisamitsu, had finally reached understandings with the weakened Bakufu and consented to put an end to the scourge of the *shishi*.

⁶⁷ Yamakawa, *Shimatsu* 1:12. And compare with a similar example from Mito, described in Koschmann, *Mito*, 158.

⁶⁸ Walthall, *Weak*, 179.

⁶⁹ Yamakawa, *Shimatsu* 1:12,38; Huber, “men”, 114.

⁷⁰ Kanbashi, *Shimazu*, 116.

Alarmingly for the *shishi*, this move was supported by the emperor, who was deeply suspicious of the court radicals and their *shishi* allies. The sovereign, terrorized and furious at the radical court nobles who dared to ally with the *shishi* and forge imperial edicts at their pleasure, implored Lord Hisamitsu to do something about them.⁷¹ On September 30, in the dead of night, Satsuma and Aizu forces took control of the Imperial Palace. Barring the gates, they expelled the Chōshū guards and denied entry to the radical court nobles. Sanjō Sanetomi, the head of the pro-*shishi* court faction, was put under house arrest along with his principal accomplices.⁷²

The decisive action of Aizu and Satsuma was a hard blow for the *shishi*, who in one day had lost their control over the emperor, their most important ideological asset. Sanjō Sanetomi, who was able to escape arrest, withdrew with six of his peers, as well as the Shinto priest Maki Izumi and a large crowd of *shishi*, to Chōshū. Many of those who failed to leave on time were methodically rounded up by Satsuma and Aizu troops, arrested, and sent back to their domains.⁷³ Similar purges against *shishi* were launched in the large domains, particularly Tosa, an important stronghold of the movement.⁷⁴ The situation was only significantly different in Chōshū. There, in the last domain friendly to the *shishi*, the band of noble and samurai fugitives regrouped at a tea house in the town of Mitajiri. Their gang effectively

⁷¹ Yamakawa, *Shimatsu* 1:101-3, 186, 89, 91, 203; Kanbashi, *Shimazu*, 121-2.

⁷² For a detailed account, see Yamakawa, *Shimatsu* 1:191-6. As well as William G. Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press), 217; Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 139-40; Kanbashi, *Shimazu*, 117, 23-4.

⁷³ Yamakawa, *Shimatsu* 1:197-200.

⁷⁴ Beasley, *Meiji*, 217-18.

metamorphosed into a military community, its members living, studying and exercising together.⁷⁵

This new pattern went hand in hand with a transition in the *modus operandi* of the *shishi*. Members of mixed gangs, whether in Mitajiri or in other places, reorganized in military structures, replacing their old hit-and-run tactics with open mutinies. The outline of this strategy, designed to “seize power for the throne with a small band of ‘loyal patriots’ by lightning violence,” was developed by the Shinto priest Maki Izumi.⁷⁶ The first stones were soon thrown in August 1863, when **militarized gangs** of *shishi*, who did not obey the more cool-headed leadership of Sanjō, Maki and the Mitajiri refugees, led peasant rebellions in two regions bordering Kyoto to the south.⁷⁷ These rebellions, however, were quashed by neighboring domains which kept their loyalty to the Bakufu.⁷⁸ On July 8, 1864, the *Shinsengumi*, the Bakufu’s own *shishi* gang, gave yet another blow to the gangs in the capital, launching a devastating surprise attack on their meeting at the Ikedaya Inn.⁷⁹

And yet, the process of *shishi* militarization did not stop. In the summer of 1864, the *shishi* refugee community in Chōshū, led by Kusaka Genzui and Maki Izumi, attempted to launch an offensive towards Kyoto in order to seize the Imperial

⁷⁵ Huber, "men", 116; Beasley, *Meiji*, 217; Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 197.

⁷⁶ Harutoonian, *Toward*, 312.

⁷⁷ Yamakawa, *Shimatsu* 1:201-3; Beasley, *Meiji*, 167-8; Aoyama, "jidai", 54.

⁷⁸ Huber, "men", 117-20; Beasley, *Meiji*, 220-1; Itō, "Tenchūgumi", 105-6.

⁷⁹ *SKTD* 1:400-2; Yamamura, "Shinsengumi", 95-6; Keene, *Emperor*, 79.

Palace. This time, they acted as part of a Chōshū-led military expedition. The *shishi*, a few hundred in number, were organized as a unit in the Chōshū Army, led by a samurai official from the domain. Imprudently, the leaders of this new *shishi* force ignored all pleas for caution, and decided to launch an immediate “heroic” attack on the gates of the Imperial Palace in order to abduct the emperor to Chōshū. “What kind of thing is it to hesitate to attack,” the commander of the force said angrily, rebuking his associates for their tepidness.⁸⁰ As expected, the commander had his way, demonstrating that ideals such as reckless bravery, characteristic of the mixed gangs, had also not disappeared in the new, militarized gang structure.

Consequently, the *shishi* suffered a crushing defeat in a battle known as the “Incident of the Forbidden Gate” (*kinmon no hen*). The results were disastrous for the *shishi* leadership: Kusaka Genzui and Maki Izumi took their own lives, while thirty *shishi* and their supporters were beheaded, their bodies exposed for three days in front of the palace gates.⁸¹ Yet even this defeat did not put an end to the *shishi* movement, nor to its ongoing process of militarization.

Takasugi Shinsaku and the Chōshū Wars: The Heyday of the Militarized Gangs

After the Incident of the Forbidden Gate, the mantle of leadership of the Chōshū *shishi* passed to Takasugi Shinsaku, a middle-ranking samurai whose unusual career had marked a sea change in the history of the *shishi* movement. At the time

⁸⁰ Huber, *Revolutionary Origins*, 135-6.

⁸¹ Huber, “men”, 120-3; Beasley, *Meiji*, 230-1; Keene, *Emperor*, 79-80; Matsuo, *Kido*, 8-9.

he took power, conditions in Chōshū and in the Japanese realm at large had changed dramatically. The defeat of the *shishi* movement in Kyoto dashed the hope of bringing a radical change in the realm through rash offensives on the palace. The combined army of Satsuma and Aizu, allied with the Bakufu, was just too strong for the *shishi* to defeat.

Worse than that, Chōshū, the most radical domain and the *shishi* heartland, found itself caught in a pincer between the foreigners and the Bakufu. In September 1864, only a few weeks after the defeat near the Forbidden Gate, Britain, France, the Netherlands and the United States decided to teach Chōshū what they considered a long-deserved lesson. Incensed by the shelling of Western ships by Chōshū batteries, the four powers dispatched a punitive expedition and dealt a devastating blow to the domain's army.⁸² The leaders of the Bakufu, too, wanted to settle a score with the rebellious domain whose endless provocations, they believed, were driving the country into chaos. Not only had Chōshū's Daimyo and his councilors defied the Bakufu and exposed it to Western retaliations by attacking the foreigners, it had also given shelter to dangerous *shishi* and radical fugitives from the Imperial Court. And the attack on the Imperial Palace could certainly not be tolerated without punishment. On August 29, 1864, the shogun's emissaries in Kyoto, with Satsuma support, were able to procure an edict from Emperor Kōmei authorizing a punitive expedition against Chōshū.⁸³

⁸² Huber, *Revolutionary Origins*, 160.

⁸³ Kanbashi, *Shimazu*, 151; Matsuo, *Kido*, 9.

Takasugi Shinsaku, the most influential military leader in Chōshū since the Incident of the Forbidden Gate, had to devise a strategy to cope with the new situation. With a direct style, a predilection for bold action and a proven ability to gulp impressive amounts of sake, Takasugi was highly popular among the *shishi* in and beyond Chōshū.⁸⁴ And yet, as a curious, quick witted and creative leader, he was much less committed to the expulsion of the foreigners than his predecessor. Instead, he preferred to concentrate on “revering the emperor” and fighting the Bakufu by harnessing the *shishi* fugitives in new, organized military structures under Chōshū supervision. For that purpose, he was more than ready to learn military science from the foreigners.⁸⁵

The first products of Takasugi’s creativity were the *Shotai*, “mixed units” of commoners and samurai led by officers from Chōshū and the *shishi* gangs. The most famous of these units, the *Kiheitai*, was organized in line with Western military patterns and armed with modern rifles. Promotion was based on merit, not status, and indeed about sixty percent of its members were peasants and other non-samurai commoners.⁸⁶ Success, however, did not come immediately. In the first Chōshū War (late 1864), Chōshū was too isolated to score a victory, and the domain had to surrender to a combined Bakufu-Satsuma army. The Bakufu forced three

⁸⁴ Ichisaka, "sake", 181-2; Huber, *Revolutionary Origins*, 143, 171-3.

⁸⁵ Miyake Tsugunobu, "Kiheitai", *Jinbutsu Ōrai Rekishi Dokuhon* (June, 2011), 100; Huber, *Revolutionary Origins*, 198; Harutoonian, *Toward*, 316, 384, 388-90.

⁸⁶ Beasley, *Meiji*, 226-7; Miyake, "Kiheitai", 98-9, 102; Takagi, *Sorekara*, 6-8, 16-18; Huber, *Revolutionary Origins*, 120-5.

domain elders to commit suicide. In addition, it forced Chōshū to expel the radical court nobles, install a collaborationist government, and disband the *Kiheitai*.⁸⁷

But the Bakufu, slow as usual in understanding the intricacies of the new reality, concentrated in punishing the high-ranking offenders. All the while, they ignored the real leader, Takasugi, who was of lower rank and thus operated “beneath the radar.” The *shishi* leader was therefore able to escape, finding shelter with a sympathetic Buddhist nun. A short while later he reappeared to lead the *Shotai* in a counter-coup against Chōshū’s collaborationist government. In doing so, he brushed aside the prudent objections of other *Shotai* commanders, who saw no chance in fighting the overwhelming force of the Bakufu and its Chōshū collaborators. But keeping to the *shishi* tradition of recklessness, Takasugi started a rebellion on his own, carrying the other reluctant commanders in his wake. And this time, it worked. Within a few months of brilliant campaigning, Takasugi was able to retake the government of the domain.⁸⁸ Chōshū and the Bakufu were yet again preparing to fight one another, while Satsuma, the great power of the South, watched the emerging conflict and calculated its future steps.

Chōshū, Satsuma and the Birth of the Inter-Domainal Alliance

After Chōshū’s defeat in late 1864, the Shogunate's relationship with Satsuma quickly deteriorated. The shogun’s advisors saw the victory in Chōshū as an opportunity to impress Bakufu superiority on all intransigent domains. First of all,

⁸⁷ Miyake, "Kiheitai", 100; Iechika, *Saigō*, 113-14; Huber, *Revolutionary Origins*, 166-7.

⁸⁸ Miyake, "Kiheitai", 101; Kanbashi, *Shimazu*, 154; Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 202-3; Huber, *Revolutionary Origins*, 166, 173-9.

they imposed highly humiliating conditions on Chōshū, contemptuously ignoring Satsuma's advice to behave more moderately. The arrogant policy of the Bakufu not only humiliated the regent of Satsuma, Shimazu Hisamitsu, and his vassals, but also created a strong impression that the shogun had no intention of sharing power with the great lords.⁸⁹ After Takasugi and his radicals overthrew the collaborationist domain government, the Bakufu planned yet another punitive expedition against Chōshū, which was announced on March 6, 1865. For Satsuma, this was too much. Many Satsuma retainers believed, perhaps justly, that their domain might be the next victim of Bakufu bullying, and the shogun's decision to import arms and military technology from France gave further credence to this threat. Therefore, a reconsideration of the relationship between Satsuma and Chōshū no longer seemed unreasonable.

As a first step, Saigō Takamori and Ōkubo Toshimichi, Lord Hisamitsu's senior advisors, quietly helped Chōshū to overcome the Bakufu blockade and procure arms from Western traders. This gesture opened the way for further negotiations between the two domains.⁹⁰ The task of negotiations was assigned by Takasugi to his right-hand man, Kido Takayoshi, who succeeded him later in the leadership of Chōshū's *shishi* movement. In February 1866, Kido secretly travelled to Kyoto to meet with Satsuma's Saigō Takamori. But the deep mistrust between the two domains, who had been bitter enemies, made the negotiations extremely difficult,

⁸⁹ Iechika, *Saigō*, 114, 19, 21-2; Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 185,94-5; Matsuo, *Kido*, 10-11.

⁹⁰ Kanbashi, *Shimazu*, 156-7; Iechika, *Saigō*, 116 21-2; Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 211-12; Matsuo, *Kido*, 10-11.

especially as neither of them wanted to lose face by being the first to propose an alliance.⁹¹

In that crucial moment, connections forged by the pan-Japanese *shishi* network could achieve what traditional domain-to-domain negotiations could not. Luckily for both Chōshū and Satsuma, *shishi* from Tosa and Fukuoka, who had excellent connections in both camps, intervened in the stalled negotiations in order to bring them to fruition.⁹² Acting as vital keystones, they were able to bridge the gap between the two sides, locking the connection between them. In this context, the credit had gone especially to Nakaoka Shintarō and Sakamoto Ryōma, two Tosa *shishi* with rich experience in numerous battles, assassinations and adventures.⁹³ Sakamoto, a naval hand and one of the most celebrated figures of the period, functioned as Satsuma's secret emissary to Chōshū, brokering rice and arms deals. Subsequently, he and Nakaoka were able to smooth away misunderstandings, explain away insults and facilitate a secret alliance between the two domains.⁹⁴

That was also the birth of the final pattern of *shishi* organization, the **inter-domainal alliance**, connecting Chōshū, Satsuma, Tosa and other domains in a common, anti-Bakufu partnership. Its architects were not the daimyo, but former *shishi* and other lower- and mid-ranking samurai who held key positions in their

⁹¹ SKTD 1:595; Iechika, *Saigō*, 123-7; Matsuo, *Kido*, 12.

⁹² Iechika, *Saigō*, 114-15.

⁹³ Kanbashi, *Shimazu*, 156-7; Matsuo, *Kido*, 10-11.

⁹⁴ Kanbashi, *Shimazu*, 156-7; Jansen, *Sakamoto*, 217; Matsuo, *Kido*, 11-12; SKTD 1:595-6. The text of the agreement and the history of the negotiations, preserved in a letter sent by Kido to Sakamoto, is fully reproduced in *ibid*, 597-602; see also Iechika, *Saigō*, 127-8.

domains. And still, their wide-ranging connections in the pan-Japanese *shishi* network helped them to communicate with greater ease with their colleagues from across the realm. This inter-domainal alliance was a hybrid creature: its different segments behaved as leaders and representatives of their domains and lords, but still felt, in the tradition of the *shishi* movement, as servants of a higher pan-Japanese cause.⁹⁵

The inter-domainal alliance was the force for change which finally overthrew the Tokugawa Bakufu and pushed Japan into a new phase in its history. On January 3, 1868, the leaders of the inter-domainal alliance, now standing in the top leadership positions of their respective domains, took control of the Imperial Palace in a quick coup d'état. Subsequently, they sealed the gates and prevented all Bakufu supporters, both daimyo and court nobles, from entering. Finally in control of the person of the young emperor, the ringleaders, assisted by their court allies, managed to secure two imperial edicts, one depriving the shogun of his titles, lands and court ranks, and the other declaring him a rebel and enemy of the court.

The shogun, deprived of the ability to maneuver, was like a fish out of water. Hesitant, crestfallen and disheartened, he withdrew to Osaka.⁹⁶ His forces on the ground were defeated shortly after, in the two decisive battles of Toba and Fushimi. A civil war ensued, but the army of the shogun was leaderless and disconcerted. Edo fell to the forces of the inter-domainal alliance later that year, and the last remnants

⁹⁵ Harutoonian, *Toward*, 392-400; Andrew Cobbing (based on the work of Inuzuka Takaaki), *The Satsuma Students in Britain: Japan's Early Search for the 'Essence of the West'* (Richmond, Surrey: Japan Library, 2000), 115-16.

⁹⁶ Matsuo, Kido, 14-15; Satow, *Diplomat*, 302.

of the Bakufu army were routed in Hokkaido in 1870. That succession of military-political events was the “Meiji Restoration,” the momentous change which opened the curtain on the history of modern Japan.

Mimesis: Afterlife of the Shishi

A few years after 1868, the *shishi* ceased to exist as a distinct group. Those who survived the wars of the Restoration either returned to their domains or served the new government in different capacities. Others, who attempted to cling to their rebellious way of life and defy the new imperial regime, were quickly apprehended, tried and executed. But the *shishi* had much longer career in Japanese imagination. Over the years, they became cultural heroes and role models for countless intellectuals, patriotic organizations, nationalistic societies and, crucially, military groups.⁹⁷

Partially, this was a result of government action. While flesh and blood *shishi* were often persecuted, imprisoned and executed, the Meiji Government idolized the fallen heroes of the 1860s in extensive commemoration campaigns. In 1875, only eight years after the Meiji Restoration, the Home Ministry ordered all provinces to commemorate the "martyrs" (*jun'nansha*) of the Meiji Restoration, even if they had violated the laws of their domains. Some even received posthumous court ranks. Starting in 1875, hundreds of *shishi* from all across the realm were enshrined in Yasukuni, the main worship venue for the nation's war dead. Gradually, there was

⁹⁷ Sasaki, *Shishi to Kanryō*, 252-7.

popular demand from below to enshrine even *shishi* and rebels executed by the Meiji Government, as long as they were motivated by sincere patriotism. The Home Ministry often refused such requests (not without prolonged deliberations), but the public debate engraved the memory of patriotic rebels in the popular mind.⁹⁸ At times, local governments valorized local *shishi* on their own initiative. Even more than the Tokyo government, local authorities used *shishi* memory as a symbol of imperial loyalty, inadvertently legitimizing disobedient behavior as long as its motives were sincere, patriotic and pure.⁹⁹ The emerging popular press joined the fray, often using the term *shishi* and its equivalents to praise contemporary activists for their patriotism.¹⁰⁰ Relatively quickly, the myth of the *shishi* was popular enough to be used for commercial purposes. Popular biographies of individual *shishi* were advertised in the press, and in 1885 a multibranch book shop specializing in patriotic literature called itself "*Shishi* must reads: The Soul of Japan".¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Takata Yūsuke, "Meiji Ishin 'shishi'-zō no Keisei to Rekishi Ishiki", *Rekishi Gakubu Ronshū: Bukkyō Daigaku Rekishi Gakubu* 2 (March, 2012), 43-52, 67-8. The name Yasukuni was adopted in 1879. Until then, the shrine was called Shōkonsha. See also: *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 25.10.1876, p.2, 14.3.1877, p.1, 21.7.1882, p.1.

⁹⁹ See for example the recognition criteria of Yamaguchi Prefecture, reproduced in *ibid*, 66-7, as well as *Asahi Shinbun* (Osaka Edition), 16.11.1879, 13.6.1884, p.2.

¹⁰⁰ For example, the *Asahi Shinbun* (Osaka Edition), 14.11.1980, p.1, reported that Fukuzawa Yūkichi is convening patriotic *shishi* (*aikoku no shishi*, i.e. popular rights activists). For similar usage in the same newspaper see also 12.4.1882, p.1. And compare with *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 16.9.1890, p.2. A search in the *Asahi Shinbun* database in the first 16 years of its existence (1879 to 1895, the time span covered by the first six chapters of the thesis) with four of the most common terms for *shishi* and similar Bakumatsu patriots (*shishi*, *yūshi*, *jun'nansha* and *sōmō*), produced 1779 results, distributed throughout the entire period. A similar search in the *Yomiuri Shinbun* database (1874-1895, headlines keyword search) produced 2148 results. Not all of these articles, however, contain those precise words. In some the context is paraphrased, and the relevant keywords appear only in the database headlines. In others, especially in the 1870s, synonyms are often used. In addition, in many articles the terms *shishi* or *yūshi* are used to describe not the historical *shishi* but contemporary patriotic behavior.

¹⁰¹ *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 14.7.1883, p.4. *Shishi Hitsudoku: Nihon no Tama*. See an advertisement in *Asahi Shinbun* (Osaka Edition), 22.7.1885, p.4.

The fact that the *shishi* were valorized by the government certainly contributed to their renown, and made it much easier for dissidents to follow their example without being branded as traitors. In tandem with a process known as *mimesis*, people who operate in conditions of uncertainty tend to imitate "proven" models that worked in the past. Sociologists Walter Powell and Paul DiMaggio have written that "when goals are ambiguous, or when the environment creates symbolic uncertainty, organizations may model themselves on other organizations. The advantages of mimetic behavior in the economy of human actions are considerable; when an organization faces a problem with ambiguous causes or unclear solutions [...] [mimetic imitation] may yield a viable solution with little expense."¹⁰²

Indeed, rebels in the early Meiji Era operated under conditions of extreme uncertainty. The old Tokugawa system had disappeared and could not be restored. The new system was still fluid, untested and constantly changing. The goals of early Meiji rebels were also ambiguous, unclear and always controversial. In such ideological, political and emotional mist, it was easy to cling to a the *shishi* movement, its ideology and organizational patterns, as a respected and legitimate rebel movement that had won an astounding success.¹⁰³

Ideologically speaking, ideas such as bravery, sincerity, self-sacrifice, disdain for authority and readiness to brave death without thought and calculation were a major part of the ideological discourse of the *shishi*. Did Takasugi not score a brilliant

¹⁰² Paul J. DiMaggio, Walter W. Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields", *American Sociological Review* 48:2 (April, 1983), 151. See also hypotheses A-3 and A-4 in the same paper, pp.154-5.

¹⁰³ DiMaggio/Powell, "Iron Cage", 154.

victory in winter 1864/5 when he “leaped” into the dark against the Chōshū collaborationist government, brushing aside the prudent advice of his colleagues? Recklessness worked, and was thus deserving of imitation. In the following chapters, we shall see that rebellions and other acts of radical disobedience were, from 1868 to the 1930s, all too often, reckless, impulsive, unplanned and poorly coordinated.¹⁰⁴ This is a direct result of the mimesis process.

At the organizational level, the *shishi* had also offered perpetually attractive models for future rebels, in the early Meiji Era and beyond. The private networks centered on a charismatic leader, the sworn brotherhoods united by common ideals, as well as the fluidity of the organizational structure – all would be enduring characteristic of rebellious groups in Japan.¹⁰⁵ In other words, the *mimesis* of the *shishi* was one of the most important factors shaping the character of Japanese military disobedience for the entire period covered by this study. Just as the original *shishi* movement has been born in times of ambiguity, uncertainty and crumbling political order, so too was their *mimesis* by rebels in the early Meiji. But, and this is crucial, that *mimesis* would endure long after its original political context had ceased to exist, long after the government in Japan had stabilized, long after the political order had crystallized and became much less ambiguous.

Finally, the *shishi* movement, by creating the inter-domainal alliance which took over the country in 1868, constituted the first chapter in the story of modern Japan. The leaders of this alliance, from Chōshū, Satsuma and other domains, were

¹⁰⁴ Sasaki, *Shishi to Kanryō*, 236-7, 46-7.

¹⁰⁵ Sasaki, *Shishi to Kanryō*, 237.

the architects of the Meiji regime. This new political order and its eventual breakdown were the most important condition which molded the development of military disobedience in years to come.

Part II

Age of Chaos:

1868–1878

Chapter Two

Jewel in the Palace

The New Political Order, 1868–1873

The administration of government is not difficult: it consists in not offending the great families.

Mencius, 4a6¹

In early January 1868 the defeated former shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, convened the foreign diplomats for the last time at Osaka Castle. “One could not but pity him,” wrote Ernest Satow of the British Legation, certainly not a friend of the Bakufu. “So changed he was from the proud, handsome man of last May. Now he looked thin and worn, and his voice had a sad tone.” The retired shogun, though, did not really believe that the new leaders in Kyoto would be able to form a viable administration without him. To the question of the British Envoy, “as to the form of government that had been set up at Kyoto, he replied that the *mikado* [emperor] ruled nominally, but that Kyoto was occupied by a set of men who did nothing but quarrel among

¹ *Mencius*, trans. Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

themselves, anything but govern. Yet he did not appear to claim that he himself possessed any authority.”²

Yoshinobu was not wide off the mark, and in fact noticed, as early as in January 1868, a permanent weakness running through the early Meiji Era: the vertical government structure of the Bakufu had been destroyed, but the imperial hierarchy emerging in its stead was weak, confused and slow to emerge. Important decisions were not reached through formal state hierarchy, but rather evolved as a result of deliberations and quarrels in a small network of leaders. The new government, in other words, presumed to be a vertical hierarchy, but in fact was a horizontal network in which power was shared between equals: the leaders of the inter-domainal alliance. “There are many individuals,” wrote Iwakura Tomomi, a key figure in the new government, “each with his own reasons to start debates, and of course it is impossible to convince them all. [... but only if] the government was as unshakable as a mountain, would it be able to acquire true authority.”³ Yet neither he nor his friends were in a position to create such “unshakable” authority at the time.

In those times of instability, the mere survival of the new regime depended on a fragile balance between the individuals in power and their respective factions. In an inter-domainal alliance, it was all but natural that such factions would be based on domain identity. Among the domains which shared power in the new

² Satow, *Diplomat*, 302.

³ *Iwakura Tomomi Kankei Monjo* (Tokyo: Kokuritsu Kobunshokan Naikaku Bunsho Shozō, 1990-1), 4:188 (hereafter cited as *ITKM*).

government, the most important were Chōshū, led by Kido Takayoshi, and Satsuma, represented by Saigō Takamori and Ōkubo Toshimichi. Two smaller domains with a significant role were Saga and Tosa, whose representatives in the government were later renowned as the founding fathers of Japanese liberalism. Another crucial component of the government was the group of court nobles led by Sanjō Sanetomi and Iwakura Tomomi. However, individual leaders allied with others not only according to domain, but also based on ideological, political and personal preferences, and these alliances shifted quite often.

The frantic attempts to keep the balance between these factions shaped the character of the imperial regime in the first few years of its existence. The situation was delicate, as the inter-domainal alliance faced threats right from the start, whether in the form of persistent *shishi* groups, peasant rebellions or samurai uprisings. However, as long as the balance between the factions was intact, it was difficult for these rebellious elements to gather support and momentum. In order to legitimize their rule, the leaders of the inter-domainal alliance made a crucial decision, to "hide" their power behind the prestigious institution of the emperor, without giving this inexperienced monarch real power. Unforeseen by most people at the time, this decision created a "bug" in the system which precipitated the growth of military disobedience for the next 70 years. That became clear already in Autumn 1873, when the inter-domainal alliance collapsed, leaving in its wake formidable waves of military insurgency. How and why it happened is the subject of the current chapter.

Jewel in the Palace: The Japanese Emperor as a Hazy Center

Following the Meiji Restoration, the official ideology placed the emperor at the head of the new hierarchy, as the center of sovereignty. Reality on the ground, however, was very different. In 1868, the Meiji Emperor was still a sixteen-year-old youth, unaccustomed to political power. Worse, he did not have any retainers loyal **only** to himself, and had no way of obtaining information from the provinces except through the leaders of the inter-domainal alliance and their confederates. As Ōkubo himself admitted, the decision to transfer the capital from Kyoto to Osaka, and later (September 1868) to Tokyo was intended first and foremost to remove the emperor from the closed sanctuary of the Kyoto Court. Concurrently, Iwakura, Kido and Ōkubo reformed the court, purging it of “feminine,” redundant and antiquated elements.⁴

As several scholars have already noted, these measures were intended to masculinize the emperor, replacing his feminine and conservative image with one of an up-to-date, manly and modern monarch.⁵ They had, however, the side-effect of diminishing the chances of him ever accumulating real power. The overhaul of the

⁴ *Ōkubo Toshimichi Monjo* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan-kai, 1967-9), 2:192-3, 301-2 (hereafter cited as *OTM*); *Diary of Kido Takayoshi*, trans. Sidney D. Brown and Akiko Hirota, (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1983-6), 1:120, 125-6 (hereafter cited as *DKT*); Maximilian von Brandt, *Dreihunddreissig Jahre in Ost-Asien: Erinnerungen eines deutschen Diplomaten* (Leipzig: Verlag von Georg Wigand, 1901), 265-6; these reforms were also intended to neutralize the influence of the conservative court faction – people who may have supported the war against the Bakufu, but staunchly opposed Western-style reforms. See: Shimoyama Saburō, *Kindai Tennōsei Kenkyū Josetsu* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1976), 80-1, 84.

⁵ Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the late Meiji Period* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 73-94; Takeshi Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 174-83; Ben Ami Shillony, *Enigma of the Emperors: Sacred Subsistence in Japanese History* (Folkestone, Kent: Global Oriental, 2005).

court, the sweeping changes in personnel, even more so the relocation of the capital, radically reshuffled the emperor's existing ties in court, preventing him from utilizing them to form independent networks of information.⁶ Effective rule, however, always presupposes a private "telescope," autonomous channels of communication and intelligence.⁷ The Meiji Emperor did not possess such channels, becoming therefore completely dependent on the leaders around him.

The emperor, in Kido's apt definition, was akin to a "jewel" held by the leaders of the government – well respected, but devoid of real power.⁸ As noted by several scholars, his presence on the throne during the crucial years of the early Meiji Era shaped the imperial institution as a system with a **hazy center**.⁹ The theoretical authority of the emperor, never disputed by anyone, kept all other factors of power gravitating around him like planets surrounding a star. Therefore, the emperor constituted a universally agreed upon center of power which prevented the system from disintegrating into its components. This political center, however,

⁶ *KDT* 1:72-3; for interesting theoretical insights into the interrelations between relocation and uprooting of old traditions, see: Kate Brown, *A Biography of a No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 82.

⁷ Martin van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1895), 65-78, 226-32, 268-77.

⁸ The translation is taken from Beasley, *Restoration*, 285. For the Japanese original see: *Ōkubo Toshimichi Nikki* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan Kai, 1969), 1:395 (hereafter cited as *OTN*).

⁹ The concept was already articulated by several scholars, though the term "hazy center" is my own. For an excellent scholarly treatment see for example: John Haley, *Authority without Power: Law and the Japanese Paradox* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 79-80

was hazy, in the sense that the precise role of the emperor, and more importantly his wishes, were often hidden and open to debate and interpretation.¹⁰

Here, a major "bug" in the new regime came into view, one of the structural problems which allowed military disobedience to grow into a pervasive malaise from the early 1870s up until the 1930s. Every actor in the system had to take the imperial "wish" into account, but as this "wish" was usually expressed in decrees formulated by advisors, marginalized actors could always argue that the emperor was "manipulated" by the people around him. "An unjust imperial edict is not an imperial edict at all and should not be obeyed," wrote Ōkubo to Saigō in 1866 in an attempt to justify their refusal to obey an imperial edict procured by the Bakufu.¹¹ It is important to note that Ōkubo did not merely say that "an unjust imperial edict should not be obeyed," but rather denied its very nature as an imperial edict, because the emperor's will, by definition, could not be unjust. Indeed, the attempt to "guess" what the person at the hazy center really wanted was to be an enduring element in most cases of rebellion and defiance from early Meiji times until the 1930s.

It might have been that a stronger, more dominant individual could have filled the hazy center with real power, utilizing his enormous symbolic capital to form independent networks of information, building his own structure of power while

¹⁰ For a brilliant contemporary analysis of this phenomenon, see: Fukuzawa Yukichi, "Teishitsu-ron" in Fukuzawa, *Nihon Kōshitsu-ron* (Shimazu Shobō, 1987), 22-3.

¹¹ Op. cit. in Tōyama, *Ishin Henkaku*, 324. See Harutoonian, *Toward*, 399-400, for analysis and discussion.

getting rid of troublesome advisors. But given the tender age, character, upbringing and immediate surroundings of the Meiji Emperor, such a result was less than likely. As Ernest Satow remarked, had Meiji's father, Emperor Kōmei, not died prematurely at age 41, reality could have been very different.¹² Obstinate, conservative and implacably xenophobic, Kōmei never failed to utter complaints, drag feet and even defy the Bakufu openly.¹³ Such a man was hardly equipped to rule the country after 1868, but it defies reason to believe that he would have been utilized so easily by the leaders of the new regime as a silent, malleable symbol of power. Kōmei's untimely death and his succession by Meiji were a necessary condition for the formation of the Meiji system as it did develop: an interaction of a hazy center, a weak state hierarchy, and the fragile inter-domainal alliance revolving around it.

Juggling: The Ruling Coalition and the Meiji Reforms

The Meiji Regime was established through a series of decisive reforms, all of which rested on two major pillars: the symbolic authority of the imperial hazy center and a consensus between the different components of the inter-domainal alliance. First, in 1869, the domain lords "volunteered" to "return" their registers (i.e., lands and population) to the emperor "to distribute or retain them at his pleasure."¹⁴ Then, in summer 1871, the Imperial Government dismissed all daimyo and

¹² Satow, *Diplomat*, 192.

¹³ Keene, *Emperor*, 40-1.

¹⁴ Tōyama, *Ishin Henkaku*, 232-3.

reorganized the domains into administrative prefectures.¹⁵ As the central government was still weak and destabilized, both of these decisions could not be reached through top-down orders. Rather, they were made through horizontal cooperation between the leaders of the factions from the court, Chōshū, Satsuma, and some other domains.¹⁶

But the leaders knew well that their power would only last as long as the factions of the inter-domainal alliance continued to cooperate with one another. True, the domains were formally abolished, but they still existed as political units and powerful sources of identity. A high officer from Tosa, for example, recalled that he had "prepared the military force of Tosa for the day when hell breaks loose between Satsuma and Chōshū."¹⁷ Aware of the danger, Ōkubo appealed to his clansmen to keep amicable relations with Chōshū. "The two domains," he wrote in an open letter, "turned into one for the sake of the Imperial Country [...] together they are its cornerstone."¹⁸ Therefore, he implored his fellow Satsuma samurai to forgo their narrow interests and cherish this cooperation, lest "the domains fight among themselves, each for its own sake [...] and all achievements of the

¹⁵ Michio Umegaki, *After the Restoration: the Beginning of Japan's Modern State* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 4-5, 8, 35-7.

¹⁶ The quote is from *DKT* 2:61-2; See also: *SKTD* 2:1477-8; Tokutomi Ichirō (Sohō), *Kōshaku Yamagata Aritomo Den* (Tokyo: Yamagata Aritomo-Kō Kinen Jigyōkai, 1933), 134-5.

¹⁷ Op. cit. in Ōshima Akiko, "Meiji Shoki Dajōkansei ni okeru Seigun Kankei", *Kioi Shigaku* 11 (1991), 10.

¹⁸ *OTM* 3:353,55.

Restoration are lost [...] Close your eyes and think about it well. [All past achievements] may come to naught in a single moment.”¹⁹

Meanwhile, inter-domainal cooperation, tense as it was, bore substantial fruits. These days were exciting, brimming with a breathless series of reforms. The title of samurai was abolished on August 2, 1869, and the former warriors were renamed *shizoku*, or “samurai families.” The daimyo and court nobles were integrated into a newly established peerage system.²⁰ In 1870 the government allowed all commoners to use surnames in public, a measure followed by the establishment of mandatory education, conscription and other reforms. The leaders, however, knew they were walking on a tight rope.²¹ The reforms were all based on collaboration between the rival factions of ruling coalition. As Ōkubo warned his clansmen, internal discord between these factions could bring all of these efforts “to naught”. The Meiji Government, formed under the aegis of the imperial throne in the early 1870s, was designed to keep the balance between the factions in order to prevent this dreaded outcome.

Government, Army and the Chōshū-Satsuma Rift

¹⁹ Ibid, 352,56.

²⁰ The lowest class of Samurai, *sotsu*, was preserved for a while, until it was finally merged with the *shizoku* on 8.3.1872. Shimoyama, *Tennōsei*, 228-34; Wolfgang Schwentkner, "Die Samurai im Zeitalter der Meiji-Restauration. Einwandel und Modernisierung in Japan, 1830-1890, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28:1 (Jan.Mar.2002), 34.

²¹ For more information of early Meiji reforms see: Sakeda Masatoshi, George Akita, "The Samurai Disestablished: Abei Iwane and his Stipend", *Monumenta Nipponica* 41:3 (Autumn, 1986): 299-301; Kim, Kyu-Hyun, *The Age of Visions and Arguments: Parliamentarianism and the National Public Sphere in Early Meiji Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), 70-80.

In the new Meiji order, finally stabilized in August 1871, the emperor was formally the head of state and “imperial rule” was to be assisted by the Grand Council of State (*Dajōkan*), led by a chief minister.²² Though his powers were theoretically similar to those held by Western prime ministers of the time, Chief Minister Sanjō, a courtier and a former ally of the *shishi*, was a weak and indecisive politician. As a result, his office was not invested with significant authority. Decisions were actually made by the minister of the right, Iwakura Tomomi, in conjunction with the the leaders of the inter-domainal alliance who took the title of imperial councilors. These councilors, along with Sanjō and Iwakura, formed the Imperial Cabinet.²³ To add confusion to an already muddled system, government portfolios were not held by members of the cabinet, but by other officials known as lords (*kyō*).²⁴ The lords did not sit in the cabinet, the main executive body of the new regime, unless they were concurrently appointed as imperial councilors.

In autumn 1871, not long after the stabilization of the *Dajōkan* system, prominent cabinet members and other dignitaries left to Europe in the famous Iwakura Expedition, led by the minister of the right. The large group of Japanese leaders spent almost a year and a half abroad, and visited the United States, Great

²² Reproduced in Yamazaki Tanshō, *Naikaku Seidō no Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Takayama Shoin, 1942), 31.

²³ The name of this executive body in Japanese was *seiin* (literally: "Central Chamber"). Since May 2 1873, the term "cabinet" (*naikaku*) was alternately used. For clarity's sake, I chose to consistently translate as "cabinet".

²⁴ Naikaku Kiroku Kyoku, ed., *Hōki Bunrui Taizen* (Tokyo: Naikaku Kiroku Kyoku, 1889-91), 10:157,160; 19:2 (hereafter cited as *HBT*); Beasley, *Restoration*, 347; Ch'en, Hsien-T'ing, *The Japanese Government and the Creation of the Imperial Army* (PhD thesis, unpublished: Harvard University, 1963), 98. Though most authors translated *kyō* as “ministers,” this is highly misleading. The title “minister” (*daijin*) was reserved at the time to the ministers of the right and the left, and was given to officials in charge of portfolios only after the establishment of the cabinet system in 1885. It seems to me, therefore, that translating *kyō* as “minister” might gloss over the uniqueness of the *Dajōkan* system.

Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia and other European countries.²⁵

Meanwhile, from late 1871 to autumn 1873, the absence of so many prominent leaders left Japan in the hands of a “Caretaker Government” (*Rusu Seifu*). In Iwakura’s absence, Chief Minister Sanjō remained alone at the top of an increasingly unstable ruling elite. Being weak and indecisive, he found it difficult to constantly balance the different forces in the government. Real power rested with Saigō Takamori, imperial councilor and lord of the treasury, who was also in charge of internal administration. But even the admired Satsuma leader, sick, under pressure from all sides and emotionally unstable, could only barely balance the system and keep it intact.²⁶

The rifts and rivalries of the inter-domainal alliance were evident, most of all, in the torturous process leading up to the formation of the early Meiji army. It was certainly paradoxical, for the project of the Imperial Army, from its very inception, presumed cooperation between the restoration domains and beyond, paving the way for national unity. The early Meiji army, however, was one of the major venues of feuds between officers and power holders on domainal grounds.

In February 1871, Yamagata Aritomo from Chōshū, Takasugi' Shinsaku's lieutenant in the Restoration Wars, had told Saigō, his Satsuma counterpart, that as long as the central government was not backed by military force, the Restoration

²⁵ For a concise description of the expedition, see the introduction to the English version of Kido’s diary by the editor and translator, Sidney Brown, *DKT 2*:xvii-xxxiii.

²⁶ Iechika, *Saigō*, 69-105, Yates, Charles, *Saigo Takamori: the Man behind the Myth*, (London/New York: Kegan Paul International, 1994), 137-9.

was only “nominal.” Using an economic metaphor, he reiterated that the government was “gambling with borrowed money.” Saigō agreed, and the two decided to establish a central military force (*Goshimpei*), composed of troops taken from the three major restoration domains, Chōshū, Satsuma and Tosa.²⁷ In his negotiations with his non-Chōshū counterparts, however, Yamagata made it clear that the new force belonged to no domain, but to the central government alone. Soldiers, he maintained, may have to fight on command even the lords of their own domains.²⁸ On February 12, 1872, the *Goshimpei* were renamed the Imperial Guard (*Konoe*), investing them with the prestige of direct service to the emperor. Yamagata, promoted in summer 1871 to deputy lord of war, was the strong man in the ministry, as his lord, an imperial prince, was absent from office most of the time.²⁹

However, the Imperial Guard was very difficult to control. It was almost exclusively comprised of *shizoku*, many of them notoriously unreliable, rebellious and mutinous former samurai from Satsuma and Tosa. Worryingly, some of them were also involved in attacks against foreigners, endangering Japan’s delicate relations with the Western powers.³⁰ As Kido suspected, it was not easy to secure

²⁷ Op.cit in Ch'en, *Imperial Army*, 55; based on Yamagata’s testimony to his biographer. Japanese original in *KYAD* 2:80; for the text of the order, detailing the exact composition of the assembled force, see: *HBT* 1:43; for discussion see also Umegaki, 68-9.

²⁸ *KYAD* 2:80.

²⁹ Ōshima Akiko, "1873 (Meiji Roku-nen) no Shibirian Kontororu: Seikanron Seihen ni okeru Gun to Seiji", *Shigaku Zasshi* 117(7), 1228.

³⁰ Oka Yoshitake, *Reimei ki no Meiji Nihon: Nichi-Ei Kōshōshi no Shikaku ni oite* (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1965), 73-7; Brandt, *Dreihunddreissig Jahren*, 274-5.

cooperation between soldiers from different domains, each with its own unique traditions, customs, identity and dialect.³¹ According to Ch'en Hsien-T'ing, the troops were "deeply imbued with the old *han* [domain] loyalties: they regarded themselves as the soldiers of Satsuma, or Chōshū or Tosa, rather than as the soldiers of Japan, the nation."³² The Imperial Guard units were only formally subordinate to Yamagata and his Army Ministry, but actually obeyed individual imperial councilors who had led them during the restoration wars.³³ In an attempt to cope with this situation, Yamagata proceeded to create another military force, exclusively subordinate to his ministry. These were the military garrisons across Japan, beefed up and augmented by the Conscription Act of October 10, 1873.³⁴

In order to appease the restive officers of the Imperial Guard, the government had to tap again the influence and prestige of Saigō Takamori. In October 1872, Saigō was appointed by the cabinet as "leading imperial councilor", commander in chief of the Imperial Guard and field marshal of the army, the only one to hold this rank at the time.³⁵ Under such conditions, the domainal fault lines in the armed forces were becoming increasingly clear: Yamagata and the Chōshū

³¹ *Kido Takayoshi Monjo*, Kido-kō Denki Hensanjo, ed. (Tokyo: Nihon Shiseki Kyōkai, 1929-1931), 8 vols, 4:192-3, 196-7 (hereafter cited as *KTM*). In his memoirs, Tani Kanjō recalled that the competition between the three domains inside the force was intense. The Tosa troops, for example, were ordered to "perform better" than their Chōshū and Satsuma counterparts. Nevertheless, they were also warned to keep strict discipline, refraining, for example, from wearing swords. See: *Tani Kanjō Ikō*, ed. Nihon Shiseki Kyōkai, (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan Kai, 1975-6), 2 vols.1:225 (hereafter cited as *TKI*).

³² Ch'en, *Imperial Army*, 83.

³³ Ōshima, "Shibirian Kontororu", 1124-6.

³⁴ Tōyama, *Ishin Henkaku*, 244.

³⁵ *DSZ* 2:663.

faction controlled most garrisons across the country, while Saigō presided over the Imperial Guard and the National Police.³⁶ Thus, coming full circle, Satsuma and Chōshū held again their own independent military forces, exactly replicating the situation which the founders of the Imperial Army had intended to avoid.

Collapse: Korea and the End of the Inter-Domainal Alliance

It was this situation of fragmentation and severe imbalance which faced Iwakura and Ōkubo when they finally returned from Europe around September 1873. The first issue that they had to tackle, however, was not related to internal reforms but rather to foreign policy. It was this problem which led to the most acute government crisis the Meiji system had known since its inception, to the final collapse of the inter-domainal alliance and to strong outbreaks of disobedience inside the army.

The question of how to respond to Korean behavior, deemed offensive and disrespectful by the Japanese leadership, had been on the agenda of the cabinet for quite a while. Since Japan had embarked on Western-style reforms, the Koreans viewed it as a “lawless state,” and their harassment of Japanese traders and diplomats was growing by the day. In response, a high official in the Foreign Ministry proposed that a delegation escorted by an armed contingent be sent to Korea in an

³⁶ Nakahara Hidenori, "Sakamoto Sumihiro Rireki Ippan", *Keisatsu Kenkyū* 42:5 (1971), 71-74

attempt to force the kingdom to change its ways.³⁷ Following a debate, the cabinet decided to accept the compromise proposed by Saigō Takamori: he would personally travel to Korea as an envoy to remonstrate the Koreans on their evil ways. In a letter, which has been both famous and controversial ever since, he assured that his real intention was to have himself murdered by the Koreans, thus providing an excuse for a punitive war against this country.³⁸ It is controversial whether Saigō really wanted a war, but he was certainly under immense pressure by his followers in Satsuma and Tosa to do **something** about the Korean issue.³⁹ Restive warriors from both domains were looking for employment in a military campaign. Saigō, in any case pressured to breaking point, was anxious to find a way to appease his supporters. His proposal was endorsed by the cabinet, and as time wore on, he was more and more anxious to set sail.

When Iwakura finally returned to Japan in early September, Saigō was expecting an immediate decision on his delegation, but as he later wrote with great

³⁷ Mōri, *Seihen*, 108-10.

³⁸ *DSZ* 2:736-8.

³⁹ Saigō's real intentions in the Korean issue were a subject of intense debate. Some historians, such as Sidney Brown, the editor of the Kido diaries, depicted Saigō as the head of a "war party," contrasting him with Ōkubo's relative moderation (*DKT* 2:xxxiii). Kōza School Marxist historians (for example, Tōyama, *Ishin Henkaku*, 309-10), doubted the explanatory power of such distinctions, tending instead to view the differences between Saigō and Ōkubo as rather small: both supported imperialism, and the debate between them was only about timing, internal policy and also concerning the question about who should personally lead the imperialist project. Mōri Toshihiko, by contrast, argued that Saigō did not really want war, but actually intended to achieve peace through negotiations. His famous letter to Itagaki, according to Mōri, was merely a tactical ploy to convince his hawkish friend to support the plan. See Mōri, *Seihen*, 112-32. The thesis of Mōri is reservedly supported by several authors, for example Mark Ravina, *The Last Samurai: The Life and Battles of Saigo Takamori* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley and Sons, 2004), 189-95. It is, however, strongly criticized by others, most notably Ichika Yoshiki (*Saigō*, 18-23), who believes that Saigō, sick, irrational and mentally unstable, opted for war as a kind of "escape" from his travails.

dismay, the minister of the right took his time.⁴⁰ For Iwakura, the Russian threat and the internal problems were much more tangible and important. As Saigō kept on pushing, Iwakura became more and more apprehensive towards the entire idea. He, Ōkubo Toshimichi, Kido Takayoshi and Itō Hirobumi formed a makeshift “returnees” faction, bringing forward the perspective of diplomatic prudence, based on their experience in the West. More than anything, they argued against a military expedition to Korea.⁴¹

In his famous “Seven Points Speech,” Ōkubo tried to convince the councilors that due to the country’s lack of military preparedness and tenuous diplomatic position, an expedition to Korea was imprudent.⁴² But he failed. The formation of the “returnees” faction had indeed upset the balance in the cabinet, yet nevertheless it was still controlled by Saigō’s allies from Satsuma, Saga and Tosa. Ōkubo formally submitted his resignation, but diligently outmaneuvered his rivals behind the scenes. In a quick move, famously referred to as the “secret plot” (*hissaku*), he, Itō and Iwakura formed an alliance with the lord of the Imperial Household. This high courtier, who was close to the emperor, was able to procure an imperial edict postponing Saigō’s mission to Korea.⁴³

⁴⁰ *DSZ* 2:787-8.

⁴¹ The change was particularly dramatic in the case of Kido, as he used to be an exponent of an aggressive foreign policy towards Korea, see *DKT* 1:167-8, and compare with his position in 1873, *ibid* 2:370-1, 383-4; *KTM* 8:360-1; Kim, *Age of Visions*, 83-6.

⁴² For a translation of Ōkubo’s “Seven Points Speech” see: David J. Lu, ed., *Japan: A Documentary History* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 325-7.

⁴³ *OTN* 2:205.

With one stroke, Ōkubo destroyed the precarious balance and toppled the inter-domainal alliance like a house of cards. He overturned decisions not by turning to the cabinet, which was supposed to be the omnipotent executive branch. Nor did he take his power from the ministries or the former domains.⁴⁴ Outmaneuvering all other power factors in the government, Ōkubo utilized the emperor, the “hazy center,” and secured a decision by a ploy not dissimilar to the 1868 palace coup which brought about the Meiji Restoration. His move taught all other actors in the system that, in a country controlled by a hazy center, all calculations could be upset should this center unexpectedly interfere in decision making. Ōkubo, a government official competing with colleagues for power and influence, was certainly not a rebel. But after him, rebels and other disobedient elements would exploit the haziness of the imperial center to have their way in politics, and the result would always be disastrous.

Ōkubo’s “secret plot” left the government in tatters. Angry, humiliated and sicker than ever, Saigō Takamori resigned, returning his government salaries, rewards and titles, except the rank of field marshal. His supporters in the cabinet and the government ministries, incensed by Ōkubo’s move, resigned as well.⁴⁵ The “Occupy Korea” debate was so destructive mainly because one side, that of Ōkubo, scored a knockout victory, causing the other side to lose face. Satsuma and Tosa officers in the Tokyo garrison and National Police, as well as veterans of the Imperial

⁴⁴ In fact, as Tōyama rightly argues, Ōkubo was isolated in his domain even before the Iwakura Expedition. See: Tōyama, *Ishin Henkaku*, 331-2.

⁴⁵ *Sanjō Sanetomi Kō Nenpu*, ed. Kunaishō Zushoryō, (Tokyo: Kunaishō, 1901), 27:39a-b (hereafter cited as *SSKN*); *DKT* 2:385.

Guard, left Tokyo with Saigō Takamori. Most of them were never to return.⁴⁶

Satsuma did not rebel yet, but without “Old Saigō,” cooperation between Tokyo and Kagoshima became very difficult. The system became more imbalanced than ever before, and the worst trials were still ahead.

Nevertheless, Saigō Tsugumichi, Takamori’s younger brother, did not return to Kagoshima. Instead, he stayed at Yamagata’s side, the two men still holding the Army Ministry under their sway.⁴⁷ Well before his “secret plot,” and certainly after it, Ōkubo lost most of his credibility in Satsuma.⁴⁸ It was up to “little Saigō,” therefore, to broker between the government and the powerful southwestern domain. Saigō Tsugumichi’s sudden rise, born out of the imbalance of the government in late 1873, served as the immediate catalyst for the first major case of military defiance in modern Japan: the unauthorized Taiwan expedition of spring 1874. A wave of military rebellions would be the result of the breakup of the inter-domainal alliance. The Taiwan defiance, by contrast, would rise from the desperate attempts to hold its broken pieces together.

⁴⁶ Nakahara, "Sakamoto Sumihiro", 75.

⁴⁷ *DSZ* 2:698 (editor’s notes).

⁴⁸ Umegaki, *After*, 67.

Chapter Three

“By not stopping”:

Military Defiance and the Taiwan Expedition, 1874

If the lords want to stop Tsugumichi, let them fulfill their duty by [trying] to stop him, and Tsugumichi will fulfill his duty by not stopping.

Lieutenant General Saigō Tsugumichi, April 1874

On December 17, 1871, two ships from the Kingdom of Ryūkyū were washed up on the coast of Southern Taiwan, which was populated mainly by aboriginal groups. As the sailors discovered to their horror, some of the locals killed any foreigner who happened to land on their shores, allegedly in retribution for a past massacre committed by European interlopers.¹ As a result, most of the sailors were butchered by the villagers. Only a handful of them were able to reach the Qing-controlled part of the island, and were then finally repatriated to Ryūkyū through mainland China.²

¹ Robert Eskildsen, ed., *Foreign Adventurers and the Aborigines of Southern Taiwan, 1867-1874: Western Sources Related to Japan's 1874 Expedition to Taiwan* (Taipei: Institute of Taiwan History, Academia Sinica, 2005), 3-7; Charles LeGendre, "Notes of Travel in Formosa", in LeGendre, 121-2, 125, 132; *Iwakura-Ko Jikki* (Tokyo: Kōgō Gūshoku, 1906), 2:1183 (hereafter cited as *IKJ*); Tei Nagayasu (Tei Ei-Nei), "Soejima Taishi teki Shin Gairyaku", in *Meiji Bunka Zenshū*, Meiji Bunka Kenkyū Kai, ed. (Tokyo: Nihon Hyōronsha, 1967-1974) (edition 1955-7) 6:63 (hereafter cited as *MBZ*); Paul D. Barclay, "Gaining Confidence and Friendship in Aborigine Country: Diplomacy, Drinking and Debauchery on Japan's Southern Frontier", *Social Science Japan* 6:1 (April, 2003), 81-2.

² LeGendre, "notes" in Eskildsen, *Adventurers*, 166,9; *IKJ* 2:1171; Mizuno Jun, "Taiwan Seiban Ki", in Yagashiro Hideyoshi, ed., *Tairo Mizuno Jun Sensei* (Tokyo: Yuma ni Shobō, 2008), 263 (hereafter cited as *TMJS*). Several testimonies of the survivors, collected by Kagoshima Prefecture officials and reported to the Japanese government, were reproduced in *Saigō Totoku to Kabayama Sōtoku*, ed. Saigō Totoku to Kabayama Sōtoku Kinen Jigyō Shuppan linkai (Taipei: Saigo Totoku to Kabayama Sōtoku Kinen Jigyō Shuppan linkai, 1936), part II, pp.50-1 (hereafter cited as *STKS*). The different theories on the motives of the perpetrators are analyzed by Ōhama Ikuko. See: Ōhama, "Budansha

As Ryūkyū was considered by the Japanese leadership a dependency of the empire, the incident was followed by a lengthy debate, spanning almost two and a half years, over whether Japan should invade Taiwan by itself, or rely instead on Qing China to punish the wrongdoers.³ During much of 1873, this debate was overshadowed by the more urgent Korean question, but after Ōkubo's rise to power in late October, the hot potato of Taiwan was soon placed on his desk. An intricate chain of events, culminating in late April 1874, led to the first important case of military defiance in modern Japan. The commander of the Taiwan Expeditionary Force, Lieutenant General Saigō Tsugumichi, decided to invade Taiwan against explicit government orders of which he was well aware.⁴ This fact was surprising, because Saigō was usually known as a cooperative general. His unusual case of defiance, however, had important and complex ramifications on the development of military disobedience in future years.⁵

Jiken Saikō: Naze Paiwan-Zoku wa Ryūkyū Shima-jin wo satsugai shita no ka", *Taiwan Genjūmin Kenkyū* 11 (2007), 203-24.

³ Ōyama Tsunayoshi, "Ōyama Kagoshima Ken Sanji Ryūkyū Tōmin Taiwan ni okete Sōgai nit tsuite Monzai no Shi nado nado Jōchin", 31.8.1872, Japanese Army and Navy Archives (Library of Congress, Washington DC), Microfilm 5041, Reel 34, Frame: 44843 (hereafter cited as *JANA*).

⁴ Xu Jielin, "Gaisei to Tōchi: 1874-nen Taiwan Shuppei o rei ni shite", in *Gendai Kokka to Kempō no Gerni* (Tokyo: Yūhikaku, 1983), 400.

⁵ The Taiwan Expedition was already discussed by several scholars, especially Robert Eskildsen, Mizuno Norihiro and Edwin Pak-Wah Leung, but their discussion' focus is either the roots of Japanese Imperialism or Sino-Japanese relations. Japanese language authors, such as Mōri Toshihiko and Xu Jielin, tend to focus on the internal Japanese politics. This chapter, while drawing on the above mentioned studies, is the first to use primary sources to explore the subject from the crucial viewpoint of military disobedience. For the studies mentioned above see: Robert Eskildsen, "Of Civilization and Savages: The Mimetic Imperialism of Japan's 1874 Expedition to Taiwan", *The American Historical Review* 107:2 (April, 2002), 388-418; Mizuno, Norohito, "Early Meiji Policies towards the Ryukyus and the Taiwanese Aboriginal Territories", *Modern Asian Studies* 43:3 (May, 2009), 683-739; Leung, Edwin Pak-Wah, "The Quasi-War in East Asia: Japan's Expedition to Taiwan and the Ryūkyū Controversy", *Modern Asian Studies* 17:2 (1983), 257-81; Mōri Toshihiko, *Taiwan Shuppei: Dai Nihon Teikoku no Kaimaku Geki* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1996); Xu, "Gaisei", 389-416.

“Appeasing Angry Spirits”: Ryūkyū and the Satsuma Lobby

To understand Saigō’s decision to disobey, one has first to observe the strong reaction of Satsuma potentates to the murder of the Ryūkyūan sailors. First invaded by Satsuma in 1609, Ryūkyū was a tributary state of China and Satsuma alike. The Tokugawa Bakufu, in any case prone to concentrate specific routes of foreign trade in the hands of selected domains, entrusted Satsuma with Ryūkyū. In practice, Kagoshima dealt with the Qing through the kingdom, grabbing its own share of the lucrative China trade. Constantly worried about Bakufu and Chinese interference with this substantial source of income, the daimyo ordered the successive kings of Ryūkyū to keep the extent of their “special relationship” with Satsuma secret.⁶

Around late 1871, the Ryūkyū question surfaced in both Japanese and Chinese politics. In August that year, upon the abolition of Satsuma and its replacement with Kagoshima Prefecture, Ryūkyū became a tributary of the Imperial Japanese Government. The new leaders, at odds about the proper treatment of their new catch, gave Ryūkyū the curious status of domain (*han*) – the only domain in a country otherwise made of prefectures. Still, Ryūkyū did not yet give up its tributary relationship with China.⁷ In mid-May next year, when the Japanese envoy to China

⁶ Kagoshima Ken, ed., *Kagoshima Ken Shi* (Kagoshima: Kagoshima Ken, 1967) 2:668 (hereafter cited as *KKS*).

⁷ Kabayama Sukenori, "Taiwan Kiji", in *STKS*, part II, 144, 47-8; *The Japan Daily Herald*, 7.4.1874 (hereafter cited as *TJDH*); Leung, "The Quasi-War", 258; Tei, "Soejima", in *MBZ* 6:64. For the debates in the Japanese government on the possible annexation of Ryūkyū to the Empire see: *Meiji Bunka Shiryō Sōsho*, ed. Meiji Bunka Shiryō Sōsho Kankō Kai, (Tokyo: Kazama Shobō, 1963), 4:8-9, for analysis see:

heard about the murder of the Ryūkyūan sailors and reported accordingly to Tokyo, it was unclear who among the three patrons of Ryūkyū should bear responsibility: the Japanese Imperial Government, the Qing Government or the leaders of the former Satsuma Domain.⁸ And indeed, as events proved, neither Tokyo nor Beijing, but rather Kagoshima, was the first capital to react.

In summer 1872, rumors about the sad fate of the Ryūkyūan sailors spread around the prefecture, which was particularly restive at that time. The acting governor of Kagoshima Prefecture, Grand Councilor Ōyama Tsunayoshi, complained that the province was quickly becoming ungovernable. While the local *shizoku* (former samurai) became increasingly hostile to the government, its representatives, such as Ōyama, found themselves in an unenviable position.⁹ Under such conditions, the Taiwan Incident was grasped by Ōyama and some of his associates as manna from heaven. Here, at last, was an event which they could use to rally *shizoku* public opinion in Satsuma to their side. Ryūkyū was now a domain under the central government and no longer a Satsuma dependency, but it was still temporarily attached to Kagoshima.¹⁰ A prompt reaction to the murder of “their” dependents could bolster Satsuma supremacy over Ryūkyū also under the new regime, and divert the dangerous energies of former Satsuma retainers toward a military

Kurihara Jun, "Taiwan Jiken (1874 nen): Ryūkyū Seisaku no Tenki toshite no Taiwan Shuppei", *Shigaku Zasshi* 87(9), 1328-52.

⁸ Tei, "Soejima", in *MBZ* 6:63.

⁹ *OTM* 3:535; *OTN* 2:127-8.

¹⁰ Tei, "Soejima" in *MBZ* 6:63.

adventure abroad. Ōyama did not spare one moment.¹¹ By August 31, 1872, he had sent the following urgent dispatch to the government in Tokyo:

I, Tsunayoshi, plead for imperial authority to lead an investigation. In order to chastise them [the aborigines], I humbly beg to borrow several battleships, knock out their lair, annihilate the ringleaders and spread imperial power across the seas, thus appeasing the angry spirits of the islanders. I humbly beg my request to be granted.¹²

The pressure of the Satsuma lobby was not limited to highly-placed individuals such as Ōyama. It quickly became a consensus among Satsuma activists that something had to be done to avenge the Ryūkyūan sailors, but as the hierarchy in the prefecture was muddled, it was still unclear on whom this honor should be bestowed. The result was a radicalization of all involved, as Kagoshima officials competed with each other as to who would press the central government harder to launch an expedition to Taiwan. It was probably assumed that the first to raise the subject would be the first in line for glorious command posts on the expedition. Therefore, Ōyama and his emissary to Tokyo were immediately joined by other eager lobbyists from the former Satsuma Domain.¹³

The reactions in the central government were more nuanced. Some key figures, especially from the Treasury, Army and Navy Ministries, as well as Minister

¹¹ Ōyama, 31.8.1872, *JANA*, M:5041, R:34, F:33834; Kurihara, "Taiwan Jiken", 1329.

¹² Ōyama, 31.8.1872, *JANA*, M:5041, R:34, F:33834. Iwakura's choice to fully quote Ōyama's letter in his diary (precise date unclear), indicates the influence this letter had on Japanese policy makers. see *IKJ* 2:1171.

¹³ Kabayama, "Taiwan Kiji", in *STKS*, Part II, 139.

of the Right Iwakura Tomomi, were against the idea of a military expedition.¹⁴ Saigō Takamori, the most senior Satsuma figure in the government, was also not enthusiastic to embark on a military adventure in Taiwan. He was convinced by his Satsuma cohorts that an expedition should be launched, yet initially did not throw his weight into the matter. In March 1873, however, Taiwanese aborigines robbed and mistreated sailors from Oda. Now, as not only sailors from Ryūkyū were endangered by the aborigines but also Japanese subjects from the core of the empire, the position of the proponents of the invasion became stronger.¹⁵

Prelude to the Expedition: The Soejima Mission to China

At the end of 1872, a final decision on Taiwan was still pending.¹⁶ Many of the senior leaders of the government had travelled abroad as part of the famous Iwakura Expedition, and it was difficult to reach important decisions in their absence. Hence, the advocates of the invasion and their rivals reached a convenient compromise: to send Foreign Lord Soejima Taneomi, a proponent of the invasion, on a diplomatic mission of inquiry in China. He was ordered to ask the Chinese whether they had jurisdiction over the aboriginal part of Taiwan. If they did, he should demand that they take responsibility, namely to adequately punish the aborigines

¹⁴ *IKJ* 2:1172; *TJDH*, 7.4.1874; Kobayashi Takao, 'Rusu seifu to sei-Tai ronso: Rujandoru oboegaki ni kansuru ichi kosatsu,' in *Seiji keizai Shigaku* (December 1990), Vol. 296, pp. 1–25; Zhang Hu, 'Soejima tai-Shin gaiko no kento,' in *Meiji Ishin to Ajia*, 30–60; Shinobu Seizaburō, *Nihon Seiji Shi* (Tokyo: Nansōsha, 1976–82), 2: 434–5; *DKT* 3:70–1.

¹⁵ Saigō Tsugumichi to Charles LeGendre, 8.4.1873, "Taiwan Joriku ato no Kyōdō oyobi Shinkoku Seifu to no kōshō nado ni kan suru" (Terashima to Parkes, conversation minutes), 7.4.1874, *Dai Nihon Gaikō Bunshō*, Gaimoshō, ed. (Tokyo: Gaimushō Chōshabu, 1936–40) 7:21–5 (hereafter cited as *DNGB*). For general impressions on the Oda Incident see also Edward H. House, *Japanese Expedition to Formosa* (Tokyo, 1875), p. 13; *SEDS* 3:638.

¹⁶ *DKT* 3:370–1, 3:12, 15, 59–60; *SEDS* 3:638.

and compensate the families of the bereaved Ryūkyūan sailors. In case the Chinese did not have sovereignty there, he should ask them whether they had any objections to Japan dispatching a punitive expedition to the southern part of the island.¹⁷

Soejima and his entourage stayed in China for about four months, from March to July 1873, and most of their time was devoted to diplomatic questions unrelated to Taiwan. The Taiwan Incident was only mentioned in one meeting, held in August between the councilors of the Qing Foreign Ministry and two of Soejima's aids. The meeting was not recorded by the Chinese side, but according to the minutes of the Japanese delegation, the Qing officials were asked whether Taiwan was part of China, and if so, whether the Chinese were ready to punish the wrongdoers and pay compensation. The Chinese side replied that they were not responsible for the "barbarian" part of Taiwan, which was "beyond the pale of civilization" (Chinese: *huahai*, Japanese: *kegai*). This ambiguous if not careless answer was "understood" by the Japanese as a relinquishment of sovereignty over the "barbarian" part of Taiwan.¹⁸ It is probable that the Chinese officials did not even grasp at the time that their answer left such a dangerous lacuna, as they did not take the Taiwan problem seriously.¹⁹

¹⁷ *IKJ* 2:1172–3; *OM* 1:40; *SEDS* 3:638–9.

¹⁸ McWilliams, "East", 261-6; The Japanese records, taken by Yanagihara Sakimitsu and his team, are referred to by Yanagihara and Tei's memorandum in *JANA*, M:5041, R:34 F:44973, and reproduced in Iwakura's diary (*IKJ* 2:1174-5) and, in a shortened version, in Tei, "Soejima" in *MBZ* 6:70-1. For a nearly full English translation (with some unimportant omissions) see: Nagao Ariga, "Diplomacy" in Alfred Steed, ed., *Japan by the Japanese* (London, 1904), 161-3. The Japanese "interpretation" of the Qing Foreign Ministry's answer was propagated to the English speaking world by the *New York Herald's* Edward House, who served for all practical purposes as the mouthpiece of Soejima and the Foreign Ministry. See House, *Expedition*, 10-11. It was also accepted by *TJDH*, 7.4.1874.

¹⁹ This is the assumption of McWilliams, in "East", 268-9.

Soejima's return to Japan on July 25 reawakened the debate over the invasion of Taiwan. As the Chinese answer was misleadingly interpreted by the Japanese side as a *carte blanche* to invade southern Taiwan, the main argument against the invasion, the danger of a war with Qing China, seemed less convincing than before. However, the debate on Korea in the summer and autumn of 1873 pushed the Taiwan problem to the sidelines, as the Satsuma lobby, Saigō and Soejima shifted their attention from Taiwan to the Korean peninsula.²⁰ The political crisis in October (described in the previous chapter) resulted in a sweeping overhaul of the government, pushing Saigō Takamori, Soejima Taneomi and their allies out of national politics.²¹

On the one hand, these developments decimated the Satsuma lobby, as its most important government backers retired from office. But on the other hand, they disproportionately strengthened the few Satsuma leaders who decided to remain in Tokyo. After the retirement of Saigō Takamori and his allies, Satsuma troops were seething with rebellion, and a civil war between Tokyo and Kagoshima seemed closer than ever.²² Hence, those Satsuma retainers who kept their network connections **both** in the central government and in Satsuma were urgently needed in the capital. The most prominent of these people was Saigō Tsugumichi, Takamori's younger brother, major general and deputy lord of the army. His position, advocating a

²⁰ *IKJ* 2:1176.

²¹ *SSKN* 27:39a-b; *A Diplomat in Japan: The Diaries of Ernst Satow*, ed. Ian Ruxton, (Morrisville, North Carolina: Lulu Press Inc., 2009), 2:102 (hereafter cited as *DES*).

²² *OTN* 2:209, 22; *TKI* 2:54-5. For historical context, see: "Taiwan Shuppei Hōshin to Tenkan to Chōshūha no Hantai Undō", *Shigaku Zasshi*, 92:11 (1983), 1774; Shinobu, *Nihon Seiji* 2:417-8.

military expedition to Taiwan, had to therefore be treated with utmost consideration.²³

A Hot Potato: The Taiwan Problem under the Ōkubo Administration

Under such conditions, The Ōkubo administration could not have ignored the pending Taiwan problem when it was raised again before the cabinet in the winter months of 1873/4.²⁴ Once again, Satsuma officers travelled to the capital to lobby for a military expedition.²⁵ This time, the leaders of the government were responsive. The projected expedition was, after all, dear to many Satsuma retainers. The government leaders believed it would be advisable to send at least a few of them abroad, for a while, in hope of appeasing Satsuma public opinion. It was probably also assumed that the alliance between the government and Satsuma, broken after the debate on Korea, could be rebuilt through such a joint venture.

In a memorandum submitted to the cabinet on February 6, 1874, Ōkubo and the new lord of the treasury, Ōkuma Shigenobu, proposed an outline for a military expedition to Taiwan.²⁶ In order to solidify Ōkuma's position as the head of the

²³ See for example *OTN* 2:203-25.

²⁴ *OTM* 5: 234–236; *OTN* 2:227, 233–236; *Ōkuma Shigenobu Kankei Monjo*, Nihon Shiseki Kyōkai, ed. (Tokyo: Nihon Shiseki Kyōkai, 1932–5), 2:235 (hereafter cited as *OSKM*).

²⁵ Kabayama, "Taiwan Kiji," in *STKS*, part II, 281, 314; *IKJ* 2:1176.

²⁶ "Taiwan Banchi Shobun Yōryaku," 6.2.1874, *DNGB* 7:1–2. Kabayama, "Taiwan Kiji," in *STKS*, part II, 281. The plan was actually drafted by the minister to China, Yanagihara Sakimitsu and his right-hand man, Tei Nagayasu, on January 29, 1874, to be revised and submitted later by Okubo and Ōkuma. See JN-R34-F44973-44979. The colonization plans were also influenced by the reports of spies sent to Taiwan. See: *Center for Asian Historical Record* (hereafter cited as *JACAR*), <http://jacar.go.jp>, Ref. A03030073600, (14.6.1875), Ref. AA01100078600, p. 14, Naikaku (December, 1874), Ref. C09120280000, Rikugun-shō Dai Nikki (1875), Ref. A03030425400, p. 595.

hierarchy, he was put in charge of a new government body, the so-called “Bureau of Taiwan Barbarian Affairs” (*Taiwan Banchi Jimu Kyoku*), directly subordinated to the cabinet.²⁷ In mid-March Saigō Tsugumichi himself produced another plan which implied outright colonization, an idea not uncommon among Satsuma activists.²⁸ Saigō asked Iwakura and Ōkubo to appoint him as the commander of the expedition, and even proposed settling discontent Satsuma samurai on the annexed island.²⁹ Given Ōkubo’s delicate relations with his former domain and dependence on Saigō, it was unsurprising that the demand of Satsuma officials to prepare Taiwan for colonization were accepted by the government.³⁰ Accordingly, Ōkuma began to earnestly acquire seeds of “European” trees for plantation in Taiwan, a clear sign of long term colonial intentions. The plans were to proceed secretly, most probably in order not to provoke protests from the envoys of the Western powers.³¹

²⁷ *DNGB* 7:1–3; *OTM*, 5: 343–348; *SSKN* 27:52a; *JACAR*, Ref. A03030997600 (5.4.1874), pp. 1–3.

²⁷ *DNGB* 7: 1–3; *OTM* 5: 343–348.

²⁸ Kabayama, “Taiwan Kiji,” in *STKS*, Part II, 288, 314–6. *TJDH*, 11.4.1874. See also Mōri, *Taiwan Shuppei*, 143–4.

²⁹ *OTM* 5: 468; Kishida Ginkō, 15.5.1874, “Taiwan Shinpō” in *STKS*, part II, 7 (the dates here, and in all other subsequent references to Kishida’s articles, are the dates of publication in the *Tokyo Nichi-Nichi Shinbun*, usually two or three weeks after the piece was written.

³⁰ *OTM* 5: 464–469; *OSKM* 2: 283–285; *IKJ* 2:1179; Ochiai Hiroki, *Meiji Kokka to Shizoku* (Tokyo: Yoshikaewa Kobunkan 2001), 127; Saigō Jūkō, *Gensui Saigō Tsugumichi Den* (Tokyo: Matsuyō Shobō, 1997), 117. The plan is reproduced in *STKS* Part II:64,8. Colonization is explicitly mentioned in the text, as well as the term “colonizing soldiers” (*shokumin-hei*). See also Kabayama, “Taiwan Kiji” in *STKS*, part II, 314, 21.

³¹ Eskildsen, “Mimetic,” 397; *STKS* Part II, 64; House, *Expedition*, 15. For sentiments supporting colonization among Satsuma retainers see also Kabayama, “Taiwan Kiji,” in *STKS*, part II, 144. About the seedlings see: Ōkuma to Kido/Kuroda, 10.4.1874, *National Archives of Japan* (hereafter cited as *NA-JP*), Gyōsei Bunsho, Naikaku Sōrifu, Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:10, Shoban Shorui 2A-033-07, Hito 00596100, p. 19.

On April 4, Ōkubo and Ōkuma finally decided to appoint Saigō Tsugumichi as the commander-in-chief of the Taiwan expedition. The appointment was confirmed by Chief Minister Sanjō and submitted to the throne for final endorsement.³² An imperial decree immediately followed. Saigō was promoted to the rank of lieutenant general, and nominated “Commander in Chief in charge of the Barbarian Part of Taiwan” (*Taiwan Banchi Jimu Totoku*), a long title without precedent in the short history of the Meiji army.³³ Perhaps this was an attempt to honor him with a title equivalent to that of his older brother Takamori, who had served as commander-in-chief of the Imperial Guard. Two other officers, Admiral Akamatsu Noriyoshi from the navy, and Major General Tani Kanjō from the army, were appointed as his seconds in command.³⁴ The next day, Saigō received two subsequent imperial edicts, defining his task and scope of authority. The first of the two read:

Regarding the punishment of the Taiwan barbarians, you, Tsugumichi, are appointed as Commander-in-Chief of Operations in the Barbarian Part of Taiwan. You are hereby invested with full authority to give rewards and inflict punishments using military and naval force [...]: 1. To investigate and punish the crime of murdering our countrymen. 2. In case the crime is not compensated, you are to use military force to punish [the guilty parties].³⁵

³² Minister of the Treasury to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 12.4.1874, *NA-JP*, Gyōsei Bunsho, Naikaku Sōrifu, Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:10, 2A-037-00, Hitoe 00977100, pp. 29:d–e; *SSKN* 27:52a–b; *IKJ* 2:1179–82.

³³ *SSKN* 27: 52a–b; Xu, “Tōchi,” 395.

³⁴ *TKI* 2:65; *IKJ* 2:1179. Akamatsu Noriyoshi, “Taiwan Seitō no Nikki” in “Akamatsu Noriyoshi Kankei Monjo,” Modern Japanese Political History Materials Room, National Diet Library, Tokyo (hereafter cited as *MJPH-NDL*), p. 1.

³⁵ “Saigō Taiwan Banchi Jimu totoku ni tamawaritaru Shinchoku”, 5.4.1874, *DNGB* 7:18.

A subsequent order, arriving on the next day, defined the scope of the mission, and Saigō's role, in greater detail. This order, it seemed, was formulated specifically to curb the authority of the independent-minded Saigō, as it included a long list of limitations and prohibitions. Above all, he was instructed to concentrate on military operations alone without interfering in diplomacy. "If any protest is lodged by the Chinese government," it was written, "[you] have nothing to do with it. [Such a protest] should be answered by means of diplomatic negotiations conducted by our envoy in Beijing." Furthermore, foreseeing the danger of independent military operations with grave international implications, the order specified that "in any matter related to our relationship with the Chinese government [...] you should appeal to the Imperial Throne for orders."³⁶

Saigō, in turn, tried to establish a similar vertical structure of command among his troops. In an undated appeal to his soldiers, probably published in early April, he emphasized the importance of unity and military discipline. The soldiers should always obey their commanders, and, while on the ships, adhere to the regulations of the Imperial Navy. Most of all, they must take care to avoid independent actions which might jeopardize the relations of the Japanese with friendly locals. "Do not harm the collective by acting on your own rage," he emphasized, "each one should keep that well in mind. For example, even if you are personally offended, bear it with endurance and do not compromise the important

³⁶ "Saigō Taiwan Banchi Jimu Totoku ni Tamawaritariru Tokuyu", 5.4.1874, *DNGB* 7:19; for another version of the order (undated), see *STKS* Part II:64-70; *IKJ* 2:1183. This went contrary to the American advisor Charles LeGendre's advice, to concentrate in the hands of one person full authority over both diplomacy and military affairs. See: *Ōkuma Monjo*, Waseda Daigaku Shakai Rigaku Kenkyūjo, ed. (Tokyo: Waseda Daigaku Shakai Rigaku Kenkyūjo, 1963) 1:42-3.

interests of the country.” He also warned the *shizoku* to forgo mutual hostilities, to avoid quarrelling and to “overcome the current tendency of our country for loud rows.” Only in that way, he emphasized, “we will not bring the sneer of foreigners upon ourselves.” In a force comprising so many former samurai, it was important for Saigō to emphasize that the vertical chain of command, representing the interests of the abstract collective called “Japan,” should reign supreme during the expedition.³⁷ In addition, Saigō did not dispute his subordination to civilian authorities. In a letter to the expedition’s American advisor, he rephrased his official orders. The military force, he emphasized, was not assigned to intervene in diplomacy. In case of difficulties raised by Qing authorities, the commander should “wait for orders from the government.”³⁸ So far, there were no signs of disobedience whatsoever. But the unforeseen events of April 1874 would dramatically change that situation.

An Unexpected Turn: The Interference of the Foreign Envoys

In April 1874, while the expeditionary force was waiting in Nagasaki for the final order to set sail, unexpected developments threatened to reshuffle the cards. In spite of Japanese attempts to keep the preparations for the expedition secret, the foreign press in Yokohama had been reporting on the subject for quite some time.³⁹ On the April 9, the British envoy in Tokyo, Sir Harry Parkes, wrote to Terashima

³⁷ Saigō to the troops, in *STKS* part II: 70.

³⁸ Saigō Tsugumichi to Charles LeGendre, 8.4.1873, *DNGB* 7:22.

³⁹ *TJDH*, 6,7.4.1874. The language of the report indicates that the events were well-known to the readers for quite some time.

Munenori, Lord of Foreign Affairs, and warned him against involving British subjects and ships in any activity “considered hostile by the Chinese government.”⁴⁰ The Japanese government had many reasons to fear British displeasure, one of which was probably financial: the funds for the expedition were to be transferred through a bank in Hong Kong. British sanctions could place the expeditionary force in severe financial troubles.⁴¹

While Terashima was trying to deflect pressure from Parkes, another front suddenly opened with the US Legation in Tokyo. Unfortunately for the Japanese government, the State Department ordered the new American envoy, John Bingham, to prevent by any means the participation of US citizens or vessels in the “permanent occupation of the Eastern side of the Island of Formosa.” The envoy wrote accordingly to Terashima and advised him that it was his duty to “protest against the employment by Your Excellency’s [the Japanese] government of any ship or any citizen of the United States in any military or naval expedition hostile to the Government or authority of China, or to any portion of her people, inasmuch as such employment is expressly forbidden and prohibited by the laws of the United States.” The German envoy, Max von Brandt, also tried to talk the Japanese out of the expedition. Along with some other Western diplomats, he warned his counterparts

⁴⁰ Parkes to Terashima, 13.4.1874, *DNGB* 7:31; *OTN* 2:262.

⁴¹ Minister of the Treasury to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 12.4.1874, *NA-JP*, Gyōsei Bunsho, Naikaku Sōrifu, Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:10, 2A-037-00, Hitoe 00977100, p. 29f.

from the Imperial Government that the Taiwan adventure was likely to be costly in human life and doomed to failure from its outset.⁴²

“Not the Tsugumichi of Former Days”: The Decision to Disobey

The pressure from the foreign diplomats apparently worked.⁴³ On April 19 the cabinet met in a partial quorum, most notably in the absence of Ōkubo, who was still out of Tokyo.⁴⁴ Those assembled, chaired by Chief Minister Sanjō, agreed to postpone the expedition. An urgent telegram was sent to Ōkuma in Nagasaki, and Ōkubo was also brought into the picture upon his arrival in Tokyo. Subsequently, on April 29, he hurried to Nagasaki in order to personally confer with Saigō Tsugumichi.⁴⁵ A special imperial emissary, Secretary of the Cabinet Kanai Yukiyasu, was dispatched to Nagasaki in order to convey the message in person, and the local governor was ordered to delay the departure of the warships until his arrival.⁴⁶

Prince Iwakura Tomomi, minister of the right, documented the subsequent events in his diary:

On the 25th, [Kanai] Yukiyasu arrived at Nagasaki harbor. [Ōkuma] Shigenobu received and read the letter written by [Sanjō] Sanetomi, and was informed

⁴² Terashima to Bingham, 22.4.1874, Bingham to Terashima, 23.4.1874, *DNGB* 7:47-8; Brandt, *Dreihunddreissig Jahre*, 302. Brandt's line was also reflected in the foreign press, see *TJDH*, 11.4.1874.

⁴³ Mōri, *Taiwan Shuppei*, 136.

⁴⁴ *OTN* 2:256–62.

⁴⁵ *OTN* 2:262–3; “Naimu-kyō Ōkubo Toshimichi Kyūshū e mu[ki] shuppatsu todo[ke],” 29.4.1874, *NA-JP*, Gyōsei Bunsho, Naikaku Sōrifu, , Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:10, 2A-009-00, Hitoe 01309100, p. 52; *OSKM* 2:302–3; Akamatsu, “Taiwan Seitō Nikki” in “Akamatsu Monjo,” pp. 4–5, *MJPH-NDL*.

⁴⁶ *IKJ* 2:1193; *OSKM* 2:302–3; Sanjō to Ōkuma, 19.4.1874, *JACAR*, Ref. A03030120800. Cabinet to Miyakawa, 19,20.4.1874, *JACAR*, Ref. A03030122000; *TJDH*, 23,24.4.1874.

about the protests of the foreign envoys. Subsequently, he called Tsugumichi and explained the situation. Tsugumichi's reply was that the military spirit was already aroused in the army and the navy, and how could he stop them? At the next day at dawn, Shigenobu went over to Tsugumichi at the camp, and told him to await further orders.⁴⁷

Iwakura noted in his diary that Saigō was furious, and promptly refused to follow the orders of the government. As Ōkuma explained to Sanjō later, “the army was brimming with military spirit and there was no way to bring it under control.”⁴⁸

According to Iwakura's narrative:

Tsugumichi would not listen. Even at the time of receiving the imperial decree appointing him commander-in-chief, he was afraid that the imperial decision would change midway. [...] Now, Tsugumichi had an imperial command [*taimej*] in his hand to launch a punitive expedition without bringing disgrace. Was it possible to discuss such an imperial decree in the government then, when the expedition was on its way and not even a few days had elapsed? Furthermore, should they remain in harbor for more than ten days, the military spirit/discipline [*gunki*] of the troops may dissipate, so why the hell [*nanzō*] should they wait for further orders?⁴⁹

Now came the crucial part. Saigō Tsugumichi tapped into the hidden power of the emperor to circumvent established channels of authority. Yet, his argument was mixed with practical considerations. The conversation below is based on a report which reached Iwakura and was recorded in his diary:

Tsugumichi had already received a decree signed by the emperor – he is not the Tsugumichi of former days. Today, even if Chief Minister [Sanjō] comes and hands him an order personally, he will not follow it. To begin with, orders

⁴⁷ *IKJ* 2:1193–4. Compare with: Ōkuma to Sanjō and Iwakura, 20.4.1874, *JACAR*, Ref. A03030122100, Ōkuma to Sanjō, 2.5.1874, *JACAR*, Ref. A03030136600; *TJDH*, 7.5.1874.

⁴⁸ *OSKM* 2:310. See also: Ōkuma to Sanjō and Iwakura, 20.4.1874, *JACAR*, Ref. A03030122100.

⁴⁹ *IKJ* 2:1194. Compare with: Ōkuma to Ōkubo, 27.4.1874, *JACAR*, Ref. A03030131200.

issued by the cabinet are constantly changing, filling the hearts of the people of the realm with confusion and fear. The day of foundation [Meiji Restoration] is not far off in the past. Because the leaders are still not used to handling things, soldiers, though stationed everywhere, are rampant with conspiracies. One wrong move and everything will collapse, never to be brought again under control. Though it would not be difficult for Tsugumichi to placate the troops under his own control, once they are out of these makeshift arrangements, what good would it do? Once the depressed mood is aroused [among the troops] a disaster is to be expected, maybe in a scale no smaller than the Saga Rebellion. He is deeply worried about it.⁵⁰

But according to Iwakura, Tsugumichi had also offered a practical solution:

If the lords want to stop Tsugumichi, let them fulfill their duty by [trying] to stop him, and Tsugumichi will fulfill his duty by not stopping. Would the lords try to force his hand he would still knock the den of barbarians, hanging the imperial edict around his neck. Only death will stop him. If the Qing Government subsequently opens a conflict, our government may excuse itself, shutting the mouth of the Qing government by declaring that Tsugumichi is an escaping pirate who stole battleships [...]⁵¹

On April 26 the Yūkōmaru, the first ship of the expedition, left Nagasaki Harbor on route to Amoy. On May 3 it arrived, and Saigō's emissary handed over a formal letter to the local Qing Governor. For all practical purposes the expedition was launched against government orders, but Tsugumichi was convinced to delay his own departure until Ōkubo arrived in Nagasaki.⁵² However, even Ōkubo, the strong man of the government, could not or did not want to change things. In the evening

⁵⁰ Ibid, 2:1194–5. And compare with Kabayama, “Taiwan Kiji,” in *STKS*, part II, 293.

⁵¹ Ibid, 2:1195. Ochiai, writing his memoirs after the event, believed that the piracy threat was only a joke, but this is different from the impression conveyed by Iwakura's diary. See: Ochiai Taizō, *Seiban Tōbatsu*, 60, in Yasukuni Jinja Kaikō Bunkō (Yasukuni Shrine Archives, hereafter cited as *YJKB*).

⁵² *IKJ* 2:1196–7; Kabayama, “Taiwan Kiji,” in *STKS*, part II, 319–20; *OSKM* 2:310; Ōkubo to Sanjō, 29.4.1874, *JACAR*, Ref. A03030133900; Fukushima to the Bureau of Taiwan Barbarian Affairs, 3.5.1874, *JACAR*, Ref. A03030137800.

of May 4, Ōkubo finally met Saigō and authorized the expedition *post-facto*.⁵³ In an agreement signed by Ōkubo, Ōkuma and Saigō, the former agreed to take upon himself the lion's share of the responsibility.⁵⁴ On May 16, almost two weeks later, Chief Minister Sanjō retrospectively authorized the *fait accompli* through a government order. The leaders of the government agreed that now, when the ships were on their way and a formal letter had already been sent to the Chinese side, the annulment of the expedition would result in substantial embarrassment to the Japanese Empire.⁵⁵

The dynamics of Saigō's defiance, tolerated by Ōkuma and recognized *post-facto* by Ōkubo and Sanjō, cannot be understood without taking into account that Ōkuma, Ōkubo and Sanjō shared Saigō's cause.⁵⁶ The three politicians and the military leader did not disagree on the desirability of invading Taiwan. All of them believed that the expedition was both just and beneficial for Japan. Ōkubo and Ōkuma had no doubt that the Taiwanese "barbarians" had to be chastised, although they did not originally plan to annex Taiwan, and reached that radical conclusion only as a result of Satsuma lobbying.⁵⁷ As they agreed with Saigō on the

⁵³ *OTN* 2:266.

⁵⁴ *ibid.* *IKJ* 2:1195–9; *OSKM* 2:307–8, 11–13. The text of the agreement is reproduced in *OSKM* 2:312–3. Saigō had also agreed to send Wasson and Cassel back to Japan (*OSKM* 2:311), but that was never done. *TJDH* (25.4.1874), whose editorial line was hostile to the expedition, called LeGendre to follow his newly adopted samurai values to the end, thereby committing *seppuku* to atone for his responsibility to this "very abortive" operation. For the paper's hostility to the expedition and LeGendre alike, see also *ibid.*, 7.5.1874.

⁵⁵ *STKS*, Part II:75; compare with *IKJ* 2:1200.

⁵⁶ Eskildsen, *Adventurers*, p. 12 ; *Meiji Shoki Nisshin Koshoshi Kenkyu* (Tokyo: Gannando Shoten, 1995), 105; Mōri, *Taiwan Shuppei*, 136–40, 237; Xu "Gaisei", 398; Mizuno, "Early Meiji Policies," 729.

⁵⁷ Iechika, "Taiwan Shuppei," 1775–6.

righteousness of the cause, neither of them had a deep motivation to stop him. Saigō, to use a German military term, had "escaped to the front". Through disobedience he strived for the government's own goals, and therefore it was difficult for the same government to restrain or punish him. Indeed, several observers, such as the German envoy Max von Brandt, brushed Saigō's disobedience aside.⁵⁸ If Saigō merely did what was expected of him by the leadership, could his behavior be defined as disobedience at all?

Still, the government did attempt to stop Saigō, and Ōkuma gave him an order to postpone the expedition. A few days later, the same order was also personally submitted to him by a special imperial emissary. On April 29, to make things ever clearer, Sanjō instructed Ōkuma yet again, in an urgent tone and very unequivocal terms, to stop Saigō and his troops. In his letter, he emphasized that there was no way to outwit the foreigners and send the expedition under their nose.⁵⁹ Even Ōkuma, an avid supporter of the expedition, initially implored Saigō to follow orders. In addition, Sanjō and Iwakura had viewed the events of late April, both Saigō's disobedience and the reaction of the foreign diplomats, as a failure of their policy and offered their resignations, a move prevented only at the last moment.⁶⁰

Hence, the pressure applied by the foreign envoys was strong enough to deter the leaders of the government, at least temporarily, from launching the

⁵⁸ Brandt, *Dreiunddreissig Jahre*, 303.

⁵⁹ *OSKM* 2:305–6.

⁶⁰ *IKJ* 2:1203–14.

expedition. However, the counter-pressure applied by Saigō Tsugumichi, as the representative of Satsuma, was even stronger. The acute imbalance in the ruling group after the October crisis, combined with the specter of a Satsuma rebellion, empowered Saigō Tsugumichi as broker between his domain and the government, practically making him one of the most influential individuals in the country. Without him, there was no one to connect the government and Satsuma, no way to keep together the broken pieces of the former coalition.⁶¹

Saigō, however, was neither a political extortionist nor a willing rebel. As argued before, he made sincere efforts to create a functioning chain of command, and even ordered his subordinates to leave all diplomatic issues to civilian authorities. In fact, when approached by Qing officials, he refused to negotiate a settlement and advised his Chinese counterpart to approach civilian diplomats.⁶² Nor did he disobey government orders before April 1874 or later. On April 25, however, he himself was in a very difficult position, peer pressured by other Satsuma volunteers around him. Any retreat might have looked like cowardice, and destroy his status in his home domain. Worse, it might have humiliated him in front of his elder brother, Saigō Takamori, who helped him assemble the volunteer troops. Tsugumichi's warning about a possible uprising of the troops was probably sincere.

⁶¹ *OTN* 2:264; *SSKN* 28:1. *TJDH*, 21,28.4.1874. So desperate were the leaders of the government that they even tried to summon Shimazu Hisamitsu to Tokyo. He indeed arrived on April 21, and served for a while as the minister of the left. His tenure, however, was stormy and full of fights with other government leaders, most notably his arch-rival Ōkubo. In 1876, Hisamitsu left the government in disgust, never to return again. See: *IKJ* 2:1207–14. *DKT* 3:220–1, 38–9; “Naikaku Komon Shimazu Hisamitsu Kagoshima-ken yori ki-Kyō todo[ke]” 22.4.1874, *NA-JP*, Gyōsei Bunsho, Naikaku Sōrifu, , Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:10, 2A-009-00, Hitoe 01309100, p. 42.

⁶² These negotiations are reproduced in the official history of the Taiwan Expedition, “Shoban Shui Sho” in *MBZ* 6:157. See also the minutes produced by Saigō himself in *STKS*, part II, 104–9, as well as Iwakura's account in *IKJ* 1203, 24–5.

As *The Japan Daily Herald* commented in an editorial, “Soldiers and ships of war are like sharp tools, dangerous things to handle.” Considering the fact that a contingent of former Satsuma policemen was already in Nagasaki, as well as there being incessant petitions of Satsuma and Tosa individuals to participate in the expedition, one could assume that postponement might have been a threat not only for the government, but also for Saigō personally.⁶³ In a way, he deflected to the government the pressure applied on him.

Finally, in order to justify his defiance of government authority, Saigō utilized the power of the imperial institution, the hidden center of authority at the heart of the Meiji system. He, Saigō, originally received an imperial decree, not an order of the government, to chastise the aborigines in Taiwan. Such a sanctified decree could not be revoked by a mere order of the government, not even by the chief minister himself. Saigō’s threat to sail to Taiwan against orders while “hanging the imperial decree around his neck” was therefore highly symbolic, because the certificate given by the emperor was in fact his symbol of empowerment, almost an amulet of defiance. In many later cases of disobedience, defiant officers resorted to “reinterpretation” of the hidden imperial will to suit their individual interests. In 1874, such a move was unnecessary, as the government did not procure an imperial decree to postpone the mission. The fact that Saigō had received his orders in the form of a decree, and their revocation as a mere government instruction, provided

⁶³ Mizuno Norihito, “Early Meiji Policies,” 729; Ochiai Taizō, *Seiban Tōbatsu*, 46–7, *YJKB*; Mōri, *Taiwan Shuppei*, 137; *TJDH*, 7,8.5.1874. On May 18, the *Herald* even published a rumor that angry soldiers had threatened to decapitate Saigō if the expedition was canceled. According to Kishida Ginkō, the soldiers waited quietly and obediently at port, but that could well have changed if the expedition had been suddenly canceled. See: Kishida, “Taiwan Shinpō,” 16.5.1874, in *STKS*, part II, 8.

him with optimal conditions to utilize the authority of the emperor for his own purposes.

Saigō Tsugumichi and his Army in Taiwan: Diffusion of Disobedience?

Having sorted out the difficulties with Ōkubo, Saigō Tsugumichi embarked himself for Taiwan on May 17, reaching the island five days later.⁶⁴ He arrived in time for the grand encounter of the expedition, the battle of Sekimon (Stone Gate), where the Japanese expeditionary force smashed the armed units of the tribe responsible for the murder of the castaway sailors. After another large-scale battle, Saigō was able to declare, on June 4, that the aborigines were finally subdued. The chief, his son and fifty three of his warriors laid dead, some of them slaughtered when wounded, their heads and arms severed and put on display by the victorious Japanese. The leaders of other tribes hastened to surrender to Saigō Tsugumichi, who seemed to enjoy the role of the benevolent victor.⁶⁵

As far as discipline was concerned, Saigō repeatedly warned his soldiers not to loot, rape, or harm “innocent aborigines.” Indeed, there were much stronger efforts of the high command to prevent mass atrocities than in any subsequent Japanese campaign in China or Taiwan, and the brutality of the Japanese Army in

⁶⁴ Cassel to LeGendre, 24.5.1873, Wasson to Ōkuma, 1875, in Eskildsen, *Adventurers*, 203, 237.

⁶⁵ Saigō to Ōkuma, 7.6.1874, Kabayama, “Taiwan Kiji,” in *STKS*, part II, 101–2, 326–7; Cassel to LeGendre, 24, 26.5.1873, Wasson to Ōkuma, in Eskildsen, *Adventurers*, 209, 12, 36, 39–40, 47–8; Mizuno Jun, “Seiban Ki,” in *TMJS*, 228, 81–2; Adachi Tsunayuki, “Watashi no Shosei Jidai no Tsuioku (shita): Adachi Tsunayuki Ō Sōdan,” *Jikei* Vol. 17, No. 6 (June, 1935), 70; Ochiai Taizō, *Seiban Tōbatsu*, 78–9, *YJKB*. In his memoirs, Ochiai Taizō denies that the Japanese took the heads of the chief and his son, but the testimonies of Wasson, Cassel and Mizuno indicate otherwise.

1874 could not be compared to its ruthlessness in the First Sino-Japanese War (1895), and certainly not to the mass atrocities of the 1930s. Saigō's orders, however, were not always obeyed, as seen by the admonitions of his lieutenants, General Tani and Admiral Akamatsu, to the troops. In these circulars, they decried mistreatment of civilians, particularly Taiwanese coolies, "shameful illicit relationships with women," brawls, and violation of orders. All of these were certainly not surprising in a mixed, heterogeneous force comprising garrison soldiers and bellicose Satsuma volunteers.⁶⁶

However, the force was also plagued by another, more dangerous kind of disobedience, exercised by enlisted men and junior officers alike. Douglas Cassel and James Wasson, the American military advisors, did not fail to notice that both junior officers and enlisted men often broke ranks and attacked the enemy against orders. In his report to Ōkuma, Wasson complained about the "want of order among the troops. The companies had been properly formed in camp on starting but in a short time the ranks were broken and when the rivers were crossed those that got out first dashed ahead without waiting to reform ranks and the march out soon became a mere race to see who would reach the scene of action first."⁶⁷

Cassel, who had a more comprehensive view of the situation, understood that the root of the problem was not only with the disobedient troops, but with the sanction given by junior officers to such violations of discipline. Often they

⁶⁶ *STKS*, Part II, 179, see also pp. 110–11. Such behavior is also implied in House's account in *idem*, *Expedition*, 48, 58. Compare with Adachi, "Shosei," 68–70.

⁶⁷ Wasson to Ōkuma, 1875, in Eskildsen, *Adventurers*, 233.

authorized and even led such private operations against the orders of the generals.

As a result, the sensitive negotiations with the aboriginal tribes were put at risk:

But there was and is one evil which I have ever been unable to prevent, and that is the unauthorized movements of small parties of officers and men into the country. I say, "unauthorized," but after all, in many cases no doubt these expeditions have been undertaken under the orders of the comd'g officers. The first which came to my notice was a party of six officers who penetrated the southern country as far as South Bay [...] As I much feared that anything like a collision with any savages in the South would seriously endanger our relations with Esa, Tok-e-tok [Tokitok – the leader of the confederated tribes – D.O.] and the rest of the people with whom we had made friends, I made the strongest representations that such conduct must be discontinued. But as the officers seem to have little or no control over their men, my advice produced but little effect.⁶⁸

Cassel's confusion as to the question of whether these raids were "authorized" or not touched at the heart of the problem: the junior officers had a larger measure of control over the troops than their seniors. This phenomenon of private, uncoordinated operations staged by ambitious officers was widespread, resulting at times in diplomatic hazards or unnecessary loss of life. When a crucial order not to intimidate a delegation of aboriginal chiefs was enforced, Cassel described it as a "wonder."⁶⁹ According to his description, even the decisive battle at Stone Gate began when a Japanese company attacked the enemy when ordered to retreat. The American advisor, who wanted to draw more enemy forces into a trap, felt that the

⁶⁸ Emphasis is mine. Cassel to LeGendre, 24.5.1874, and compare with Wasson to Ōkuma, 1875, in Eskildsen, *Adventurers*, 207–8, 231–6. Unlike Cassel, Wasson put a greater emphasis on disobedience among the troops.

⁶⁹ Cassel to LeGendre, 26.5.1874, 212. Cassel's testimony on the disastrous lack of discipline during the battle of Sekimon is confirmed by the memoirs of Mizuno Jun, "Taiwan Seiban Ki," in *TMJS*, 228. Mizuno also complained that the officers could not control the tendency of soldiers to rush forward, even when such unauthorized moves were dangerous to the war effort. See also hints in the diary of Admiral Akamatsu: Akamatsu, "Taiwan Seitō no Nikki" in "Akamatsu Monjo", 9, *MJPH-NDL*.

unauthorized advance at “Stone Gate” frustrated his plans, and bitterly complained to Admiral Akamatsu. Dumbfounded, the admiral replied “that the men had acted without orders.” Cassel’s distrust of the troops was so great as to advise the Japanese commanders to order an immediate attack: “Otherwise in their discontent at inactivity, they will undertake something foolish which may result in disaster.”⁷⁰ In other words, the junior officers were in need of constant action. If idle, they were likely to become uncontrollable.⁷¹

Even some of the senior officers had a troublingly similar state of mind. In a memorandum sent to the government (probably to Ōkuma), General Tani Kanjō proposed attacking the Qing part of Taiwan, using the aborigines, no less, as Japanese shock troops, settling them in the island’s capital and turning the whole of Taiwan into an imperial possession. Later, he wrote, Japan would gradually send “robbers to instigate rebellions” throughout China, form alliances with local forces and use the chaos to take over chunks of the country.⁷² This wild fantasy, similar as it was to what Japan actually did in China during the 1930s, opens a window to Tani’s unruly mentality. Taiwan envisioned by him was not an organized colony but rather a private fiefdom of samurai of his kind (most probably from Tosa and Satsuma), constantly employed in private raids and exciting adventures in mainland China. Considering the fact that one of the expedition’s top commanders harbored such ideas, there is no wonder that “illegal” private operations of junior officers were

⁷⁰ Cassel to LeGendre, 24.5.1873, in Eskildsen, *Adventurers*, 209.

⁷¹ See for example *ibid.*, pp. 208, 212.

⁷² *TKI* 2:71. As usual, Tani had viewed his grandiose schemes on China as means to “sweep away” Japan’s “internal trouble” (*naiyū o hakidashi*).

tolerated. Saigō Tsugumichi explicitly forbade such behavior in his orders to the troops, but his ability to fully control the junior officers was no greater than the government's ability to control him. By 1874 the Meiji Army was still unable, even at the level of the officers, senior and junior alike, to turn unruly warriors into obedient soldiers.

An important question is whether Saigō's disobedience in late April diffused downwards among the troops, finally influencing the officers to imitate the disobedient behavior of their commander. Indeed, the foreign press in Yokohama was well informed about the events of April 25—*The Japan Daily Herald* even condemned the leaders of the expedition as pirates and mutineers—but it is unclear whether most of the troops, apart from a handful of insiders, were fully aware that Saigō had defied government orders. Even Admiral Akamatsu, who fleetingly mentioned the government order to stop the expedition in his diary, did not remark on the refusal of his commander-in-chief to obey it, though rumors were certainly widespread.⁷³ Still, though we cannot rule with certainty that Saigō's defiance diffused downwards to the junior officers, they disobeyed orders for reasons similar to his. Just like Saigō, they had grown up with a tradition of direct action, personal bravery and individual honor. Due to the lack of military resources, it was also difficult to replace them with others, and that gave them leverage over their

⁷³ *TJDH*, 7.5.1875; *IKJ* 2:1196, Mōri, *Taiwan Shuppei*, 137; Akamatsu, "Taiwan Seitō Nikki" in "Akamatsu Monjo," 4–5, *MJPH-NDL*; Kabayama, "Taiwan Kiji," in *STKS*, part II, 324–5. Kishida, "Taiwan Shinpō," 12, 16.5.1874, in *STKS*, Part II, 4, 8. The accounts of Mizuno and Ochiai have to be read with caution, as they are influenced by retrospective knowledge. See: Mizuno Jun, "Taiwan Seiban Ki," in *TMJS*, 218; Ochiai Taizō, *Seiban Tōbatsu*, 60–3, *YJKB*. Edward House, who travelled with the Japanese troops, was completely oblivious to the drama that took place in the Japanese high command, see *Expedition*, 23–4.

commanders. Therefore, they could not have been easily punished, even if their superiors had wanted to discipline them in the first place.

End of the Taiwan Expedition

Spring gave way to summer, and the drenching heat of Taiwan took a heavy toll on the Japanese troops. Their encampment was often flooded by rain, and the low-quality tents constantly leaked, making it difficult for the soldiers to sleep at night. Food and ammunition supply was sometimes disrupted, and individual units suffered from hunger. According to several estimates, seventy to eighty percent of the troops, including Saigō himself, had contracted tropical diseases, mainly due to consumption of bad food and water.⁷⁴ As Mōri Toshihiko argued, Saigō's militant state of mind withered away during the summer, and he was merely looking for an honorable excuse to leave Taiwan altogether.⁷⁵ Under such conditions the plan to settle former Satsuma samurai in the island had to be abandoned.

The reports of Saigō and Tani to Ōkuma betrayed their increasing dismay. The morale of the troops, according to Tani, had become more sluggish as time went by. The forced idleness, he warned, was filling the soldiers with homesickness and turning their valor into weakness. Tani's urgent plea to send a detachment of Military Police (*Kempei*) to Taiwan indicates that the discipline among the troops had

⁷⁴ House, *Expedition*, 53–4, 60; Ochiai Taizō, *Seiban Tōbatsu*, 70–1, 96–7, 110–5, *YJKB*; Adachi, "Soshei," p. 71; Wasson to Ōkuma, 1875, in Eskildsen, *Adventurers*, 250–1; *STKS*, part I, 15–17; Mizuno, "Seiban Ki" in *TMZS*, 291–6; Saigō, *Gensui*, 120. According to Nakahara Hidenori, 561 soldiers died of disease, a very heavy toll for a force of 3,600, especially if one considers that only twelve soldiers actually fell in battle. See: Nakahara, "Sakamoto Sumihiro", 77.

⁷⁵ Mōri, *Taiwan Shuppei*, 145. Eskildsen (*Adventurers*, 13) argues, without good evidence, that Saigō wanted to remain in Taiwan and opposed the peace agreement with the Qing.

deteriorated as well.⁷⁶ Many of the Satsuma volunteers, considered at first enthusiastic and tough, were tired of waiting for the endless negotiations with the Qing to end, especially when their hopes of being replaced by fresh troops were dashed.⁷⁷ Perhaps they believed, as some assume, that the Taiwan Expedition was just a quick preparatory stage for an invasion to Korea, and wanted to return to Japan and participate in the “real thing.” Maybe, as the editors of Kagoshima Prefecture’s official history have written, the volunteers had just “softened,” tortured by the blazing heat and the debilitating tropical diseases. In any case, they were impatient, and could not understand why they had to linger in Taiwan after the surrender of the aboriginal tribes.⁷⁸

“At that time, many pranks were born of the determination of the *senpai* [older soldiers] [...] to push for an early retreat [to Japan],” recalled Adachi Tsunayuki, a young former policeman who participated in the expedition as one of the volunteers. “Whenever Commander-in-Chief Saigō appeared at the main encampment and asked the soldiers how they fared, [the veterans], aiming particularly for that time, would instigate a large number of young [soldiers]. [The young soldiers] would compete among themselves in climbing the Banyan trees, then look down on the camp and yell as loud as they could: ‘let’s—go—back! Let’s—

⁷⁶ *TKI* 2:68–71, and compare with Kabayama's account, “Taiwan Kiji,” in *STKS*, part II, 361–2.

⁷⁷ Ochiai Taizō, *Seiban Tōbatsu*, 110–6, *YJKB*.

⁷⁸ Nakahara, “Sakamoto Sumihiro,” 77; *KKS* 3:867–8. Ochiai Taizō, *Seiban Tōbatsu*, p. 45, *YJKB*.

go—back! (*modo-rō! modo-rō!*).” Yet, according to Adachi, there was also a faction of soldiers, admittedly much smaller, which wanted to remain in Taiwan.⁷⁹

Finally, in late October, China and Japan were able to reach an agreement on the Taiwanese question. The Japanese agreed to evacuate and forgo all claims to Taiwan, in return for a series of major Chinese concessions. The Qing Empire paid compensation to the bereaved families of the Ryūkyūan sailors, effectively putting up with exclusive Japanese sovereignty over the Ryūkyū Islands. In addition, the Chinese formally recognized that the Japanese had the right to chastise the aborigines in Taiwan, and reimbursed Japan for the bridges and other installations built across the southern part of the Island.⁸⁰

Ōkubo, knowing well that Saigō had disobeyed orders only a few months earlier, did not repeat the mistakes made in April. Instead, he did his best to secure the commander-in-chief’s cooperation with the agreement, assuring him that he was the victor, not the humiliated chief of a retreating force. First of all, Ōkubo himself arrived in Taiwan, followed by Prince Higashikuze, the grand chamberlain, who personally delivered an imperial edict ordering Saigō to return with his troops to Japan. The formal edict endorsed by the grand chamberlain, a court noble close to the emperor, prevented Saigō from again utilizing imperial authority as an excuse to disobey orders. Ōkubo was wise enough to take with him some of the most radical Satsuma activists, thus effectively preventing the formation of a hawkish lobby back

⁷⁹ Adachi, “Shosei,” 70. Compare with Ochiai Taizō, *Seiban Tōbatsu*, 116, *YJKB*.

⁸⁰ *SSKN* 28:1–9; Mizuno Norihito, “Early Meiji Policies,” 731–3.

home.⁸¹ Saigō, his officers and his troops were honored with flowery compliments, lavish gifts and an enthusiastic mass reception back in Yokohama Harbor. Later, in Tokyo, the commander-in-chief and his officers were received for an imperial audience. To Ōkubo's surprised relief, these precautions proved to be redundant. Saigō, not too eager to remain in Taiwan, obeyed the order to retreat without any difficulties. His soldiers, sick and disheartened, were in any case gradually evacuated to Japan. Still, according to one participant in the expedition, many of the troops, believing that Japan had "surrendered" to China, were disappointed with the agreement.⁸²

The Taiwan Expedition: An Omen for the Future?

At first glance, it is tempting to argue that Saigō Tsugumichi's decision to sail to Taiwan against orders served as a precedent, paving the way for military disobedience in future years. This conclusion seems reasonable, as prewar Japanese history was replete with examples of military disobedience, most of which bear significant similarity to Saigō's behavior in Taiwan. Several of these incidents will be described in the following chapters.

⁸¹ Kabayama, "Taiwan Kiji," in *STKS*, part II, 360–6. *OTN* 2:248–9; Saigō, *Gensui*, 121. About the role of Higashikuze, see especially p. 362; Ochiai Taizō, *Seiban Tōbatsu*, 134–5, YJKB; Mizuno, "Seiban Ki" in *TMZS*, 297–303.

⁸² *JACAR*, Ref. A03031062200, (1874, precise date unknown); *STKS* Part II, 126–7; *OTN* 2:248–55; *STKS*, part II, 363. According to Ochiai, Saigō was so bored in the last months, that he amused himself by watching young, robust soldiers performing sumo wrestling for his pleasure. Even when he heard that Ōkubo was coming, he behaved indifferently, and ordered his soldiers to continue the bout. *Seiban Tōbatsu*, 116–7, 130, 33–4, YJKB.

But as every historian knows, parallels between events do not necessarily denote causality, and the claim that Saigō's behavior served as a precedent for the future could not be easily proven. As far as I have been able to establish, there is no evidence that later disobedient officers had ever mentioned Saigō as their role model or discussed the 1874 Taiwan invasion as a precedent to be followed. The Taiwan Expedition did contribute to the development of future disobedience in the army, but in a roundabout way. It began to prompt a sense of crisis in the military elites, a feeling that something in the prevailing form of civil-military relations was fundamentally wrong. Yamagata and some of his confidants believed that the expedition was a folly, private war born out of illicit connections between Satsuma politicians and private army units. The entire campaign, said Miura Gorō, a burgeoning Chōshū commander, was a "lawless war".⁸³ The military reforms initiated by Yamagata four years later, in 1878, were intended to solve this problem by cutting all ties between officers and politicians. These reforms, as we shall see in chapter five, became a major source of military disobedience later on.

But the Taiwan Expedition, by itself, did not shock the elites strongly enough to precipitate immediate change in civil-military relations, and in 1874 Yamagata and Miura were relatively isolated voices. In order to convince the leaders of the government to reform their relations with the army, a much greater trauma was needed. Such a trauma, however, gradually evolved in the years following the Taiwan Expedition. Saigō Tsugumichi, as we have seen, "escaped to the front", i.e.,

⁸³ KYAD 2:350; Yamagata Aritomo, *Yamagata Aritomo Ikensho* (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1966), 57–60. Miura, *Kanju*, 99–101. Stewart Lone, *Army, Empire and Politics in Meiji Japan: The Three Careers of General Katsura Tarō* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000), 13. Kurono Taeru, *Sanbō Honbu to Rikugun Daigakkō* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2004), 28.

disobeyed his superiors by striving to achieve **their** own goals faster and better than they could have done. *Fukoku Kyōhei*, richer country and stronger army, was increasingly interpreted by many in the elites as diplomatic assertiveness and territorial expansion. When someone strived for this goal by a military expedition abroad it was difficult to stop him, even if he acted against government orders. Along with the haziness of the imperial center, that was a major bug in the Meiji system which encouraged disobedience from Saigō Tsugumichi's days up to the 1930s.

In the 1870s, however, the government did try, from time to time, to stop officers and officials, less prominent than Tsugumichi, who defied its will by "escaping to the front" against orders. The result, as we shall see in the next chapter, was a series of armed rebellions. It was these rebellions, along with the Taiwan Expedition, which precipitated the military reforms of 1878, the basis on which later military disobedience would grow.

Chapter Four

Fatal Optimism

Rebels and Assassins in the 1870s

And it is worthy of remark, that although each person present disliked the other mainly because he or she did belong to the family, they one and all concurred in hating Mr. Tigg because he didn't.

Charles Dickens, *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*

In October 1876, almost nine years after the Meiji Restoration, it was clear to Kido Takayoshi that something was rotten in the kingdom of Japan. Storm clouds were gathering, people were unhappy and evidence of imminent rebellion seemed to be ubiquitous:

It is my observation, as I survey the current scene, that everybody in the land is dissatisfied, whether he be peasant, merchant, or *shizoku*. Although the country has been quiet for a time, it is not because the people were contented. The only completely satisfied people are the government officials. The people, therefore, are set to revolt. [...] The government [...] had carried on its administration in an arrogant style, without consideration for the hard life in the remote areas, and without regard for traditions which date back several hundred years.¹

Kido was right on the mark. As the Meiji reforms endangered and at times even destroyed the livelihood of many, it is little surprise that they often encountered

¹ DKT 3:381.

resistance: peasants who rebelled against conscription, mandatory education and the legalization of Christianity; *shizoku* who could not sit idle while their domains were abolished and stipends taken away, or former *shishi* who had fought to expel the foreigners only to be appalled by the pro-Western policy of the government.² Furthermore, in a new state such as Meiji Japan, lacking any substantial policymaking tradition, almost every important decision in internal and foreign affairs was bound to evoke controversy and even indignation. People dissatisfied with the chosen course of policy resorted at times to disobedience, either in the form of non-violent defiance, like Saigō Tsugumichi on the eve of the Taiwan Expedition, or armed rebellion.

Saigō Tsugumichi's defiance was secret, and thus could be smoothed over. But when the challenge was public, the government could not show leniency to rebels without compromising its most sensitive ideological tenet: the monopoly over the Imperial Throne. The emperor's will, presented to the public through a thick layer of ministers and advisors, was subject to competing interpretations by the government and its enemies. When the state and a group of violent protesters both claimed to represent the emperor, it was clear that only one of them could be right as the emperor could not support two contradictory causes at once. In such confrontations, each side tended to view its own struggle as purely righteous and the other's as irrevocably wicked. Each faction claimed to represent the hazy imperial center and accused its rivals of rebellion against the throne. Enemy troops were not

² Rikujō Jieitai Kita Kumamoto Shūshinaki, ed., *Shimpen Seinan Senshi* (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1977) 1:23-4 (hereafter cited as *SPSS*); Wagatsuma Sakae et. al, eds., *Nihon Seiji Saiban Shiroku: Meiji* (Tokyo: Daiichi Hōki Shuppan, 1968-70) 1:402-3 (hereafter cited as *NSSS-M*); Hugh Cortazzi, *Dr. Willis in Japan, 1862-1877: British Medical Pioneer* (London: The Athlone Press, 1985), 217-19.

considered legitimate soldiers (*guntai*) but robbers, rebels and traitors (*zokutō/zokuhei*). The campaign against them was called a punitive expedition (*seitō*), not a war (*sensō*).³ In such a zero-sum game no compromises could be made, and the fight was almost always to the death.

The main "bug" in the Meiji political code, the haziness of imperial authority, allowed mutineers to justify their behavior by "guessing" what the emperor *really* wanted. Seeing themselves as loyal subjects who merely followed the will of their hidden sovereign, most rebels began their uprisings with moves of "escape to the front", disobeying the government while striving for national, patriotic goals, allegedly in tandem with the imagined imperial wish. The fuel for such "patriotic" uprisings was a particular kind of optimism, whose presence or absence was a major determinant for military disobedience up to the 1930s. In this chapter, we shall discuss early Meiji rebellions and conspiracies in order to understand the patterns of escape to the front, reliance on the hazy center and the optimism which mutated them into active rebellions. Finally, we shall see why the failure of early Meiji rebellions gave the government more than half of a century without further military

³ Sanbō Honbu Rikugunsha Hensanka, ed., *Seisei Senki Kō* (Tokyo: Sanbō Honbu Rikugunbu Hensanka, 1887) 1:1 (hereafter cited as *SSK*). For an English language example of the government discourse on rebellions see the *Nichi Nichi Shinbun* article, "On Saigō's Rebellion", reproduced by *The Japan Daily Herald*, 3.3.1877. An extreme example of such a Manichean attitude from the rebels' perspective is the *Shinpūren* manifesto (October 1876), reproduced in *IKJ* 2:1377-8. See also the crucial discussion of Saigō Takamori and his lieutenants, described in *SPSS* 1:117-8. The participants in the discussion described their expedition against the government as an "investigation" (*kitsumon*), as they were the legal authorities and the Tokyo leaders – the criminals. In a subsequent appeal, the rebels described their mission as a military effort of loyal retainers to "cleanse the evil men" around the Throne. See: *NA-JP*, Gyōsei Bunsho, Naikaku-Sōrifu, Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:1, Kōbunroku, *Kagoshima Seitō Shimatsu*, 2A-009-00, 00833100 (hereafter cited as *KSS*), 8:10.

uprisings. However, the reaction of the army to this crisis opened the door for new, no less dangerous forms of disobedience.

Pessimism, Optimism and Conspiracy in Tosa

Around December 1873, a few months after the October crisis over the invasion of Korea, the leaders of the Tosa *shizoku* in Tokyo convened a large meeting of their clansmen. Tosa was an ally of Satsuma during the October crisis, and its two prominent leaders, Itagaki Taisuke and Gotō Shōjirō, resigned from the cabinet with many of their followers after the breakup of the inter-domainal alliance. The assembled Tosa *shizoku* debated whether they should return to their Prefecture (the former Tosa Domain), work against the government in Tokyo or remain in imperial service.⁴ The mood in the meeting was very rebellious, according to available testimonies, and moderate opinions were ignored, marginalized or otherwise brushed aside.⁵

The Tosa leaders knew well that their fellow retainers were bubbling with discontent.⁶ Itagaki and Gotō, who supported peaceful opposition, used their power to prevent a mass uprising, but their control over the rank and file was imperfect and could not prevent smaller-scale violence. In their homes, as well as in the abodes of other hosts, Tosa *shizoku* intermingled with each other and with retainers from

⁴ Kawata Mizuho, *Kataoka Kenkichi Sensei Den* (Tokyo: Kohokusha, 1978), 248-62; Hayashi Yūzō, *Hayashi Yūzō Jirekidan* (Kōchi: Kōchi Risshimin Toshokan, 1968), 1:53.

⁵ *Hogohiroi: Sasaki Takayuki Nikki*, ed. Tokyo Daigaku Shiryō Hensanjo, (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan Kai, 1970-9) 5:419 (hereafter cited as *HSTN*).

⁶ Tani Kanjō to Kataoka Kenkichi, 27.1.1874, reproduced in Kawata, *Kataoka*, 152.

smaller domains.⁷ Just like the fencing students who turned to revolutionary activity during the late Tokugawa period, some of the social connections between Tosa warriors gradually "mutated" into anti-government conspiracies.⁸

This mutation was by no means inevitable, universal or even large-scale. In fact, it happened in surprisingly small parts of the Tosa network, mainly because Itagaki, Gotō and their collaborators redirected much of the violent energy into peaceful channels by creating schools, parties and other organizations.⁹ However, some retainers were not satisfied with petitions and political activity, opting instead for a more radical breakaway from the government.¹⁰ This situation gave rise to two distinct groups of violent activists. Both were almost exclusively comprised of Tosa retainers who agreed that the ills in the Japanese polity had to be remedied through violence. In both cases, it was the October crisis and the demise of the inter-domainal alliance which triggered their decision to rebel.

In the absence of direction by well-informed national leaders, the members of these groups were largely fed by rumors. As decisions had to be made in such conditions of uncertainty, the question of whether the rebels' "gut feelings" were optimistic or pessimistic was of large importance. In this context the words "optimistic" and "pessimistic" signify one's assessment of the prospects of changing

⁷ See the interrogation of Odate Tomokata, reproduced in Fukushima Nariyuki, *Seikanron no Yobun: Akasaka Kuichigai no Jihen* (Tokyo: Maeda Bajōta, 1927), 108-14.

⁸ An interesting description of such a process may be found in the police deposition of Odate Tomokata, reproduced in Fukushima, *Akasaka Kuichigai*, 108-14.

⁹ Hayashi, *Jirekidan*, 1:53 ; Umegaki, *After*, 202.

¹⁰ Ogawara Masamichi, *Seinan Sensō: Saigō Takamori to Nihon Saigo no Naisen* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2007), 10-11. Compare with *HSTN* 6:16-17.

society by violent direct action. While rebels with a pessimistic state of mind prioritized action against symbolic targets, optimists more often resorted to assassinations of high-profile government figures.

The Pessimistic Rebels: Senya, Miyazaki and Toda

Miyazaki Misaki, Toda Kūjirō and Sen'ya Kiyosato, three young *shizoku*, met each other around the dinner tables of Itagaki Taisuke and other Tosa hosts. Miyazaki and Sen'ya were from Tosa, and Toda, their accomplice, came from Niigata. Sen'ya, a highly charismatic figure according to available testimonies, was the dominant character among the three.¹¹ Miyazaki worked for a while in the Treasury and the Development Agency, but resigned after the October crisis. He was homeless, forced to roam between the apartments of sympathetic hosts. His friends, Sen'ya and Toda, faced a similar situation and had to rely on the hospitality of Itagaki and other Tosa leaders.¹² Like many of their clansmen they were incensed by the October crisis and the government's failure to invade Korea, but for them it was merely the tip of the iceberg, part of an all-pervading moral, spiritual and religious decay. The leaders, they believed, failed to block Christianity, eliminate Buddhism and elevate the pure, authentic cult of Japan's native Gods.

Since 1868 and even before, wide circles in the ruling elites had advocated the establishment of Shintō, an eclectic collection of nativist cults reinterpreted as an "authentic" Japanese religion. These circles, orchestrated by the Council for

¹¹ Ogawara Masamichi, "Seikanron Seihen ato no Seifu Tenpuku Keikaku", *Musashino Gakuin Daigaku Kenkyū Kiyō* 3 (2006), 91.

¹² *Yūbin Hōchi Shinbun*, 2.10.1875.

Divine Affairs (*Jingikan*), denounced Buddhism as a foreign religion associated with the discredited Tokugawa regime. Bad enough by itself, it was even worse when mixed with Shintō, polluting the “authentic” creed of Japan with syncretism. As the syncretism of Buddhist and native cults was very much the reality in Japan prior to 1868, some Meiji Shintōists began a campaign to destroy Buddhism or at least separate it from their own creed. The government half-heartedly supported these attempts by creating an institution for state-sponsored spiritual ethics, called the “Great Teaching Institute” (*Taikyōin*). For a time it seemed to some foreign observers that Buddhism was about to be “swept out of Japan”.¹³ The government, however, gradually broke with the anti-Buddhist campaign. In March 1872, the Council for Divine Affairs was abolished and incorporated into the Ministry of Education.¹⁴ Few months later, the government decided to move the Great Teaching Institute to the Buddhist temple Zōjōji, formerly the place of worship of the Tokugawa family.¹⁵

Seeing the government backing down from its professed ideology, Toda, Miyazaki and Sen'ya acquired a mentality of “escape to the front”: an attempt to pursue national policy better, faster and more decisively than their leadership. They decided to independently proceed in the direction of spiritual purification, once professed by the ruling elites themselves.¹⁶ The failure to invade Korea and the

¹³ A.B. Mitford, *Tales of Old Japan: Classic Folklore, Fairy Tales, Ghost Stories and Tales of the Samurai* (London: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000), 313.

¹⁴ Helen Hardacre, *Shintō and the State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 30-1.

¹⁵ Ogawara Masamichi, *Daikyōin no Kenkyū: Meiji Shoki Shūkyō Gyōsei no Tenkai to Zassetsu* (Tokyo: Keiō Gijuku Daigaku Shuppankai, 2004), 181.

¹⁶ “Keishichō Rokuji”, *Yūbin Hōchi Shinbun*, 16.9.1874.

leniency towards Buddhism combined into one spiritual malaise, a Gordian knot which had to be cut by direct action of brave warriors. The poverty of the three activists, combined with their highly bleak view of Japanese spiritual decay, gave rise to a profoundly pessimistic world view with significant impacts on their revolutionary strategy. First of all, they rejected the tactics of assassinating individual leaders. Killing one of them is futile, Sen'ya told a fellow clansman. "If you cut one blade of grass in the morning, another one will grow up in the evening." The leadership was not only evil and corrupt, but well established. Kill one leader, and another one would take his place. The only chance for revival depended on the elimination of the entire ruling group simultaneously. Thus, Sen'ya and Miyazaki proposed setting fire near the temporary Imperial Palace at Akasaka. Then, they imagined, all of the ministers and imperial councilors would go out to examine the scene only to be slaughtered en masse.¹⁷

In addition, the pessimism of Toda, Miyazaki and Sen'ya discouraged them from putting the assassination of government leaders as their top priority, because that by itself would not cure Japan's spiritual decay. First, the insult to the Japanese gods had to be remedied. Therefore, before setting fire in the vicinity of the Imperial Palace, the trio decided to torch other, more important targets. The first target for destruction had to be the ultimate abomination, the Great Teaching Institute placed inside a "dirty Buddhist temple".¹⁸ Then they planned to target Buddhism by burning the popular temple of Kannon, the Goddess of Mercy, in Asakusa. According to Toda,

¹⁷ Take Yoriwake, "Tosa Jinbutsu Hyōron", *Nihon Oyobi Nihonjin* 504 (February, 1909), 25.

¹⁸ Take, "Tosa Hyōron", 26.

this place “was the source of pollution, undermining the mentality of ‘love the country, respect the Gods’ among the people”.¹⁹ Only after removing the spiritual pollution, they would set fire near the Akasaka Imperial Palace in order to kill the Imperial councilors.²⁰

The plan of Sen'ya and his two friends was impossibly complicated and out of touch with the limited resources they had. As they failed to coordinate with other groups, they did not have the manpower to torch the three destinations at once, and had to destroy them one by one.²¹ On New Year's Eve 1874, at around 1:00 AM, Miyazaki and Sen'ya sneaked into Zōjōji temple and set fire to the Great Teaching Institute. The fire soon spread to the main hall and consumed it.²² The police, initially suspecting the night watchman, gradually realized that disaffected *shizoku* were responsible and began to hunt them down.²³ Undeterred, Miyazaki, Sen'ya and Toda decided to strike again one week later. On January 8th they tried to set fire to the Kannon Asakusa temple, but the sudden appearance of a patrolman foiled the plan.²⁴ The three hapless *shizoku* understood they were in grave danger of arrest and gave up the unrealistic plan to assassinate the imperial councilors.

¹⁹ *Yūbin Hōchi Shinbun*, 2.10.1875.

²⁰ See the statements of Miyazaki, Senya and Toda to the police, published in “Keishichō Rokuji”, *Yūbin Hōchi Shinbun*, 16.9.1874.

²¹ Take, “Tosa Hyōron”, 25.

²² “Shaji Torishirabe Ruisan” 152, Reel.50, *Rare Books and Old Materials Room – National Diet Library* (hereafter cited as *RBOMR-NDL*).

²³ *Yūbin Hōchi Shinbun*, 4.1.1874. For analysis and additional references see Ogawara, *Taikyōin*, 184-8.

²⁴ “Keishichō Rokuji”, *Yūbin Hōchi Shinbun*, 16.9.1874. Fukushima Nariyuki (*Asakusa Kuichigai*, 58-9) wrongly dates the two incidents to December 20th and January 3rd, respectively.

Takechi Kumakichi and his Group: the Optimistic Rebels

Before and during the arson operation, Sen'ya and his two friends were also in touch with another group of conspirators led by Major Takechi Kumakichi, a former officer and employee of the Foreign Ministry.²⁵ A distinguished veteran of the Restoration War, Takechi was sent to spy in Manchuria in preparation for a prospective expedition to Korea. After the October crisis he and his brother were intensely unhappy with the government's decision to abandon the invasion. In Tokyo they came in touch with a group of seven Tosa retainers. Four of them came from the same artillery unit in the Imperial Guards, one was a student, one a navy policeman, and the last a petty official at headquarters. Most of them resigned as a result of the October crisis, though others left service a few months beforehand.²⁶ Unlike Sen'ya, Miyazaki and Toda, none of them was a homeless nomad, and it seemed that they were well off economically. According to surviving testimonies, all nine were frequent patrons of taverns and brothels in the pleasure quarters. Most of them were previously connected to the Takechi brothers and to each other.²⁷

In his writings, Takechi denounced the Meiji leaders as incompetents who tyrannized the Japanese people, infringed the rights of Tosa and other former

²⁵ For information about the contacts between the groups see: Ogawara, "Seikanron Seihen ato", 92-3. And in addition: Takechi Kumakichi's statement, p.2 in "Kuichigai Bōto Takechi Kumakichi hoka hachi-nin wa Tekiritsu Ukagai" (hereafter cited as *KBTK*), July 1874, *NA-JP*, Gyōsei Bunsho, Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:1, 2A-009-00, Kō 01237100, part 2.

²⁶ Takechi Kumakichi's statement, p.2, Yamazaki Norio's statement, p.1, Iwata Masahiko's statement, p.1, *KBTK*, July 1874, *NA-JP*, Gyōsei Bunsho, Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:1, 2A-009-00, Kō 01237s100, part 2; Ogawara, "Seikanron Seihen ato", 91.

²⁷ Shimomura Yoshiaki's statement, pp.2-3, Iwata Masahiko's statement, p.2, *KBTK*, July 1874, *NA-JP*, Gyōsei Bunsho, Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:1, 2A-009-00, Kō 01237s100, part 2.

domains but at the same time canceled the invasion to Korea under threat of foreign governments.²⁸ Takechi himself served as a spy and risked his life for the purpose of invading Korea. Coming back, he was shocked to discover that the project had been abandoned, and decided to “push” the country back in the right direction by escaping to the front. That, according to his co-conspirator, Iwata Masahiko, could have been done only by direct action of brave warriors.²⁹ The belief that a private network of assassins was the only way to save the larger body of the nation from corrupted leadership was taken almost “as is” from late Tokugawa *shishi* traditions.

All of these ideological components – resistance to centralized tyranny, loyalty to Tosa and nationalism – blended together into an intensely optimistic world view. Japan’s problem, Takechi reasoned, was not an all-pervading social malaise but only the tyranny at the top. Furthermore, this tyranny did not even rest with the entire group of imperial councilors. Instead, evil was sustained by one person alone – Minister of the Right Iwakura Tomomi. As the pollution of the state was represented by an individual politician, he was demonized accordingly. “Most cunning and evil among evil men – that is Iwakura”, Takechi had angrily told one of his friends. Iwata Masahiko wrote to his parents that Iwakura had foiled the invasion of Korea “out of his own selfish motives”. Only because of him, bemoaned Shimomura Yoshiaki, another co-conspirator, had imperial authority not been spread across the seas, and Japan was humiliated in front of the world.³⁰

²⁸ Fukushima, *Akasaka Kuichigai*, 35-9.

²⁹ Iwata to his parents, 28.3.1874, in Fukushima, *Akasaka Kuichigai*, 121.

³⁰ Based on the memoirs of Hashimoto Hikosuke, quoted in Fukushima, *Akasaka Kuichigai*, 61. Iwata Masahiko to his parents, 28.3.1874, quoted in *ibid.*, 121; Takechi Kumakichi’s statement, p.2, Takechi

Takechi had further assured a friend that after Iwakura's death the other leaders would succumb. They were docile people. Bereaved of their wicked overlord, they would have to make accommodations with Saigō and Itagaki and bring them again into the government. The plans to invade Korea would probably be resumed. In such a case, Takechi assured, he would embrace death with an easy mind. According to the later testimony of his friend, Takechi was so optimistic as to be "elated".³¹ Indeed, rebels with such an optimistic mindset were much more likely to resort to the assassination of specific individuals.³² "As long as Iwakura does not pay for his crime, it is hard to speak of any future prospects for the country," Takechi told his brother.³³ The wicked person at the top was the only barrier to that bright future and therefore had to be removed.

Takechi's own assassination plot, similarly to *shishi* assassination operations in the 1860s, was justified by reliance on the imperial hazy center. That ideological move was partially a product of the tension between Takechi's Japanese nationalism and his loyalty to the Tosa identity. Without the imperial center, there was nothing to bind Tosa with the national enterprise and the rest of the country. However, the center also had to be hazy, otherwise it could be used by the leadership to justify

Kikuma's statement, p.2, Iwata Masahiko's statement, pp.2-3, Yamazaki Norio's statement, p.2, Shimomura Yoshiaki's statement, pp.1-2 in *KBTK*, July 1874, *NA-JP*, Gyōsei Bunsho, Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:1, 2A-009-00, Kō 01237s100, part 2; *IKJ* 2:1148; Fukushima, *Akasaka Kuichigai*, 56.

³¹ Based on the memoirs of Hashimoto Hikosuke, quoted in Fukushima, *Akasaka Kuichigai*, 61-2; Compare with: Iwata to his parents, 28.3.1874, in *ibid.*, 121. Takechi's denouncement of Iwakura was not uncommon among Tosa retainers at the time. See: *HSTN* 6:16-17.

³² For further elaboration of this idea see: Danny Orbach, "Tyrannicide in Radical Islam: Sayid Qutb and Abd a-Salam Faraj", *Middle Eastern Studies* (November 2012).

³³ Kokuryūkai, ed., *Seinanki Den* (Tokyo: Kokuryūkai, 1908-11), (hereafter cited as *SNKD*) 2b:235.

centralized tyranny. This delicate balance was reflected in Takechi's remark to a friend, that after the assassination, they would take Iwakura's severed head and bow to the Imperial Palace.³⁴ This ghastly offering signified that the emperor was viewed almost as a Shintō god – important, worthy of the highest reverence, but at the same time physically absent.

Over a few days, during the first two weeks of 1874, the conspirators had collected intelligence on Iwakura's daily routine, above all the route he used to take from his home to the palace.³⁵ On the evening of January 14th, around 20:00, six days after the failed attempt to torch the Kannon Asakusa temple, they ambushed his carriage in a hidden plot of grass beside the Kuichigai hill. Spotting Iwakura passing by, they jumped on his carriage, shouting "*kokuzoku!*" (traitor). While some of the assassins were holding the horse, one of them stabbed through the carriage, lightly wounding the minister. Iwakura, however, was able to jump out into a shallow canal. He hid himself in the shadowy water, concealed by the dark, moonless night, while his assailants were searching for him in vain in the vegetation nearby. Finally, after they despaired and ran away, Iwakura was rescued and brought to safety by a passer-by. That same night, the assassins buried their swords in Itagaki's garden and hoped for the best. The next day, they were disappointed to read in the *Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shinbun* that Iwakura was merely wounded. Their plan had come to naught.³⁶

³⁴ Hashimoto Hikosuke's memoirs, quoted by Fukushima, *Akasaka Kuichigai*, 61.

³⁵ Takechi's statement, p.3, Sawada's statement, p.3 *KBTK*, July 1874, *NA-JP*, Gyōsei Bunsho, Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:1, 2A-009-00, Kō 01237100, part 2.

³⁶ *IKJ* 2:1146; *OTN* 2:229-30; Uchida Tomoi, *Itagaki Taisuke kun Denki* (Kōchi: Kumongō, 2009) 2:556-7. In fact, many of them tried to mislead the police, and said in their depositions that they had thrown their swords into the river. See: Fukushima, *Akasaka Kuichigai*, 127, and compare with Takechi Kumakichi's statement, pp.4-5, Yamazaki Norio's statement, p.5, in *KBTK*, July 1874, *NA-JP*, Gyōsei

The National Police, reformed by Ōkubo under the auspices of the new Home Ministry, made extraordinary efforts to hunt down the assassins, and they were able to arrest Takechi and five of his accomplices three days later, on the 17th. The leader of the group, it seemed, was unlucky enough to leave a sandal and a hand towel at the crime scene, and that evidence had quickly put the police on his track. The remaining three conspirators were found in the next two days.³⁷ They were interrogated, tortured and then brought, fully willing to confess, in front of a special tribunal convened on January 18th.³⁸ The six judges, after hearing the confessions, convicted the defendants of “political crimes” (*kokujihan*), an article still non-existent in Meiji legislation. Accordingly, they were expelled from the *shizoku* class and condemned to death by beheading.³⁹ In the summer of 1874, Toda, Miyazaki and Sen'ya were also arrested. Just like Takechi and his group they were declassified and executed.⁴⁰

The utter failure of these two groups of assassins had shown that in order to change things in the government, personal, *shishi*-style terror would not suffice. These groups were too detached from each other, their members too individualistic

Bunsho, Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:1, 2A-009-00, Kō 01237100, part 2; Osatake Takeki, “Akasaka Kuichigai no Hen: Iwakura U-Daijin no Kyogeki”, *Osatake Takeki cho Sakushū* (Tokyo: Yuma ni Shobō, 2005-6), vol.5, 151-3; Fukushima, *Akasaka Kuichigai*, 66-8; Sawada to Tsuchiya, 9.2.1874, in *ibid.*, 124.

³⁷ OTN 2:230-1; Fukushima, *Akasaka Kuichigai*, 89-91; Kaku Kōzō, *Daikeshi Kawaji Toshiyoshi: Bakumatsu Meiji kakenuketa Kyōjin* (Tokyo: Shuppan Geijutsusha, 1999), 336-7.

³⁸ Iwata to his parents, 28.3.1874, in Fukushima, *Akasaka Kuichigai*, 122; Uchida, *Itagaki* 2:557.

³⁹ KBTK, NA-JP, Gyōsei Bunsho, Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:1, 2A-009-00, Kō 01237100, part 2, p.1-2; Osatake, “Akasaka Kuichigai” in Osatake, *Sakushū*, 153-4; *Yūbin Hōchi Shinbun*, 17.1.1874; NSSS-M 1:542.

⁴⁰ “Keishichō Rokuji”, *Yūbin Hōchi Shinbun*, 16.9.1874; Take, “Tosa Hyōron”, 26.

to work together. Though each group was familiar with the general intentions of the other, each was oblivious to the other's plan. Nor could they rally wider support around them. In order to trigger a large-scale rebellion, someone had to inject a substantial dose of optimism into a large number of people, and only a famous leader could do that. Takechi, Sen'ya and the others proved unwilling or unable to win over such a person. The rebels in Saga Prefecture, however, succeeded in doing just that at about the same time.

The Saga Rebellion: Mass Optimism and Escape to the Front

Saga Prefecture, one of the four domains which brought about the Meiji Restoration, had become increasingly restive since the summer of 1873. In fact, problems in that area were nothing new: its internal administration had been chaotic and inefficient for many years, officials at all levels were frequently transferred and many of them were absent from their duties. In the summer of 1873, the local peasants were hit by a drought and a typhoon in addition to tyrannical headmen and controversial agrarian reforms. Rural unrest was rampant throughout the prefecture.⁴¹ In July that year an energetic new governor of Tosa origins, Iwamura Michitoshi, attempted to rationalize and centralize local administration, ease the lot of the peasants and build a strong police force. His efforts, effective as they were,

⁴¹ Nagano Susumu, *Saga no Eki to Chiiki Shakai* (Fukuoka-shi: Kyushu Daigaku Shuppankai, 1987), 116-22, 30-5, 203-4.

encountered resistance from local *shizoku* whose vested interests were undermined by the new policies.⁴²

After the October crisis and the breakup of the inter-domainal alliance, these *shizoku*, deeply affected by soaring rice prices, taxation of their stipends and Iwamura's "tyrannical" administration, made their own contribution to the local chaos. Poor and unemployed, they looked for income and opportunities to prove their merit in a Korean expedition. It is not difficult to understand why they were disappointed when the plan was shelved. In addition, they were angry over the resignation of "their" Saga ministers from the government. Used to being ruled only by Saga officials, their local patriotic feelings were offended by the appointment of two "foreigners", Iwamura and his deputy Mori Nagayoshi, to the two most senior posts in their prefecture.⁴³

On the evening of 16th January, just two days after the attempt to kill Iwakura, thirteen *shizoku* forced their way into the mansion of Councilor (Deputy Governor) Mori. Faced with the surprised official, they loudly demanded permission to convene an "occupy Korea" meeting in one of Saga's public halls. Mori refused, and had abuse hurled at him by his "visitors". The next day more petitioners came in and voiced the same demands in equally rude language. Mori, dismayed and insulted, stood by his refusal and summoned all unwelcome visitors for a criminal investigation. First they submitted letters of apology, but during the hearing they condemned the government yet again in harsh language, denouncing Iwakura,

⁴² *NSSS-M* 1:343; Nagano, *Saga no Eki*, 161-5, 83-5, 90-1.

⁴³ Nagano, *Saga no Eki*, 116-17, 198-204; Ogi-chō (Saga-ken), *Ogi-chō shi* (Ogi: Ogi, 1974), 377.

Ōkubo and their friends who conspired to thwart the planned invasion of Korea.⁴⁴

Every loyal Japanese subject, they insisted, was bound by duty to advocate an expedition to the Korean Peninsula.⁴⁵

In a letter to Ōkuma Shigenobu, lord of the treasury, Councilor Mori admitted that the situation in Saga was getting out of control. “Occupy Korea” meetings, he assumed, were being convened despite his prohibitions throughout the prefecture.⁴⁶ One participant in the meetings had later recalled with pride how he and his friends wore large hats in order to hide their faces when they passed by the governor’s office (from thence they were nicknamed the “hat troops” – *Bōshitai*).⁴⁷ Painfully aware of the shakiness of his authority, Mori cautioned the government that trouble with the local retainers might break out unexpectedly at any moment.⁴⁸ By February 4th both Ōkubo and Kido had written in their diaries about violent disturbances in Saga: local *shizoku* had robbed large sums of government money. Yet this localized violence still fell short of a full-scale rebellion.⁴⁹

Just like other restive *shizoku* in the prefecture, the petitioners who insulted Councilor Mori displayed a mentality of “escape to the front”. They did not see

⁴⁴ Mori to Ōkuma, 23.1.1874, *NA-JP*, Gyōsei Bunsho, Naikaku-Sōrifu, Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:1, Kōbunroku, Saga Seitō Shimatsu 1:1,3,6,7,28, 2A-009-00, Kō 01318100, (hereafter cited as SSS) 1:10. On the convoluted, chaotic structure of authority in Saga Prefecture see: Nagano, *Saga no Eki*, 114-15.

⁴⁵ The version of the petitioners is reproduced in Matono Heisuke, *Etō Nanpaku* (Tokyo: Nanpaku Kenshōkai, 1914), 2:403-5. And compare with Mori’s letter to Ōkuma, 23.1.1874, *NA-JP*, SSS 1:10

⁴⁶ Mori to Ōkuma, 23.1.1874, *NA-JP*, SSS 1:10.

⁴⁷ Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:405.

⁴⁸ Mori to Ōkuma, 23.1.1874, *NA-JP*, SSS 1:10.

⁴⁹ *OTN* 2:236; *DKT* 2:427; *SSSN-M* 1:344; Nagano, *Saga no Eki*, 209-10.

themselves as rebels but as loyal subjects. Fulfilling their duties, they were merely pressing for the just cause of chastising Korea, advocated by the government itself only a short time before.⁵⁰ Urged by Saga clansmen who returned from Tokyo after the October crisis, local *shizoku* began to stockpile arms, ammunition and provisions, ostensibly in order to prepare for a Korean expedition. On 23rd December, around one thousand *shizoku* activists gathered to inaugurate the *Seikantō* (Occupy Korea Party). They sent a petition to the government and volunteered to serve as a vanguard force if the plans to invade Korea were rekindled.⁵¹ A quantitative study shows that most of these activists were younger *shizoku* and many were local officials. Nagano Susumu suggests that by the end of January the *Seikantō* had taken over the administrative apparatus of the prefecture. By that time it was not yet an army of rebels, but rather a private network poised to “push” the government forward in the “right direction”.⁵²

But not all *shizoku* in Saga Prefecture shared the world view of the *Seikantō*. Others, mainly older men, retired office holders from the former domain and residents of branch domains remained very conservative and concerned with internal rather than with foreign affairs.⁵³ These retainers, robbed of both honour

⁵⁰ Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:394.

⁵¹ Nagano, *Saga no Eki*, 205; *SPSS* 1:28.

⁵² Nagano, *Saga no Eki*, 216, 19-20, 33. See also: “Seikan-tō Shuisho”, Murachi Masashi’s testimony in *Nanpaku* 2:398-400. For dates and the petition of the Seikan-tō see Sonoda, *Etō*, 150. See also: Mori to Ōkuma, 23.1.1874, *NA-JP*, SSS 1:10. Testimony of Murachi Masashi in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:398-400. Maeyama Seiichirō, leader of the loyalist faction in Saga, complained about the presence of Seikan-tō members throughout the administration of the prefecture to Governor Iwamura Takatoshi. See: Iwamura to the Lord of Home affairs, 27.2.1874, *NA-JP*, SSS 2:27(10), p.2.

⁵³ Sonoda, *Etō*, 130; Nagano, *Saga no Eki*, 233; *Ogi-chō shi*, 377, see also the Ogi diary excerpt reproduced in *ibid.*, 382.

and livelihood by the taxation of samurai stipends, annulment of class distinctions and the conscription edict, had ample reasons to be dissatisfied with government policy. Inspired by petitions of Satsuma conservatives, they appealed the government to rescind conscription, recriminalize Christianity and forbid Western dress. In addition, they demanded that the daimyo and the stipends of the *shizoku* would be restored. The organization formed by these conservatives was called the *Yūkokutō* (Patriotic Party).⁵⁴

Just like their colleagues from the *Seikantō*, members of the *Yūkokutō* did not see themselves as rebels. In their petition to imperial authorities they admitted that unrest was spreading throughout the country but insisted that they were on the government's side. Their platform was supposed to protect the emperor from the unrest by striking at the roots of the problem. "For the Imperial Country, for the old domain [...] how can we not be filled with rage?" they asked rhetorically.⁵⁵ In addition to the demands to undo Westernization the members also resisted the scheme to invade Korea. In the future, they stated, Japan should invade not only Korea but also China and Russia. But as long as there were so many discontented *shizoku* around the country it was still "too early" to send a military expedition abroad.⁵⁶ Like their *Seikantō* competitors, members of the *Yūkokutō* had stockpiled

⁵⁴ *NA-JP*, SSS 1:26. For the full platform of the *Yūkokutō* see: "Yūkokusha Mōshiai-sho" in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:429-30; Nakano, *Saga no Eki*, 190-7, 212; Umegaki, *After*, 196-7.

⁵⁵ "Yūkokusha Mōshiaisho" in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:429, and compare with Shima's testimony in *ibid.*, 434.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Sonoda, *Etō*, 144.

weapons and ammunition, allegedly in order to “protect” the emperor and their former daimyo.⁵⁷

Members of both *Seikantō* and *Yūkokutō* shared some important similarities despite their political differences. Both parties recognized the hazy imperial center, but they interpreted its role in different ways. For the *Seikantō* the emperor was a potent symbol of nationalist prestige, military prowess and overseas expansion. For the *Yūkokutō* he was a symbol of Japanese tradition whose power should bind Saga and the other prefectures into a loose feudal structure.⁵⁸ These differences in interpretation notwithstanding, the utmost respect to the imperial institution still bound both parties to the larger collective called “Japan”, and none of them went so far as to demand independence for Saga. Despite the pro-emperor rhetoric of the two parties, however, their base of support was too parochial to allow effective cooperation with *shizoku* from other domains.⁵⁹ Joint action was difficult also inside Saga Prefecture, whose *shizoku* were divided on political, generational and factional lines.⁶⁰ Therefore, some of the opposition activists understood that in order to overcome their differences they must be led by a national figure, a leader respected throughout the prefecture and even beyond. Without such a leader the localized

⁵⁷ Nakano, *Saga no Eki*, 208.

⁵⁸ Nagano, *Saga no Eki*, 212-13; “Yūkokoku-sha Mōshiai-sho” in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:429-30.

⁵⁹ Umegaki, *After*, 207.

⁶⁰ For quantitative data and analysis about these divisions see: Nagano, *Saga no Eki*, 226-35. As Nagano suggests, the data we have about the members of the parties and their distribution is incomplete. See also Iizuka Kazuyuki, “Saga no Ran no zai-Kentō: Shuhen no Shiten kara”, *Kyūshū Shigaku* 149 (February, 2008), 28.

unrest in Saga could never have developed into prefecture-wide, coordinated opposition.

In the early days of January 1874, there was a growing sense in the *Seikantō* that Etō Shimpei, former justice lord, was the right man for the job.⁶¹ Etō, who resigned with Saigō Takamori during the October crisis, was disgusted both by government corruption and the failure to invade Korea.⁶² Quick to notice the former justice lord's frustration, representatives of the *Seikantō* had been pressuring him to return to Saga.⁶³ The prefecture is replete with protest, they told him, but without a “senior figure” (*senpai*) it would be difficult to enlarge the movement. For Etō, frustrated and humiliated, the call to lead a party in his home domain was probably too tempting to ignore.⁶⁴ Fully aware of the danger of a rebellion led by a national leader, Chief Minister Sanjō tried to convince Etō to remain in Tokyo, but the former justice lord refused.⁶⁵ Blinded by the support of the *shizoku* groups back home, Etō developed an excessively optimistic state of mind, and began to believe that Ōkubo and the other government leaders would tremble at the mere thought of him going to Saga.⁶⁶ On January 13 he finally decided to leave without getting prior approval

⁶¹ Testimony of Murachi Masashi, quoted in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:395,401.

⁶² Etō Shimpei, “Taigai Saku”, in *SNKD* 1A, appendix, pp.67-9; *NSSS-M* 1:339.

⁶³ Mashiko Eizu, “Saga Jijō” 1 in *SNKD* 1B, appendix, p.26.

⁶⁴ Testimony of Murachi Masashi in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:397-8, 401; Statement of Etō Shimpei to the court, 8-9.4.1874 (hereafter cited as Etō’s Statement), reproduced in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:555, and compare with the official version of the Army Ministry in: Rikugun Sanbō Kyoku, ed., *Saga Seitō Senki* (Tokyo: Rikugun Bunkō, 1875), p.2 (hereafter cited as *SGSS*).

⁶⁵ Sonoda Hiyoshi, *Etō Shimpei to Saga no Ran* (Tokyo: Shin-jinbutsu Jūraisha, 1874), 117. For the account of the conversation between Etō and Itagaki, who tried to convince him to remain in Tokyo, see Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:410-11.

⁶⁶ Testimony of Takaki Hidetomi, quoted in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:427.

from the cabinet. The government leaders were worried and uncertain. “Etō Shimpei left secretly for Saga [...],” wrote Deputy Justice Lord Sasaki Takayuki in his diary. “His intentions are unknown.”⁶⁷

It is still unclear whether Etō intended to lead a rebellion when he left Tokyo, as the evidence is not unequivocal.⁶⁸ Most probably, he himself did not have a concrete plan. As several observers have noted, the former justice lord was furious with the government and certainly planned to challenge it with his own political force.⁶⁹ Gradually he became enamored with the idea of leading a formidable, armed faction. Using his new power, he may have hoped to "escape to the front" by pushing for an invasion of Korea, even if that was illegal by government standards. He did not rule out a rebellion against the government, which he had seen as a new Bakufu, but did not meticulously plan for that possibility either.⁷⁰

Etō's return alone, however, could not tip the entire prefecture into rebellion. Localized unrest notwithstanding, the political differences between the *Seikantō* and *Yūkokutō* were still too deep to allow organized, joint military activity. Etō's authority was respected in the *Seikantō*, but the *Yūkokutō* lacked a leader who could unite it for action. In addition, neither party was eager to fight an all-out war.

⁶⁷ *HSTN* 6:5. See also: Etō to the Dajōkan, 9.1.1874, in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:406-7; Etō's Statement in *ibid.*, 555; *HSTN* 6:5; Sonoda, *Etō*, 133.

⁶⁸ For specific evidence and theories in that regard see: Mōri, *Etō*, 205; *NSSS-M* 1:341; Iizuka, “Saga no Ran”, 16. Compare also with Hayashi, *Jirekidan* 1:56 (quoted in Matono 418-19); Etō's own Statement is reproduced in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:555.

⁶⁹ Hayashi, *Jirekidan* 1:53-4.

⁷⁰ Testimony of Takaki Hidetomi, in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:411-2, and the account of the conversation with Itagaki in *ibid.*, 2:409-10.

As self-perceived loyal patriots who merely escaped the the front by striving for national goals, they needed a government provocation to push them over the edge. Only such provocation could allow them to believe that they were not rebelling but merely defending themselves.⁷¹

With their policy decisions, however, the leaders of the government finally pushed Saga over the top. While Councilor Mori was trying to hold his ground in the prefecture, Chief Minister Sanjō turned to a peaceful strategy. He decided to send a Saga retainer named Shima Yoshitake, a former government official, to mollify the discontented *shizoku* in his home domain. Shima, a deeply conservative man whose younger brother was a prominent activist in the *Yūkokutō*, was supposed to strike a chord with the activists of this party. Unintentionally, Sanjō had provided the *Yūkokutō* with the leader it needed to unite for action.

Meanwhile, Home Minister Ōkubo planned a strong-handed response to the violations of discipline in Saga, thus giving the local retainers a good reason to rebel.⁷² On 28th January he replaced Governor Iwamura Michitoshi with his brother Takatoshi, a Tosa retainer known for his quick temper and uncompromising attitude. In fact, Takatoshi had already volunteered for this role a few weeks beforehand, imploring Ōkubo to send him to overpower the discontented *shizoku* in Saga by sword and execute their leaders. He warned that if action was not taken at once, the rebellion was likely to spread to neighboring prefectures.⁷³ Five days later, on

⁷¹ Nakano, *Saga no Eki*, 210.

⁷² OTN 2 -4.2.1874; Shima's testimony in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:434.

⁷³ The letter is quoted in *NSSS-M* 1:342; *SGSS*, 5-6.

February 4th, Ōkubo and his staff decided to dispatch garrison soldiers in order to aid the new governor in the subjugation of the Saga *shizoku*.⁷⁴ That harsh response might have been influenced by the nervous mood prevailing in the government after the attempt to assassinate Iwakura.⁷⁵ Ōkubo and his colleagues were afraid that this plot was merely the prelude for further assassinations and perhaps even an armed uprising. There were rumors that Kido Takayoshi may be the next target, which moved some loyal *shizoku* from Chōshū to guard his house.⁷⁶ This was certainly not the time to be “soft” towards unrest in Saga. As intelligence continued to flow from neighboring regions on military preparations in the prefecture, there were genuine fears of a revolutionary ripple effect.⁷⁷

As it turned out, the new Saga governor, Iwamura Takatoshi, boarded the same ship as Shima Yoshitake, Sanjō’s emissary to the *Yūkokutō*. During the journey, Shima was infuriated by the disdain Iwamura showed to the Saga *shizoku*. He also heard that Iwamura was planning to “invade” Saga using “Chōshū troops”. Upon his arrival in Nagasaki, Shima joined the central board of the *Yūkokutō*. On February 11th he and Etō met in a village near Nagasaki, and the two men decided to rally their respective parties to protect Saga from “invasion”. A local loyalist leader

⁷⁴ *NA-JP*, Gyōsei Bunsho, Naikaku-Sōrifu, Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:1, Kōbunroku, SSS 1:1,3,6,7,28, 2A-009-00, Kō 01318100, (hereafter cited as SSS); *OTN* 2:236; Mōri, *Etō*, 206

⁷⁵ Mōri, *Etō*, 206.

⁷⁶ *DKT* 2:420. Compare with *HSTN* 6:11.

⁷⁷ *SGSS*, 2, 5-6; Iwakura to Ōkubo, 28.2.1874, reproduced in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:568-9; *IKJ* 2:1157; *NSSS-M* 1:340; Nagano, *Saga no Eki*, 210. Even as late as 2nd March, some people in the government were afraid that rebellious troops from Satsuma and Chikuzen might come to the aid of the rebels, though these rumours were quickly refuted. See: Fukuoka to Tokyo (telegram), 2.3.1874, *NA-JP*, SSS 2:68(31), p.1.

informed Governor Iwamura about the content of the meeting, implying that he should not enter the prefecture: Etō and Shima would rebel only to protect their parties from arrest by the governor's garrison troops, otherwise peace would be kept. Iwamura, obstinate as ever, decided to enter Saga anyway, making violent confrontation inevitable.⁷⁸

The rebellion did not have one commander but two – Etō and Shima, who kept their forces separated most of the time. The rebel armies were ill-led and discipline was extremely hard to maintain. Indeed, in the regulations published by Etō and Shima after February 18th, they emphasized, in the first two articles, that soldiers were “not allowed to cast off their shoes and run away to their homes” or to “disappear without prior notification”.⁷⁹ No efforts were made to eliminate a Saga loyalist faction, misleadingly called the “Neutral Party” (*Chūritsutō*), which spied for Governor Iwamura and supplied his army with invaluable local guides.⁸⁰

The political preparations were as inadequate as the military ones. Etō failed in his belated, half-hearted attempts to revive segments of the inter-domainal alliance and obtain military assistance from Satsuma and Tosa. Hayashi Yūzō, a Tosa

⁷⁸ Iwamura to the Lord of Home Affairs, 27.2.1874, *NA-JP*, SSS 2:27(10), pp.3-4.

⁷⁹ Etō's Statement in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:558. In his testimony, Etō had quoted only these two articles, though he did mention that there were “two or three” additional ones. His emphasis on the prohibitions on desertion show how perennial this problem was in the Saga rebel force.

⁸⁰ For the reports submitted by the leader of the loyalist faction, Maeyama Seiichirō, to Governor Iwamura see: Iwamura to the Lord of Home affairs, 27.2.1874, *NA-JP*, SSS 2:27(10), pp.2-3. In addition, see a short statement written by Maeyama, and a letter of his to the Imperial Army, as well as Iwakura's report to Ōkubo: Maeyama Seiichirō, “Sōryūji Shūkai Mōshiaisho”, and Maeyama to the Imperial Army, 17.2.1874, Iwakura to Ōkubo, 28.2.1874, in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:436-7, 439, 570, and also the testimony of Murachi Masahi in *ibid.*, 438-9, and *SGSS*, 8. For survey and analysis see Sonoda, *Etō*, 157-62; Mōri, *Etō*, 204-5. There were also Saga *shizoku* who joined the government forces on their own initiative. Even Ogi, a stronghold of the *Yūkokutō*, had “more than one hundred” allies of the Imperial Army. See: *Ogichō-shi*, 377.

shizoku close to Itagaki, visited Etō in early January in an attempt to mediate between Saga and the other two former domains. However, he was taken aback by Etō's cavalier attitude and lack of preparedness, strongly suspecting that the militarily inexperienced Saga leader was manipulated by reckless *shizoku* activists. When Etō displayed confidence that Satsuma would follow Saga in rebellion, Hayashi had to warn him that Saigō Takamori, whom he had met earlier in Kagoshima, would not budge. The Satsuma leader merely wanted to be left alone. Hayashi could not even promise assistance from his own native Tosa. Therefore, he urged Etō to postpone the rebellion, but the former justice lord refused. After the conversation, he finally understood that Saga would have to fight the government on its own.⁸¹

The political preparations of Etō and Shima were inadequate even inside Saga. They had based their common cause on Saga local patriotism, but badly miscalculated the strength of this identity throughout the region. Many local *shizoku* militias cared about their region above all else and were ready to support either the rebels or the government according to the situation on the ground. A typical example was Takeo, a strategic town located on the road connecting Saga and the government port of Nagasaki. Shima, who understood the strategic importance of Takeo, offered the local leader a lucrative command post. The latter negotiated for a while through proxies but joined the government side upon realizing its strength.⁸²

⁸¹ Hayashi, *Jirekidan* 1:56-8. For the situation in Tosa see also *ITKM* 4:512-3.

⁸² Shima's testimony in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:435-6; Iizuka, Kazuyuki, "Saga no Ran no zai-Kentō: Shuhen no Shiten kara", *Kyūshū Shigaku* 149 (February, 2008), 22-4.

Even in the branch domain of Ogi, a stronghold of the *Yūkokutō*, local *shizoku* were reluctant to fight battles outside the prefecture.⁸³

This lack of preparation reflected a profound diffusion of responsibility. The rank and file put their hopes in the leaders, while the leaders – who joined the rebellion at the last moment – trusted prior preparations by their rank and file. As a result, no one was adequately prepared.⁸⁴ Etō was led to believe, as he promised to Shima on February 11th, that the rebellion had already been prepared by the *Seikantō* activists, but that was not the case.⁸⁵ The preparations, as far as they existed, were hasty, haphazard and uncoordinated.

However, Etō and Shima worked quickly and by February 16th were able to muster around 12,000 men, both *shizoku* and volunteers from a commoner background. The rebellion began on the same day, after Iwamura entered the Saga castle with a few hundred garrison troops with the declared intention of arresting Etō and Shima. The two leaders decided to act first by raiding the prefectural headquarters in the precincts of the castle.⁸⁶ Fully anticipating the rebellion, Ōkubo

⁸³ Iizuka, “Saga no Ran”, 28.

⁸⁴ Eto’s Statement in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:556-7.

⁸⁵ Nagano, *Saga no Eki*, 211-2; Mōri, *Etō*, 205. Interestingly enough, this false impression was also shared by Maeyama Seiichirō, the most important supporter of the government in the province. See: Shima’s testimony in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:435, and: Maeyama to the Imperial Army, 17.2.1874 in *ibid.*, 439. Compare with Hayashi, *Jirekidan* 1:56-8, and the testimony of Nakajima Suzutane in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:440-1.

⁸⁶ Chief Minister Sanjō Sanetomi, Dispatch No. 23, 19.2.1874, *NA-JP*, Gyōsei Bunsho, Naikaku-Sōrifu, Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:1, Kōbunroku, February 1874): 8, 2A-009-00, Kō-01016100 (hereafter cited as Kōbunroku 1); *DKT* 2:433. The number is taken from *NSSS-M* 1:34515. According to this evaluation, only four or five thousand rebels took part directly in the fighting. See also the report of Nakayama Ichirō to Etō and Shima, 20.2.1874, reproduced in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:467-8. For the version of the *Yūkokutō* see: *Shinbun Zasshi*, 2.4.1874.

decided not to rely on Iwamura and the other generals, and departed to Saga himself on February 14th, taking the political, judicial and military authority over the prefecture.⁸⁷ Later, Army Lord Yamagata departed to Kyushu as well in order to command the forces in person. An imperial prince was appointed as a nominal overlord.⁸⁸

The government force, composed of around 5400 garrison soldiers, volunteer *shizoku* and Imperial Guard units, advanced on Saga by land from the north.⁸⁹ At the same time, additional units were landed by the navy at the rebels' rear in Nagasaki, enveloping them in a pincer movement.⁹⁰ That was one of the first confrontations between the centralized government army and a domainal *shizoku* force. Passing that trial by fire, the new centralized army showed remarkable strength and discipline. The garrison units, for example, included soldiers from Saga who had to fight their friends and relatives. In several cases, brothers had found themselves locked in face-to-face sword fights to the death.⁹¹ Notwithstanding some cases of

⁸⁷ *NA-JP*, *Kōbunroku* 1: 11, 13. The Imperial rescript defining Ōkubo's authority is reproduced in Osatake Takeki, *Meiji Bunka Sōsetsu* (Tokyo: Gakugeisha, 1934), 181. See also: Chief Minister Sanjō to the Provincial Governors, 17.2.1874, *NA-JP*, *SSS* 1:26; *OTN* 2:237,40; *NSSS-M* 1:340. For an English language account see: Masakazu Iwata, *Ōkubo Toshimichi: The Bismarck of Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 181-2.

⁸⁸ *NA-JP*, *Kōbunroku* 1: 17,18; *OTN* 2:249; Iwakura to Ōkubo, 28.2.1874, reproduced in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:568; *NA-JP*, *SSS* 2:33(6); *SGSS*, 27.

⁸⁹ For precise data on the number of soldiers according to unit and rank see the formal history published by the Army Ministry in 1875: *SGSS*, introduction (page unnamed). It is not clear whether this number includes the volunteer *shizoku* or not. For a modern assessment see: *SPSS* 1:31. About the volunteers see: Kaku, *Daikeshi*, 364-5.

⁹⁰ *SGSS*, 3-4,7.

⁹¹ Sonoda, *Etō*, 169-70; *DKT* 2:435. For more information on tactics and the course of fighting, see Edward J. Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army: its Rise and Fall, 1853-1945* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 37.

disobedience, most Saga soldiers in the government army took part in conquering their own homeland by sword and fire. The project of military centralization, designed in 1871 by Yamagata Aritomo, the Saigō brothers and their colleagues, had certainly shown signs of success.

The rebels' collapse began in the periphery: some of the allies of the uprising deserted, others were routed. On 22nd February the rebel army was defeated in the decisive battle of Mt Asahi and the way to Saga from the north was opened. At the same time, the decision of Takeo to support the government allowed the Imperial Army to attack from the south as well.⁹² Realizing that all was lost, Eto ordered the army to disband, hide in the prefecture "like Takasugi Shinsaku after the first Chōshū war" or find shelter in Satsuma. He himself decided to ask for help in Satsuma and then in Tosa. First he headed to Kagoshima, where Saigō Takamori refused to help him. Then he turned to Kōchi, but did not receive any assistance from the leaders of the Tosa opposition either. Finally he decided to return to Tokyo in order to commit seppuku but was arrested on April 2nd while looking for a boat.⁹³

Bereft of leadership, the two parties finally surrendered on March 2nd, after the city castle had fallen. According to Kido Takayoshi's diary, 1500 to 1600 soldiers had given themselves up.⁹⁴ At first, their representatives did not agree to admit that

⁹² *OTN* 2:242-3; *DKT* 2:436; Ōkubo to Sanjō, 22.2.1874, *NA-JP*, SSS 2:29 (2); Drea, *Imperial Army*, 37. For statistics on the Imperial Army's arms see *SGSS*, introduction (page unnamed), 21-3; Iizuka, "Saga no Ran", 24.

⁹³ *OTN* 2:254; Eto's statement in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:559-60; Headquarters to Tokyo (telegram), 2.3.1874, *NA-JP*, SSS 2:68(31), p.6.

⁹⁴ *OTN* 2:246; *DKT* 3:4-5, and compare with a telegram to the Army Ministry, 3.2.1874, *NA-JP*, SSS 2:68(31), p.13, which similarly estimated the number that surrendered as 1600. According to the official history of the Army Ministry, there were 358 casualties on the government side, and 323 on

they had fought against an “imperial” army.⁹⁵ As far as they were concerned, they respected and revered the imperial hazy center. “My colleagues and I are imperial fighters through and through,” said the emissary of the *Yūkokutō*. In addition, he wanted to surrender to Ōkubo personally.⁹⁶ The implications were clear: the Saga war was not a “rebellion” but a struggle between two factions which were both loyal to the emperor. The Saga faction lost, and was ready to admit its defeat to the leader of their enemy faction. The emperor existed as a symbol uniting the Japanese polity, but in the view of the Saga rebels he was so hazy as to be almost non-present. That was similar to Takechi Kumakichi’s view of the emperor as a spiritual symbol which had to be revered, but not obeyed.

The government, of course, could not accept this view and treated its captives as rebels against the sole legitimate authority. It therefore rejected the letter as well as the other demands of the *Yūkokutō*. The representatives of the party were not allowed to enter the camp or surrender to Ōkubo personally, and had to submit letters of apology outside the gates. In addition, they were required to reformulate their letter of apology, admitting they were rebels and robbers (*zokutō*), not legitimate enemy soldiers.⁹⁷

the rebels’ side – a relatively small number compared to the Satsuma Rebellion, let alone to later wars. See: *SGSS*, 38.

⁹⁵ *Shinbun Zasshi*, 2.4.1874.

⁹⁶ *SGSS*, 35-6; Quoted also in Sonoda, *Etō*, 192.

⁹⁷ *SGSS*, 35-6; Nozu to the Army Ministry, 3.2.1874, *NA-JP*, SSS 2:68(31), p.10. The original, unrephrased letter is probably the one published in *Shinbun Zasshi*, 2.4.1874. The *Zasshi* correspondent wrote that the letter was left at Saga castle for the occupying Imperial soldiers. In other words, it was not yet the agreed-upon, formal letter of apology. The revised letter is reproduced in *SGSS*, 35.

At the time, the new code of criminal law still did not have an offense of rebellion, or "crimes against the state" (*kokujihan*). And yet, the government drafted some retroactive regulations. According to the directions of Ōkubo and his appointed judge, Kōno Togama, when arrested the prisoners were to be divided into four categories: ringleaders, senior followers, middling and lowly followers. Etō and Shima, to whom the first category applied, were to be pilloried, and their lieutenants from the second category "merely" executed. Rebels from the third category were spared but condemned to penal servitude for life. Members of the last category were punished only by penal servitude of three to ten years. *Shizoku* of all categories were to be declassed. Commoners who drifted into the rebels' camp were treated leniently.⁹⁸

On April 13th, Etō Shimpei, the architect of Meiji criminal law, was finally led to the execution ground. His attempts to explain his motives to the judge, his former subordinate and protégé ("President Kōno, I..."), were rudely silenced. In his diary, Ōkubo wrote that the former justice lord was "ugly and ridiculous" on the day of his death. Before his execution Etō had cried thrice: "only the gods of heaven and earth [*Kōten Gōdo*] know my heart."⁹⁹ By using the equivocal word *Kōten*, which means both "gods of heaven" and "emperor", Etō might have wanted to profess yet again his loyalty to the hazy imperial center as a spiritual and religious symbol. This feeling of being loyal but misunderstood was characteristic of Japanese rebels who harbored a mentality of "escape to the front". At the end of the day, the government

⁹⁸ Sonoda, *Etō*, 217-8; *OTN* 2:256; *NSSS-M* 1:350.

⁹⁹ *OTN* 2:258; Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:574-7, 98.

fought them only because it did not understand their intentions, and could not realize that by rebelling they intended merely to protect the hazy center and advance the government's (and the nation's) own goals.

Etō's severed head was displayed for three days in Tokyo, the ghastly photographs hung in government bureaus and sold in broadsheets for months throughout the town.¹⁰⁰ Yet despite this public humiliation of the former justice lord, the government proved unable to stifle his subversive narrative. In August 1874, Foreign Lord Terashima told the German envoy that Etō's grave was decorated every day with fresh flowers. "This is not a sign of despising the emperor and the government," he said, "but only an expression of a wider movement in Japan through which every extraordinary act is idolized."¹⁰¹ The respect for fallen rebels, treated by so many as fallen heroes, was a sign of things to come.

The End of Revolutionary Optimism: Saigō Takamori and the Satsuma Rebellion

Between 24th and 28th October 1876, three and a half years after the end of the Saga Rebellion, *shizoku* uprisings erupted again throughout western Japan. The first group to raise arms was the *Shinpūren* (League of Divine Wind), a spiritual organization whose agenda focused on opposing the influence of Western culture. Its members had practiced a technique of divination through which they checked whether they should rebel. During the Saga Rebellion the answer was "no". In late 1876, however, when the government outlawed the carrying of swords and allegedly

¹⁰⁰ DKT 3:19; NSSS-M 1:353; Drea, *Imperial Army*, 38.

¹⁰¹ Brandt, *Dreiunddreissig*, 304. However, some of the government leaders were concerned about popular sympathy for Etō and Shima, especially in the press. See for example: OTM 5:483

“planned to send the emperor abroad”, the group could not sit idle any longer. Such orders, they believed, were a sacrilege to the holiest values of Japanese tradition. The leaders of the *Shinpūren* asked their gods again whether to rebel, and this time the answer was affirmative.¹⁰²

Just like Sen'ya, Miyazaki and Toda, the *Shinpūren* had a deeply pessimistic world view: they imagined themselves a small island in a sea of toxic Western influence. Therefore, they did not choose to assassinate leaders in faraway Tokyo, aiming instead for the Kumamoto garrison, the most available target at hand. As usual with pessimistic rebels, the attack was not intended to achieve an immediate political goal but rather to make a bold spiritual statement through the language of violence.¹⁰³ The *Shinpūren* were connected with another like-minded group in Akizuki (in neighboring Fukuoka Prefecture) and with a former army deputy lord, the Chōshū leader Maebara Issei. All three groups resisted Western influence, idolized the old samurai spirit and revered the hazy imperial center. The result was a coalition of three charismatic local leaders, none of whom was prominent enough to gather support for a large-scale rebellion. Their poor coordination was certainly not improved by the refusal of the *Shinpūren* to use telegraph, a technology of Western origins.

First, on October 24th, the *Shinpūren* raided and massacred soldiers and officials in the Kumamoto garrison and the prefectural government headquarters.

¹⁰² *IKJ* 2:1377; Ogawara, *Seinan*, 34-5.

¹⁰³ For the manifest of the *Shinpūren* see: *IKJ* 2:1377-8; for a partial English translation see: Augustus A. Mounsey, *The Satsuma Rebellion: an Episode of modern Japanese History* (London: John Murray, 1879), 91-2; *SPSS* 1:25-8.

The small band of two hundred rebels was eliminated after one day, but their call for a general uprising was answered by their Akizuki comrades. The uprising in Akizuki was crushed as well after several days, its surviving members hunted in the mountains for the next month.¹⁰⁴ Finally, on October 26th, Maebara Issei declared a general uprising in Chōshū, but his Hagi Rebellion was a short-lived, ill-planned affair. Unlike the leaders of the two other groups, Maebara used to be a national politician, and therefore was optimistic enough to try and reach Tokyo in order to “personally complain to the emperor”. After the failure of his farcical attempt to sail to the capital, Maebara’s small army of two hundred Chōshū retainers retreated to Yamaguchi Prefecture and was finally crushed near the Hagi castle town.¹⁰⁵

The utter failure of these small *shizoku* rebellions proved yet again that a widespread rebellion could not break out without a coordinated movement spearheaded by a first-rate national leader. Of the three rebel leaders of October 1876, only Maebara Issei had once been on the national stage, and even his following did not come close to that of a really powerful politician like Etō Shimpei. The optimism he was able to generate was therefore limited to small groups of fanatics and could not inspire a truly large movement.

But by late October 1876, more than ever, the suspicious eyes of the government leaders were focused on Satsuma. As we have seen throughout the previous chapter, a rebellion of the strong, bellicose southern domain was the nightmare of the Meiji leaders throughout the 1870s. To a large extent, this fear

¹⁰⁴ *DKT* 3:381; *SPSS* 1:32-2.

¹⁰⁵ *SPSS* 1:33-4; Kaku, *Daikeishi*, 370-1.

guided their behavior, and led them, for example, to tolerate Saigō Tsugumichi's defiance during the Taiwan Expedition. And over this entire tense atmosphere loomed the character of Tsugumichi's elder brother, the immensely popular Saigō Takamori. It was widely believed at the time that a word from him could spark all the discontented *shizoku* in Kyushu, perhaps even throughout the country.¹⁰⁶

When the autumn of 1876 gave way to winter, Satsuma was in many senses already a de facto independent kingdom.¹⁰⁷ Many government orders, such as the regulations banning the wearing of swords and the adoption of the Western calendar, were contemptuously defied in Kagoshima. Governor Ōyama Tsunayoshi did attempt to reform *shizoku* stipends and to redraw some antiquated rules of land ownership, but his half-hearted efforts drew fire from all quarters. They were not rapid as the central government would have wished, but radical enough to evoke the ire of the local *shizoku*.¹⁰⁸ Kido Takayoshi, a strong advocate of vertical, centralized government, recognized the danger looming from Kagoshima, but was impatient about the preferential treatment of this defiant prefecture. A confrontation with Satsuma, he believed, was bound to happen sooner or later, but tolerating its de facto independence was contrary to the principle of vertical government, the core of the entire Meiji project. "We should always adhere to the principle of impartiality,"

¹⁰⁶ SSK 1:13-14; DKT 3:435.

¹⁰⁷ Mounsey, *Satsuma Rebellion*, 17, and compare with DKT 3:486. See also Nagano, *Saga no Eki*, 120.

¹⁰⁸ Mounsey, *Satsuma Rebellion*, 78-9; James H. Buck, "The Satsuma Rebellion of 1877: From Kagoshima through the Siege of Kumamoto Castle", *Monumenta Nipponica* 28:4 (Winter, 1973), 429; *Saigō Takamori Zenshū*, Hensan Saigō Takamori Zenshū Henshū linkai, ed. (Tokyo: Daiwa Shobō, 1976-1980) 3:510-12 (hereafter cited as *STZ*); SSK 1:5; SNKD 1b:659-60,4; DSZ 3:820-1; for discussion about the *shizoku* stipends and other reforms in Kagoshima see: Tamamuro Taijō, *Seinan Sensō* (Tokyo: Shibundō, 1958), 32-9.

he told a friend, “[and] we would have [no] regrets even if we were reduced to holding nothing more than the single castle of Tokyo.”¹⁰⁹

Unlike the uncoordinated rebels of Saga, divided as they were into two rival parties, the oppositional *shizoku* of Satsuma were strongly united under the banner of Saigō Takamori. Since June 1874, with their master's blessing, they had been busy forming an alternative army under the cover of an institution called the Private School (*Shigakkō*). This network of schools was almost a state within a state poised to take over public life as soon as the government faced a debilitating crisis from the outside. Its avowed principles were devotion to duty, morality and protection of the common subjects of the emperor, particularly when the country was facing a “national crisis”. The curriculum taught at the main school in Kagoshima and its numerous offshoots throughout the prefecture focused on military affairs, but other fields such as classical Chinese studies, Western languages and ethics were also taught.¹¹⁰ Students were expected to be unflinchingly loyal to Saigō and the school, and in 1876 they were forbidden to look for jobs or study opportunities in Tokyo. Much of the bureaucracy of Kagoshima Prefecture was hopelessly entangled with the Private School, as many mayors and police officers were selected from its ranks.¹¹¹

The tension building between the central government and the quasi-independent state of Satsuma made a large-scale conflict between the two likely,

¹⁰⁹ DKT 3:401-2.

¹¹⁰ Ogawara, *Seinan*, 15-19; SNKD 1b:652-75; Tamamuro, *Seinan*, 25-32; SPSS 1:45-6.

¹¹¹ STZ 3:501-2; Ogawara, *Seinan*, 19; SNKD 1b:661, 2a:46-7; Tamamuro, *Seinan*, 15,30-2; SPSS 1:46.

but not inevitable. True, Tokyo wanted to bring Kagoshima Prefecture in line with the rest of the country – Ōkubo called Governor Ōyama to Tokyo in September 1876 precisely to make this point – but the leaders were also afraid to provoke it.¹¹² Chief Minister Sanjō contrasted Saigō's peaceful opposition with the violent uprising in Saga, writing to the prefectural governors that since Saigō returned to Kagoshima the province had been completely peaceful.¹¹³

Indeed, a prefecture-wide rebellion could not break out without the cooperation of Saigō Takamori, who was extremely reluctant to tread this dangerous path. As Mark Ravina has remarked, only the most strained reading of the evidence might lead one to believe that Saigō planned a rebellion in either 1874 or 1877.¹¹⁴ In fact, most of his time was devoted to his favorite hobbies: tilling his field, fishing, making straw sandals, soaking in hot springs, playing with children and hunting in the hills with his favorite dog.¹¹⁵ In September 1876 he confessed to Soejima Taneomi, former lord of foreign affairs, that his interest in politics had waned and he was content with the role of an observer.¹¹⁶ In fact, as his sister-in-law testified, he often

¹¹² STZ 3:510-11; SPSS 1:49.

¹¹³ Chief Minister Sanjō to the Provincial Governors, 17.2.1874, *NA-JP*, SSS 1:26, p.2.

¹¹⁴ Ravina, *Last Samurai*, 192; Charles Yates, "Saigō Takamori in the Emergence of Modern Japan", *Modern Asian Studies* 28:3 (July, 1994), 466; John Stephan, "Saigō Takamori and the Satsuma Rebellion", *Papers on Japan* 3 (Cambridge, 1965). For an opposite view of historians who believe that Saigō planned a rebellion after his resignation in October 1873 see: Tamamuro Taijō, *Seinan*, 12-13; Kaku, *Daikeshi*, 370. This is not dissimilar to the official version of the Army Ministry in SSK 2:5-6.

¹¹⁵ Iwayama Seiko and Iwayama Kazuko, eds., *Saigo san o kataru: Iwayama Toku no Kaisō* (Tokyo: Perikansha, 1999), 56-101.

¹¹⁶ STZ 3:504. See also *HSTN* 6:2-3, Saigō to Ōyama, 5.4.1875 in *SNKD* 1b:663-4.

tried to avoid visitors who came to consult him about politics.¹¹⁷ That was certainly not a behavior fitting a would-be rebel leader. Some leaders of the Private School were certainly bellicose, but even they were unwilling to act “prematurely”, that is, without Saigō’s consent. For that reason, the Private School refused to cooperate with the emissaries of the *Shinpūren* in October 1876.¹¹⁸

Yet, if forced to rebel, Saigō was very optimistic about his chances. He believed that upon his return to Kagoshima “the world would be surprised”. Indeed, his later behavior signified that he was almost certain that a word from him could start a successful national rebellion.¹¹⁹ However, just like during the debate on occupying Korea, Saigō was not ready to start a war without a justified reason (*meibun*), and the government had still not given him one. In any case, he ordered the forces of the Private School to be prepared for a “national crisis”, probably a war between Japan and another power.¹²⁰ If that happened he would be able to “escape to the front”, save the nation through his own independent forces and change the government without direct confrontation.

In order to force a reluctant Saigō to spearhead a rebellion, extreme provocation was needed. Unfortunately, such an event happened in February 1877, prompted neither by Ōkubo nor Saigō but by the Satsuma retainers who served the central government. Naturally, they were seen by many of their clansmen in

¹¹⁷ Iwayama and Iwayama, *Saigo san*, 192. In his memoirs, Hayashi Yūzō also testified about the difficulties he encountered when trying to meet Saigō in January 1874. See: Hayashi, *Jirekidan* 1:54-5.

¹¹⁸ Testimony of Murachi Masashi in Matono, *Nanpaku* 2:396-7; *STZ* 3:507; *SPSS* 1:25.

¹¹⁹ *STZ* 3: 537.

¹²⁰ *STZ* 3:496-7, 509; *HSTN* 6:2-3; *IKJ* 2:1396.

Kagoshima as traitors.¹²¹ These people, led by Kawaji Toshiyoshi, chief superintendent of the National Police, had their bastion in the burgeoning internal security apparatus of the Meiji state. After the retirement of so many officers and patrolmen during the October crisis, Ōkubo and Kawaji reorganized the police according to a centralized French model under the auspices of the Home Ministry.¹²² The force got beefed up after the Iwakura assassination attempt and the Saga Rebellion to guard against further uprisings and assassination plots. As Sanjō advised the provincial governors, it was difficult to know whether more assassins were lurking in the dark. A heavy police presence was therefore required all around the country.¹²³

In December 1876 Kawaji decided to do something about the ticking bomb of Satsuma's Private School. After consulting Ōkubo and Iwakura, he dispatched to the prefecture ten policemen, former Satsuma retainers led by an officer named Nakahara Hisao. These policemen were given two main tasks: to collect intelligence about the “real intentions” of the Private School, and to convince as many disciples as possible to defect. On his arrival at Kagoshima, Nakahara recklessly disclosed the plan to several friends, two of whom were informers of the Private School. In a

¹²¹ Kaku, *Daikeshi*, 331-2.

¹²² *HSTN* 6:7; D. Eleanor Westney, “The Emulation of Western Organizations in Meiji Japan: the Case of the Paris Prefecture of Police and the Keishi-chō”, *Journal of Japanese Studies* 8:2 (Summer, 1982), 325.

¹²³ Chief Minister Sanjō to the Provincial Governors, 17.2.1874, *NA-JP*, SSS 1:26, pp.4-5; *DKT* 2:428; Westney, “Emulation”, 314-16, 22-3.

conversation with one of them, he may have bragged that if need be he would not hesitate to fight Saigō to the death.¹²⁴

On February 3rd *shizoku* from the Private School arrested Nakahara and his fellow policemen. Under torture, Nakahara confessed that his "real orders", given by Kawaji himself, were to assassinate Saigō.¹²⁵ Another envoy of the government, who had given himself up the next day, testified that Ōkubo was the real culprit behind the plot.¹²⁶ The British diplomat Ernest Satow, then in Kagoshima, recorded rumors that after the assassination, "the army and navy would advance on Kagoshima and massacre the followers of Saigō".¹²⁷ The "confessions" were printed in many copies, distributed in the Private School and quickly brought to Saigō's attention. Now, as far as he and his closest confidants were concerned, everything became clear. The Satsuma "collaborators" in Tokyo had traitorously planned to kill him.¹²⁸

A few days before Nakahara's arrest, the government attempted to reclaim the arms in Kagoshima's arsenal with a naval operation. Angry students from the Private School discovered the plan and retook the weapons, and the whole city was

¹²⁴ *SPSS* 1:49; *IKJ* 2:1399. For a full listing of Nakahara's team as well as brief biographical information see: *SNKD* 2a:51-3, as well as: Taniguchi Tōgorō's testimony, 24.12.1874, in *ibid.*, 36; *NA-JP*, Ōyama's confession, p.2. A glimpse into the nature of early Meiji police can be obtained from the regulations drafted by Chief Superintendent Kawaji in January 1874, reproduced in full in Keishichō Shihensan linkai, ed., *Keishichō Shi, Meiji Hen*, (Tokyo: Keichichō Shihensan linkai, 1959), 50-62.

¹²⁵ Nakahara's confession is reproduced in *SNKD* 2a:62-4, and the original is in *NA-JP*, *KSS* 8:1. See also the denunciation letter that led to his arrest in *NA-JP*, *KSS* 8:2. For an English translation of the confession see Mounsey, *Satsuma Rebellion*, 275-8; *SSK* 1:8-9.

¹²⁶ This man's name was Nomura Tsuna. His testimony is reproduced in *SNKD* 2a:73-4.

¹²⁷ *DES* 2:232-4. These lines were taken from Nakahara's confession, see in *SNKD* 2a:63.

¹²⁸ *STZ* 3:522-4,30. Saigō was hunting when he received the news, another indication that he was not prepared for a rebellion. See: *SNKD* 2a:45.

seething with rebellion.¹²⁹ Saigō had witnessed his supporters gearing up for war. Later, he told Governor Ōyama that the premature action of his disciples had left him no choice but to join them. “Had I been there,” he said, “I would have probably stopped the students [from the Private School] from violently robbing the gunpowder, but now the die is already cast.”¹³⁰ Yet, contrary to the common legend, Saigō was not merely “dragged” to war by the *fait accompli* of his students.¹³¹ Rather, in the two crucial meetings he had with the leaders of the Private School on 5th and 6th February, the main issue on the agenda was not the arsenal raid but the proper response to Nakahara’s assassination plot. “The plot of Nakahara and his men,” he told Ōyama, “completely exposed the secret intentions of Ōkubo and Kawaji.”¹³² Only because Saigō believed he was about to be murdered by government hirelings had he allowed himself to drift with his disciples to act against Tokyo.¹³³

However, just like other early Meiji rebels, Saigō did not see himself as a rebel but as a loyal retainer of the imperial hazy center. To Admiral Kawamura, deputy navy lord, he had written later that the government leaders themselves were

¹²⁹ *DES* 2:224-5; *STZ* 3:523; *SSK* 2:5; *SPSS* 1:52-4; *DKT* 3:435-6. See also the 5.2.1877 diary entry of Ichiki Shirō, op. cit. in *SNKD* 2a:102-3. For the report of the Imperial Navy about the events see: *NA-JP*, *KSS* 8:11.

¹³⁰ *NA-JP*, Ōyama’s confession, p.5. The English translation in Mounsey’s *Satsuma Rebellion* (p.282) is inaccurate.

¹³¹ Ravina, *Last Samurai*, 200.

¹³² *NA-JP*, Ōyama’s confession, p.5.

¹³³ *SPSS* 1:117-18. For an eyewitness testimony on the state of affairs in Kagoshima in early February see: Cortazzi, *Dr. Willis*, 221.

traitors and rebels who distorted the will of the Imperial Throne.¹³⁴ On 5th and 6th February, the leadership of the Private School decided to send Saigō to Tokyo. The aim of the journey was to issue a formal complaint to the emperor about the Nakahara plot and to “question the government”.¹³⁵ Saigō rejected the suggestion of one of his advisors to travel alone – he would travel with an army. As a field marshal, he claimed, he had the legal right to recruit soldiers all around the country.¹³⁶ The surviving testimonies on the meeting show that despite the meticulous military training of the Private School, a strategy for a rebellion had not been prepared in advance. That was yet another example of diffusion of responsibility. A strategy could not be devised without Saigō, but he decided to join only at the last moment.¹³⁷

Indeed, the faulty strategy chosen was yet another indication of Saigō’s lack of preparedness. Without any intelligence on government formations and intentions, without any serious attempt to win over strategic commanders, Saigō and his senior advisors were certain that all localities would accept them with open arms. The prevailing opinion was also that most navy officers were “partisans of Saigō”. So great was Saigō’s overconfidence that he did not allow commoners and *shizoku* from

¹³⁴ Mounsey, *Satsuma Rebellion*, 175. Compare with Ōyama Tsunayoshi’s statement from 28.2.1874. In his public appeal, the governor of Kagoshima Prefecture bemoaned the government’s decision to declare Saigō and his troops, loyal subjects all, as rebels to the throne. See: *NA-JP*, KSS 8:7.

¹³⁵ *DES* 2:230; *STZ* 3:521, *NA-JP*, Ōyama’s confession, p.5; the term used was “investigation” (*kitsumon*); for detailed descriptions of that crucial meeting in the Private School see: *SPSS* 1:117-18, 23-4, as well as *SNKD* 2a:104-5 and Ōyama to the police officials, 14.2.1877, *NA-JP*, KSS 8:3.

¹³⁶ *SPSS* 1:124.

¹³⁷ Mounsey, *Satsuma Rebellion*, 119-20; *SPSS* 1:117-18, 23-4; *SNKD* 2a:104-5.

outside of the Private School to accompany him.¹³⁸ After all, the Satsuma leaders had seen themselves as a perfectly legal investigation team. The governor of Kagoshima, Ōyama Tsunayoshi, had accordingly requested all prefectures and garrisons to let Saigō through, attaching also the confessions of Nakahara and his fellow “criminals”.¹³⁹ In a conversation he held with Ōyama, Saigō predicted that by March he and his troops would already be in Osaka, as if his journey was nothing but a pleasant hike around the country.¹⁴⁰

Saigō’s coordination with other opposition figures around Japan was just as faulty. In January 1874 he had snubbed Hayashi Yūzō, the Tosa emissary who tried to unite the opposition groups in some sort of inter-domainal coalition. Saigō “took his time” until he agreed to meet Hayashi, refused to commit himself and only asked whether Tosa troops would be able to march against the Kumamoto garrison. Hayashi accused Saigō of arrogance and insensitivity towards the interests of other domains. Finally, the meeting terminated without results. Saigō declined the requests of the Saga rebels for help, and three years later did not lift a finger for the uprisings in Kumamoto, Akizuki and Hagi. Unsurprisingly, apart from a few isolated,

¹³⁸ *DES* 2:230,4; *NA-JP*, Gyōsei Bunsho, Naikaku-Sōrifu, Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:1, Kōbunroku, 2A-010-00, kō 02170100 (hereafter cited as Ōyama’s confession), pp.11-12; partial English translation in Mounsey, *Satsuma Rebellion*, 288.

¹³⁹ Ōyama’s formal letters are fully reproduced in *SPSS* 1:125-6, and the originals are in *NA-JP*, KSS 8:3. For an English translation see Mounsey, *Satsuma Rebellion*, 138-9. Compare with *NA-JP*, Ōyama’s confession, p.5; *DES* 2:230. For the response of the Kumamoto garrison to Ōyama’s letter see *SSK* 21:6-7.

¹⁴⁰ *NA-JP*, Ōyama’s confession, pp.9-10.

small-scale rebellions in Kumamoto and elsewhere, very few *shizoku* came to Saigō's aid when he himself rebelled in 1877.¹⁴¹

At the beginning, Ōkubo and the other leaders of the government were not certain that Saigō himself was leading the rebel troops, even while they were dispatching garrison soldiers to Kyushu to deal with the uprising.¹⁴² Saigō was so awe-inspiring, his power so overestimated, that they were reluctant to believe it for a few days. When the truth finally dawned on them, their reaction was shock and dismay. "His suspicions aroused, he [Saigō] threw away his life and ruined his good name on account of momentary rage," wrote Kido in his diary. "How regrettable this is, the most regrettable thing in my whole lifetime."¹⁴³ But when the Satsuma army stepped out of Kagoshima Prefecture and crossed to Kumamoto on its way north, that was already too much for Ōkubo to bear. On the 19th the government declared Saigō and his troops "violent rebels". Consequently, Saigō was divested of all his ranks and titles by the court, and Kagoshima's envoys to other prefectures were promptly arrested.¹⁴⁴ At that moment, Tokyo's state hierarchy and Saigō's private

¹⁴¹ Hayashi, *Jirekidan* 1:55-6, 2:1-8; Itagaki's refusal to help Saigō was explicitly declared in a conversation with his (Itagaki's) followers, and was reported in the *Tokyo Akebono Shinbun*, 20.6.1877. The article was based on a report by a Tosa retainer, most probably on Itagaki's behest. It seems that the Tosa leader wanted to clarify his position to both Saigō and the government. In any case, according to Uchida (*Itagaki* 2:619) he told very similar things to the leaders of the *Risshisha*, his own organization. Tosa was not the puppet of Satsuma, Itagaki emphasized, and would not be dragged after Saigō in his "personal fight" with Ōkubo (*Saigō-Ōkubo no shitō*). Accordingly, Gotō met Kido in Kyoto and secured Tosa's neutrality. Some *Risshisha* activists, led by Hayashi Yūzō, tried to stage an attack on the Osaka garrison, but their plan was discovered and they were arrested.

¹⁴² *SSK* 1:12-14, 2:5; Hayashi, *Jirekidan* 2:6-7; *SPSS* 1:72-4; *OTM* 7:488.

¹⁴³ *DKT* 3:451.

¹⁴⁴ *STZ* 3:538. The original proclamation is reproduced in *SSK* 1:18, see also 2:6. For an English translation see: Mounsey, *Satsuma Rebellion*, 138; *DKT* 3:451. About the arrest of the envoys see: *NA-JP*, *KSS* 8:5.

network were repositioned into a zero-sum game. In such a state, any concession to Saigō would undermine the government's monopoly on the imperial hazy center, the very basis of its legitimacy to rule.¹⁴⁵

Saigō Takamori's first challenge was to overcome the Kumamoto garrison.¹⁴⁶ The local commander, General Tani Kanjō, was reinforced by 600 of Kawaji's policemen and 1800 soldiers from Kokura.¹⁴⁷ Tani, a Tosa general who fought both in the Taiwan Expedition and against the Saga Rebellion, was adamant about resisting Saigō to the last, and he and his troops had to withstand a seven-week siege in inhuman conditions.¹⁴⁸ However, their resoluteness had frustrated Saigō's original plan – to swiftly march to Tokyo. The old rebel leader and his officers, their plan disrupted, were at odds about their next steps and finally decided to split forces in a disastrous way. The bulk of them were still besieging Kumamoto Castle, while others were trying to block the advance of imperial forces from the north.¹⁴⁹

Saigō had no naval power to protect his home base of Kagoshima and failed to leave reserve units in the city, another result of ill planning and overconfidence. On March 7th a government force led by General Kuroda Kiyotaka, a former Satsuma retainer, raided Kagoshima by sea. Kuroda arrested Governor Ōyama, confiscated all

¹⁴⁵ SSK 1:18. For detailed statistics on the Imperial punitive force see: *SPSS* 1:57-62.

¹⁴⁶ *STZ* 3:524; Saigō to Ōyama, 12.3.1877, *NA-JP*, KSS 8:9.

¹⁴⁷ *SSK* 21:6-7; *DKT* 3:443; Buck, "Satsuma Rebellion", 434.

¹⁴⁸ *SSK* 2:1-2, 21:6-7.

¹⁴⁹ Mounsey, *Satsuma Rebellion*, 158-9; *STZ* 3:537; *The Japan Daily Herald*, 3.3.1877. For statistical data about the two opposing armies see: *NSSS-M* 1:405.

ammunition and spiked the guns.¹⁵⁰ On 20th March, the Satsuma army was defeated at the crucial battle of Tabaruzaka and pushed away from that strategic pass. Kuroda and his naval force sailed to Nagasaki at the rebels' southern rear. Being threatened by Kuroda from the south and the main government force from the north, the rebels were trapped in a pincer. As they were engaging larger and larger government forces, bereft of ammunition and supplies, the siege of Kumamoto had to be abandoned on April 19th. During the final months of the war, Saigō and his remaining force moved to and fro throughout their home prefecture, persecuted by government troops. Their last stand, on September 24th, was on Shiroyama Hill next to Kagoshima. Saigō himself suffered a bullet wound and was beheaded by one of his closest followers.¹⁵¹ With his death the Satsuma Rebellion had ended.

Misguided Optimism: *Shizoku* Rebellions and their Failure

The failure of Saigō Takamori and his Satsuma army had several important ramifications. One of them was to rob potential rebels of the optimism required to stage a mass military uprising again. If "Great Saigō" had failed, who could succeed?¹⁵² And as demonstrated throughout this chapter, the decision to challenge the government militarily was closely related to the measure of optimism felt by

¹⁵⁰ STZ 3:537. Saigō and his officers, it seems, believed that the navy would not attack them. Around February 10th, Governor Ōyama told Ernest Satow that the navy would "certainly not" bombard Kagoshima. That self-confidence was misguided. See: *DES* 2:231,34.

¹⁵¹ An American eyewitness left us a moving testimony of Saigō's last stand, reproduced in: Elizabeth Tripler Nock, "The Satsuma Rebellion of 1877: Letters of John Capen Hubbard", *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 7:4 (August, 1948), 375-60. For information on the myth of Saigō's "suicide" and other legends about his death see: Mark Ravina, "The Apocryphal Suicide of Saigō Takamori: Samurai, Seppuku and the Politics of Legend", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69:3 (August, 2010), 691-721.

¹⁵² For an alternative explanation rooted in the complex role of domain identity, see Umegaki, *After*, 207-8.

each successive group of rebels. The desperation of pessimistic rebels, isolated activists such as Senya, Miyazaki Toda and the leaders of the *Shinpūren*, led them to strike symbolic or convenient targets. Other isolated rebels, for example Takechi Kumakichi, were more optimistic about their ability to inflict change, but could not garner enough support to challenge the government openly on the field of battle. Therefore, they chose to assassinate key politicians. Only a national leader such as Etō Shimpei or Saigō Takamori could generate enough optimism to mobilize a large number of *shizoku* for a mass uprising. However, this optimism proved in all cases to be misguided.

At the time, however, it did not seem so, and many rebels believed that they had a good chance of succeeding. After all, the celebrated *shishi* who defeated the Tokugawa Bakufu in the late 1860s also operated at first as isolated guerilla warriors. That close precedent was well known to early Meiji rebels, some of whom were veterans of the anti-Bakufu struggle. Etō Shimpei, for example, compared Ōkubo's government to the Tokugawa Bakufu, and later suggested to his defeated Saga rebels that they should hide as best they could, then strike back at the government just like Takasugi Shinsaku and his celebrated *Shotai* units did in 1864.

However, to the great misfortune of rebels in the 1870s, they adopted *shishi* ways, recklessness and lack of planning, without the prior conditions which facilitated *shishi* success. In 1866 the two strongest feudal domains, Chōshū and Satsuma, managed to overcome their differences and forged the alliance which finally defeated the Bakufu. To a large extent, this alliance was made possible by an inter-domainal coalition of samurai activists who bridged and mediated between the

particular interests of the domains. By 1874, however, this network was already fragmented, and many of its former members supported the Imperial Government. As Hayashi Yūzō, the Tosa retainer who tried to mediate between the rebel groups, discovered to his dismay, Saigō Takamori “did not care about other domains” and was too bound to the specific interest of Kagoshima.¹⁵³ Satsuma and Saga did not help each other, and each of them fought and lost in isolation.

In addition, one of the most important reasons for the victory of the *shishi* between 1866 and 1868 was their increasing control over the imperial hazy center, the most crucial symbol of political legitimacy. Only after they took final control over it in January 1868 were they able to rally most of the country around them. Such a fit was possible only because the imperial capital was in Kyoto, a place not fully controlled by the Bakufu. During the 1870s, however, the emperor was in Tokyo, protected by the Imperial Army and far away from the domainal power bases of rebelling politicians.

In such conditions, the attempt to fight the government without tangible plans in typical *shishi* recklessness proved disastrous. Contrary to the arguments of some scholars, the revolutionary movements in Saga and Satsuma were not really hierarchical or tightly controlled by their leaders.¹⁵⁴ The control of Etō and Shima over their troops was very shaky and quick to collapse. Saigō had immense prestige and a much tighter command structure, but still his control over strategy was almost non-existent and he mostly reacted to decisions made by others. This was a result of

¹⁵³ Hayashi, *Jirekidan* 2:1-2. For further discussion on this problem see: *NSSS-M* 1:374.

¹⁵⁴ For a well-argued example see: *NSSS-M* 1:374.

the dynamics of "escape to the front" which we have seen throughout this chapter. The leaders had no plans for rebellion, as they initially only intended to "push" the government in the right direction, as in the case of the Saga Rebellion, or chastise it through reliance on the imperial hazy center, as Saigō and his disciples initially tried to do. At the same time, their followers could not gather enough optimism to rebel by themselves, and spent precious time waiting for the leaders to move. As a result, responsibility was diffused between leaders and followers, a dynamic which left no one in control.

To make things even more difficult for early Meiji rebels, the regime in the 1870s had substantial advantages over the Tokugawa Bakufu. To begin with, the telegraph network installed throughout the country from 1871 to 1873 enabled the government to rapidly respond to local rebellions before they gathered steam.¹⁵⁵ In addition, unlike the Bakufu, the Meiji government did not have to rely on fickle, semi-independent daimyo – it had its own centralized army, equipped with modern guns and artillery.¹⁵⁶ Crucially, the Meiji government also had unprecedented control of the sea. During the 1860s, *shishi* leaders were able to quickly form a navy and compete with the shogun on naval supply routes. In the 1870s, however, no anti-governmental private network, not even the most formidable rebel army under Saigō Takamori, was able to build its own naval force. The results of that failure were disastrous. Both in the Saga Rebellion and in the Satsuma Rebellion the government could land forces at the rebels' rear, in Nagasaki or Kagoshima, while the rebels were

¹⁵⁵ Miyachi Masato, *Bakumatsu Ishinki no Shakaiteki Seijishi Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1999), 51; Mounsey, *Satsuma Rebellion*, 109-10.

¹⁵⁶ Yates, "Saigō Takamori in the Emergence", 459.

never able to threaten the government supply lines or the imperial capital of Tokyo.¹⁵⁷

To their misfortune, *shizoku* rebels from Etō Shimpei to Saigō Takamori could not understand the extent to which the central government had grown military teeth since 1868. Instead of infiltrating the state hierarchy, filling it with their own agents and thus disrupting the military capabilities of the central government, they resigned with their men and withdrew to their old power bases in the domains. Saigō's advance, for example, was blocked by the Kumamoto garrison, a place controlled almost completely by his loyalists only a few years before. But as his officers had all resigned, this important fortress proved to be the government's most efficient line of defense. If in 1871 the government in Tokyo was militarily weaker than the private networks in the domains, by 1877 the scales had tipped in Tokyo's favor. By that time, efficient resistance could no longer come from the former feudal domains. The rebel leaders of the 1870s were plagued by basic misunderstanding of the weakness of their position. At the end of the day, their optimism blinded them from noticing their own anachronism.

Thus, the monopoly of the state over power of coercion, produced by the defeat of the private networks in the former domains, had become clear to most by 1878.¹⁵⁸ To make this point even stronger, the government demanded "letters of apology" (*shazai*) from every rebel who wished to surrender and perhaps save his own skin. In the letter, he had to admit his crimes against the sole legitimate

¹⁵⁷ Mounsey, *Satsuma Rebellion*, 109-10; *SPSS* 1:18.

¹⁵⁸ Yates, "Saigō Takamori in the Emergence", 461.

authority – that of the emperor.¹⁵⁹ The *shazai* was an important ideological tool – a document intended to ideologically disarm the rebels, and make them renounce any claim to the hazy center by forcing them to admit the monopoly of the state. It took time, but after 1878 the prevailing *shishi* mentality of competing private networks gave way to a monopoly of the state over political violence. Political challenges from the opposition continued, as well as defiance and even individual terror – Ōkubo himself was assassinated by angry *shizoku* in May 1878 – but it took almost 55 years until rebels would gather enough optimism to challenge the government with an organized military uprising again.

A chapter in the history of Japanese military disobedience was closed, but another one was soon to open. In 1878, about one year after the end of the Satsuma Rebellion, the leaders of the army decided to reform the armed services in order to cut the horizontal ties between politicians and military units – the malady of the 1870s. Their success opened a hidden door to new, no less dangerous forms of military disobedience – but that would not become clear until much later.

¹⁵⁹ A good example is the *shazai* submitted by Kihara Moritada of the *Yūkokutō* to the Imperial Army on February 28th. In the letter, Kihara and his men apologized for their “selfish violence” against the Imperial Army. The letter is reproduced in *SGSS*, 34-5.

Part III

Age of Military Independence

1878-1913

Chapter Five

The Gold-Eating Monster

Tōsui-ken and the Road to Military Independence

I will add, for my part, that in fact many persons with the rank of general have the habit of saying ludicrously: "I have served my sovereign..." as if they did not have the same sovereign as the rest of us [...] but their own special one.

*Fyodor Dostoevsky, Demons*¹

On 5 December 1878, a little more than a year after the end of the Satsuma Rebellion, the Japanese armed forces had undergone a fateful reform based on cutting-edge Prussian military models. Yamagata Aritomo, Lord of the Army, and his protégé, Colonel Katsura Tarō, established an altogether new, powerful body called the General Staff (*Sanbō Honbu*), and placed it directly under the Imperial Throne. Yamagata himself was appointed as the first chief of the new organization.² The General Staff was given responsibility for operational planning and wartime command. At the same time, the Army Ministry was denied control over operations,

¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Demons: A Novel in Three Parts*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 24.

² *Sanbō Honbu Rekishi Sōan*, Hirose Yoshishirō, ed. (Tokyo: Yumani Shobō, 2001), 4:49 (hereafter cited as *SHRS*).

but given important powers of military administration, mobilization, budgetary control and the right to promote, transfer and dismiss officers. One month later, in January 1879, a third important organ, the Army Inspectorate (*Kangun Honbu*), was established and eventually given control over military education.³ Each member of this military trinity, the General Staff, Army Ministry and the Army Inspectorate, was to undergo important reforms over the years, but in essence they remained the core of military command from 1879 to 1945. The new system was accompanied by an imported Prussian construct later known as *tōsui-ken* (German: *Kommandogewalt*), securing the independence of the armed forces from any civilian institution apart from the Imperial Throne.

In the post-war years, the *tōsui-ken* became a bogeyman to be blamed for all disasters from early Meiji to the end of the Pacific War. In a highly influential essay, the popular novelist Shiba Ryōtarō likened it to a genetic disorder transmitted through the ages, an ominous force quickly growing in power. The soldiers of the Imperial Army, entrenched within their own "*tōsui-ken* country," became as wild and murderous as the *Pixiu*, a gold-eating monster from Chinese mythology. All the attempts made since the Restoration to control this monster only made it fiercer until it had swallowed the entire body politic.⁴ It could also be said that the legendary taste of the *Pixiu* for gold was a fitting metaphor for the increasingly budget-hungry Japanese Army. Notwithstanding some disagreements about details,

³ Ernst L. Presseisen, *Before Aggression: Europeans Prepare the Japanese Army* (Tuscon: The University of Arizona Press, 1965), 94.

⁴ Shiba Ryōtarō, *Kono Kuni no Katachi* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 1997), 4:134-45. Shiba himself did not mention the gold-eating characteristics of the *Pixiu*. However, as this attribute is strongly associated with this mythical animal, the association could hardly have escaped the author and his readers.

many historians found Shiba's *Pixiu* metaphor sound and convincing.⁵ Kikuta Hitoshi, for example, conveniently explained almost every development in civil-military relations since the Restoration as a "step forward" in the growth of *tōsui-ken*, i.e. the takeover of Japan by its armed forces. The culmination of this process, according to Kikuta, was the militarist wartime regime of General Tōjō Hideki (1941-1944). If the army was a "state within a state," then the chief of the General Staff functioned as an all-powerful, inaccessible "inner shrine" (*Oku no in*).⁶

There is indeed no doubt that *tōsui-ken*, as we shall see again and again in the following chapters, was used by the army as a major tool of military defiance. That was, however, as several scholars have noted, very far from the original intentions of its initiators in 1878.⁷ Yamagata and the other Meiji leaders could not imagine, back then, that the army might overthrow a government, as it did in the Taishō political crisis of 1912, launch independent attacks on Chinese soil as in 1928 and 1931, or stage coups d'état against the government as in 1932 and 1936. But institutions rarely develop according to the original intentions of their founders.⁸ In fact, the ideology later known as *tōsui-ken* developed gradually not as a tool of

⁵ For an up-to-date literature survey see: Mori Yasuo, *Nihon Rikugun to Nittchū Sensō e no Michi* (Kyoto: Mineruva Shobō, 2010), 3-8.

⁶ Kikuta Hitoshi, *Naze 'Sensō' datta no ka: Tōsui-ken to iu Shisō* (Tokyo: Kozawa Shoten, 1998), 74. See also Ōe Shinobu, *Nihon no Sanbō Honbu* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1985), 31-4.

⁷ Tobe Ryōichi, *Gyakusetsu no Guntai* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1998), 78-80; Yoshimitsu Khan, "Inoue Kowashi and the Dual Images of the Emperor of Japan," *Pacific Affairs* 71:2 (Summer, 1998), 229.

⁸ See chapter 8-10, and also: Umetani, Noboru, "Sanbo Honbu Dokuritsu no Kettei Keii ni tsuite," *Gunji Shigaku* 9:2:34, 19. See also Umetani's quote in Tobe, *Gyakusetsu*, 90, as well as Peter Wetzler, "Kaiser Hirohito und der Krieg in Pazifik: zur politischen Verantwortung des Tennō in der modernen japanischen Geschichte," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 37:4 (October, 1989), 620.

rebellion and defiance but rather as a remedy to timely problems, shaped by events and circumstances into totally unforeseen directions.

The present chapter shall trace the development of the *tōsui-ken* in its early formative years. After a concise account of the reforms and their relatively smooth acceptance by the civilian leadership, we will dwell on the hidden logic behind them, based on the seemingly contradictory dynamics of consolidation and dispersion of political power. Finally, we shall address the question, why did the Japanese army develop so differently than its Prussian exemplar, or in other words, what was "lost in translation" by the implantation of a European military model in an altogether different cultural environment. The answer to this question is the key to the riddle of the wild growth of Japanese military disobedience in future years.

The Military Reforms of 1878

The Prussian model of *Kommandogewalt* was imported to Japan by officers who studied abroad in German military institutions. One of the most influential among them was Katsura Tarō, a Chōshū officer who had spent most of the turbulent 1870s in the German Empire.⁹ In August 1870 he left for France to study military science at his own expense, but could not reach besieged Paris due to the Franco-Prussian War. Giving up his Paris plans, Katsura proceeded to study in Berlin instead. In late 1873 he returned to Japan, and during 1874 helped to organize the newly reformed Staff Bureau, the first incarnation of the General Staff. In 1875 he

⁹ Matsushita, *Meiji Gunsei* 2:6-7; Ōtsuka Minao, *Meiji Ishin to Doitsu Shisō* (Tokyo: Nagasaki Shuppan, 1977), 138-40; Presseisen, *Aggression*, 94-5.

was nominated as the Japanese military attaché in Berlin.¹⁰ In July 1878 Katsura returned to Japan and immediately advocated sweeping military reforms in the Prussian mold. That dictated, of course, at least gradual abandonment of the then accepted French military model, evoking a resistance by a well-entrenched cabal of conservative officers.¹¹ Yet, even these officers did not resist the gist of the reforms, the establishment of a general staff subordinated directly to the emperor. By the end of the war, Katsura endorsed the cooperation of key military officials such as Yamagata Aritomo and his deputy Saigō Tsugumichi, a necessary precondition for acceptance of his proposed reforms.¹²

One of Katsura's main recommendations to his superiors at the Army Ministry was to adopt the Prussian separation between two aspects of military activity: administration and command.¹³ Or, in military professional terms, he proposed to abandon the "monistic" system, adopted from the French Army, in favor

¹⁰ Katsura Tarō, *Jiden* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1993), 73-4, 87-8; Rudolf Hartmann, "Japanische Offiziere im deutschen Kaiserreich," *Japonica Humboldtiana* 11 (2007), 115; Hata Ikuhiko, *Tōsui-ken to Teikoku Rikukaigun no Jidai* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2006), 76; Presseisen, *Aggression*, 60-2; Ōtsuka, *Doitsu no Shisō*, 94-5; Stewart Lone, *Army, Empire and Politics in Meiji Japan: The Three Careers of General Katsura Tarō* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 10-11. The Staff Bureau was actually established in 1871 as a section in the Army Ministry (see Presseisen, *ibid.*, as well as Katsura, *Jiden*, 81-3). For information on the establishment of the Staff Bureau see Yamagata Aritomo et al. eds., *Rikugunshō Enkaku Shi* (Tokyo: Rikugunshō, 1905), 97-8, 127 (hereafter cited as *RES*), 105.

¹¹ For information on the Japanese adoption of the French model in the 1870s see Presseisen, *Aggression*, 33-45. For information on the French-style build-up of the Army Ministry in 1873 see: *RES*, 97-8, 127. About the resistance by conservative officers see *ibid.*, 95, as well as Katsura, *Jiden*, 100; Presseisen, *Aggression*, 95-110; Miura Gorō, *Kanju Shōgun Kaikoroku* (Tokyo: Seikyōsha, 1925), 174-5; and Lone, *Katsura*, 15.

¹² Hata, *Tōsui-ken*, 76. On Yamagata's crucial role in the military reform see also Roger F. Hackett, *Yamagata Aritomo in the Rise of Modern Japan 1838-1922* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 81-9. On the question of resistance by conservative officers see also: Barbara J. Teters, *The Conservative Opposition in Japanese Politics, 1877-1894* (PhD thesis, unpublished: University of Washington, 1955), 57-8, 65-70.

¹³ Katsura, *Jiden*, 90-1.

of a Prussian "dualistic" one.¹⁴ These terms are a little confusing. Contrary to what one may assume, they do not signify a contrast between a system controlled by a single military authority (monistic) and a system controlled by two authorities (dualistic). Instead, the terms signify the relationship between the twin dimensions of command and administration. The "monistic" French system unified both aspects under the War Ministry while the Prussian Kingdom, and later the German Empire, drew a line between organs of administration and command.¹⁵

After Katsura's return to Japan in August 1878 the reforms were carried out in great haste. The Army Ministry submitted a formal proposal to the cabinet in early October, and it was formally accepted two months later, on 5 December. The decision was to establish, based on Katsura's recommendations, a military triumvirate composed of a General Staff, Army Ministry and Army Inspectorate à-la-Prussia.¹⁶ As in Imperial Germany, each of the components was made directly responsible to the emperor. The new regulations of the General Staff (*Sanbō Honbu Jōrei*), published on 25 December 1878 and signed by the Minister of the Right Iwakura Tomomi, constituted the foundational document of the new General Staff. Articles 1, 2 and 4 were the most important ones:

1. The General Staff shall be established in Tokyo. The army inspectors, Imperial Guard units and all garrisons are under its direct authority.

¹⁴ Yui Masaomi, "Meiji Shoki no Kengun Kōsō," in Yui Masaomi, Fujiwara Akira, Yoshida Yutaka. eds., *Guntai Heishi*, vol 4. In *Nihon Kindai Shishō Taikēi* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989), 488; Matsushita, *Meiji Gunsei* 2:3-4.

¹⁵ Presseisen, *Aggression*, 61-2; Kino, "Inoue Kowashi," 2:185; Lone, *Katsura*, 12.

¹⁶ *SHRS* 4:17. For an organizational chart of the General Staff in 1878 see *ibid*, 27. For analysis see: Ōe, *Sanbō Honbu*, 35-7. An organizational chart of the General Staff, updated to 1896 (right after the Sino-Japanese War) is in *ibid*, 61.

2. The chief of the General Staff shall be an officer, appointed by the emperor. He shall be responsible for the affairs [of the General Staff] and serve as a military advisor to the emperor.
4. All military and strategic plans and military orders and regulations related to marching, transfer and stationing of troops [...] are under the exclusive authority of the chief of the General Staff. These plans, subject to imperial approval, shall be submitted to the army lord for execution.¹⁷

The right of the chief of the General Staff to report directly to the emperor was established in article 2, premised on the exclusive command prerogative of the emperor as *dai gensui* (supreme commander-in-chief).¹⁸ That premise was reflected in a detailed missive dispatched by the army lord to the cabinet on 7 December, two days after the issue of the regulations. The document stated, in the very first sentence, that "the [Army] Ministry and the General Staff are both placed under direct imperial authority [*chokurei*]."¹⁹ Eleven years later, in 1889, the Meiji Constitution reinforced that by stipulating, in articles 11 and 12, that the emperor had the prerogative to command the armed forces (*tōsui su*) and to regulate their peacetime structure and organization. Shortly beforehand, at one of the preparatory constitutional conferences, Army minister Ōyama Iwao had first referred to the emperor's prerogative of supreme command by using the term *tōsui no ken*, almost a precise translation of the German *Kommandogewalt*.²⁰ In the

¹⁷ A facsimile copy of the regulations is fully reproduced in Sanbō Honbu Jōrei, *SHRS* 4:19-26. For analysis and discussion see Matsushita, *Meiji Gunsei* 2:11-12.

¹⁸ For discussion see Ōe, *Sanbō Honbu*, 33-5.

¹⁹ Army Lord to the Cabinet, 7.12.1878 in *SHRS* 4:17,33. According to Hata Ikuhiko (*Tōsui-ken*, 63-4) the missive was not drafted by Yamagata but by Saigō Tsugumichi, Education Lord, who doubled at the Army Ministry during Yamagata's sick leave. For discussion see Matsushita, *Meiji Gunsei* 2:14-15.

²⁰ Hata, *Tōsui-ken*, 11.

future, this term, shortened to *tōsui ken*, acquired notoriety and became fixed in Japanese military, political and constitutional discourse as a keyword signifying the independence of the army from civilian control.

The newly organized Army Ministry, cemented by the regulations of October 1879, was in some senses stronger and in some senses weaker than its Prussian counterpart. True, many powers such as operational control over troops were vested in the new General Staff. Still, the General Staff regulations stipulated that orders of the General Staff, pending imperial sanction, shall be sent to the Army Ministry for execution. In other words, the ministry still possessed important leverage over the army through the right to be involved in implementation of important orders.²¹

Katsura and Yamagata did not adopt the Prussian Military Cabinet, a palace organ with crucial power over military promotions and appointments.²² Instead, the Army Ministry was allowed to retain this key authority over military personnel. It had the right to appoint, promote and dismiss military office holders, with the important exception of General Staff officers.²³ According to the cabinet regulations of 1885, the army minister could access the emperor only through the prime minister, but

²¹ Army Lord to the Cabinet, 7.12.1878, in *SHRS* 4:35. For discussion and analysis see Ōe, *Sanbō Honbu*, 34. Compare with the undated draft of Army Ministry authority by Katsura Tarō: *KTKM* 16:232-4 in *MJPH-NDL*.

²² For information on the Prussian military cabinet see: Manfred Messerschmidt, "Die politische Geschichte der preussisch-deutschen Armee," in Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, ed., *Deutsche Militär geschichte in sechs bänden 1648-1939* (Munich: Bernard & Graefe Verlag, 1983), 2:297-302.

²³ *SHRS* 4:33; Ōe, *Sanbō Honbu*, 41.

that was rectified three years later. Since 1888, the army minister could report directly to the throne, a practice that quickly became a routine.²⁴

In January 1879, one month after the establishment of the General Staff, the Army Ministry issued regulations for a new Army Inspectorate (*Kangun-bu*). In 1887, based on the proposals of the German military advisor Jacob Meckel, the inspectorate was unified under an individual commander and put in charge of the crucial sphere of military training and education. The powerful commander of the new inspectorate, called the inspector-general of military education (*rikugun kyōiku sōkan*), was considered the equal of the army minister and the chief of the General Staff. He, too, possessed the right to directly report to the emperor. The ubiquitous Yamagata Aritomo was appointed as the first inspector general, to endow the new post with his personal authority, and maybe to ensure control over this crucial component of the military establishment. Together with the chief of the general staff and the army minister, the inspector general became a pillar of the powerful triumvirate of the Japanese Army, a system retained, with certain changes, up to 1945.²⁵

²⁴ The cabinet regulations (Dajōkan dispatch no.71) are fully reproduced in: Kaneko Kentarō et al., *Itō Hirobumi Den* (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1970), 2: 485-6. Compare with the *Dajōkan* regulations in Matsushita, *Meiji Gunsei* 2:15; Mori, *Nihon Rikugun*, 19; Wetzler, "Kaiser Hirohito", 619.

²⁵ For the regulations of the revised inspectorate see: *KTKM* 17:56-8, *MJPH-NDL*. The power over education was given to the Inspector General on May 31, 1887. See Tomio Nakano, *Origin and Development of So-Called Independence of Supreme Military Command in Japanese Constitution* (Tokyo: Kokusai Shuppan Insatsusha, 1932), 114; Kurono, *Rikugun Daigakkō*, 5, as well as Kino, "Inoue Kowashi," 2:188; Katsura, *Jiden*, 101; *RES*, 151-2, 217; Hata, *Tōsui-ken*, 62; Ōtsuka Minao, *Doitsu Shisō*, 113-4. Meckel's recommendations are reproduced in: Jacob Meckel, "Der organisatorische Aufbau und die Befehlsgliederung der grossen Verbände des japanischen Heeres," in George Kerst, *Jacob Meckel: sein Leben, sein Wirken in Deutschland und Japan* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt Verlag, 1970), 126-7

The Elephant in the Room: Explaining the Reforms, Overcoming Resistance

Ironically the 1878 reforms, destined to gradually remove the Japanese armed forces from the orbit of civilian control, passed with relatively little resistance. According to the *Meiji Tennō Ki*, an official chronicle of the Meiji reign, the emperor himself had some misgivings. What might happen, he worried, if in the future the Army Ministry and the General Staff quarrel with each other? However, the emperor was quick to succumb. His closest associate, Minister of the Right Iwakura, endorsed the proposals, and Meiji himself was hardly able to resist his senior advisors even in matters related to his own personal life – much less could he dispute professional recommendations on questions of military organization.²⁶ From the juxtaposition of the *Meiji Tennō ki* and other sources we know that the proposals were submitted to the emperor in the course of a torturous tour to western Japan, during which he suffered from bad weather, difficult road conditions and a breathless schedule.²⁷ Under such circumstances, even a stronger ruler could hardly have been in a position to engage in serious discussions on the intricacies of military organization.

It also helped that the military establishment unanimously endorsed the proposals. That was relatively rare, as the late 1870s and the 1880s were characterized in fierce and often venomous inner-military debates. Even Yamagata's bitter rivals Miura Gorō, Tani Kanjō, Soga Sukenori and Torio Koyata (known as the

²⁶ Kunaichō, ed., *Meiji Tennō Ki* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1968-1977) 4:577 (hereafter cited as *MT*); Keene, *Emperor*, 300-2, 583-4.

²⁷ *MT* 4:527-45; *RES*, 148-50; *IKJ* 2:1604-5; Keene, *Emperor*, 300-2.

"four generals" or *shi-shogun*), did not oppose the proposals of October 1878.²⁸ They and their followers worked hard to retain French methods of training and field organization, called for a small, defensive army and resisted military expansion. They resisted almost everything proposed by Yamagata in the 1880s – except the establishment of the General Staff. In fact, Yamagata made considerable efforts to implore, indeed, virtually beg, General Torio Koyata, his arch-rival, to return to Tokyo from his vacation (in fact an angry retirement) so as to be able to participate in the reforms.²⁹ Another rival of Yamagata, General Tani Kanjō, was urgently summoned to the capital as well.³⁰ Had they resisted the reforms, it defies reason to believe that Yamagata would have summoned them so energetically to Tokyo.

The available evidence indicates that most potentates in the civilian government did not oppose Yamagata's proposals either.³¹ Itō Hirobumi, Ōkubo's successor as Home Lord and the most influential man in the government, was a

²⁸ For a different view see: Teters, "Genrō-in," 367-8. Contrary to Teters' arguments, I have not seen any solid evidence indicating that the "four generals" resisted the establishment of the General Staff. Her source is a 1944 monograph, which indeed tells that Miura and Soga resisted the reforms from the outset – but all of the examples it brings are related to criticism of specific aspects of Yamagata's policy, almost all of them from later years. See: Koyama Hirotake, *Kindai Nihon Gunjishi Gaisetsu* (Tokyo: Itō Shoten, 1944), 226-7. An examination of the relevant portions in Tani Kanjō's correspondence, for example, shows that until 1881 his resistance was focused on specific aspects such as the army's pensions' law and not on Yamagata's policy in its entirety. See *TKI* 2:76-9, and compare with the editor's introduction to Tani's papers: *Tani Kanjō Kankei Monjo*, eds., Hiroe Yoshihiro, Kobayashi Kazuyuki, (Tokyo: Kitazumisha, 1995), 16-17, and with the analysis in Kobayashi, *Tani*, 106-7.

²⁹ See, for example, Torio Koyata's position in Sanjō to Iwakura, 1.12.1878, reproduced in Umetani, "Sanbō Honbu Dokuritsu," 15, as well as Itō to Inoue, 12.10.1878 in *ibid*, 5. And also: Ōe, *Sanbō Honbu*, 47-9; Shin'ichi Kitaoka, "The Army as a Bureaucracy: Japanese Militarism Revisited," *The Journal of Military History* 57:5 (October, 1993), 71-2; Drea, *Imperial Army*, 65-6; Kurono, *Rikugun Daigakkō*, 46-9; Kaneko, *Itō* 2:501-5.

³⁰ Tani Kanjō to Kabayama Sukenori, 2.11.1878 in *TKI* 2:498.

³¹ Mori, *Nihon Rikugun*, 15-16.

particularly strong supporter. In a letter to one of his closest political collaborators, he agreed with the army's position that the reforms "would advance the future military power of our country." In fact, as the letter suggested, Itō was aware of the proposals two months before they were formally endorsed, and opened informal negotiations with the Treasury in order to obtain the necessary funds. Ōkuma, lord of the treasury, agreed to meet the special expenditure by increasing the taxation on alcoholic beverages.³²

The correspondence of key government leaders, analyzed by Umetani Noboru, suggests that they were panicked by the mutiny in the Imperial Guard in August 1878 (known as the Takebashi Incident) and sought a quick solution to suppress unrest inside the army. The recent assassination of Ōkubo and the continued agitation of the Popular Rights Movement contributed to this atmosphere of panic. Reforms in the mutinous army were needed, and to bolster discipline by creating a direct link between the army and the emperor seemed a logical thing to do. The long-term repercussions of the reforms were hardly considered, and could hardly be conceived at the time, especially by busy leaders with a mountain of other pressing duties piling up on their desks. Itō, especially, had seen the reforms as a strictly military matter, a timely measure to consolidate the army which had little relevance to the civilian government.³³ Therefore, when the emperor finally returned to the capital in early November, he encountered a consensus of all

³² Itō Hirobumi to Inoue Kaoru, 12.10.1878, reproduced in Umetani, "Sanbō Honbu Dokuritsu," 4-5, see discussion and analysis in *ibid*, 6-7.

³³ Umetani, "Sanbō Honbu Dokuritsu", 8-13, compare with the reaction of the leadership as described by Sawachi Hisae, *Hi wa waga Kyōchū ni ari: wasurerareta Konoe Heishi no Hanran Takebashi Jiken* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2008), 310-13.

leaders, civilian and military alike. Under such conditions, it was inadmissible for him to raise further objections.³⁴

The General Staff reforms, hastily accepted in autumn 1878, were already a binding tradition in the 1880s, when the Meiji constitution was being drafted by Itō Hirobumi and his advisors. The army's independence under the Imperial Throne, as several scholars have suggested, was already ingrained in bylaws, considered almost as a given by the drafters of the constitution.³⁵ Already in an early draft, submitted in 1880, the advisor Inoue Kowashi proposed that all powers, civilian and military, should be invested in the imperial sovereign. In a subsequent draft, he wrote that "the emperor personally commands the army and the navy." In his comments to the Japanese translation of Lorenz von Stein's constitutional-military theory, Inoue approved Stein's own justification of *tōsui-ken*: unlike military administration, military command demands absolute obedience and cannot be conditioned by normal civilian law. Therefore, only the monarch could unify in his person both of these aspects of military affairs. That amounted not merely to a justification of *tōsui-ken*, but also of the military presumption to operate independently from the civilian cabinet.³⁶

³⁴ In his letter to Inoue Kaoru, Itō made it clear that to keep "due process" they must wait for the emperor's return. However, until that time, Itō ensured the consensus of the entire leadership, so the monarch, upon his return, was faced with a *fait-accompli*. See Itō to Inoue, 12.10.1878, in Umetani, "Sanbō Honbu Dokuritsu," 5.

³⁵ Katō Yōko, *Sensō no Ronri: Nichi-Ro Sensō kara Taiheiyō Sensō made* (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 2005), 143; Nakano, *Origin*, 99; Matsushita, *Meiji Gunsei* 2:16. See also Ōe, *Sanbō Honbu*, 33.

³⁶ Kino, "Inoue Kowashi," 2:176,8, 82-3.

Still, during the 1880s there were some attempts to resist the military's growing involvement in politics. In December 1885, the old government structure was abolished in favor of a Western-style cabinet system. The weak position of the Chief Minister was replaced with a somewhat stronger prime minister, who was qualified to advise the emperor in "affairs of state." The positions of the minister of the right, the lords and the imperial councilors were abolished. Instead, the portfolios were manned by Western-style cabinet ministers. Itō Hirobumi, the rising leader of Japan since Ōkubo's assassination, was appointed as the first prime minister.³⁷

The government leaders had used this opportunity to restrict the power of Yamagata, who served concurrently in two of the most powerful civilian and military posts: home minister and chief of the General Staff. Already in August, four months before the final inauguration of the cabinet reform, Yamagata was forced to step down from the General Staff – the home minister could not be a military commander, and the two spheres had to be separated. The initiators of the move were probably Itō and Sanjō.³⁸ That was not, it should be emphasized, an attempt to reverse the clock to pre-1878 conditions by binding the General Staff to the cabinet's control, but to merely to restrain the army by interpreting the reforms in a more

³⁷ See the missive of Chief Minister Sanjō in *RES*, 205-6, and the Imperial rescript establishing the cabinet system in *ibid*, 207-8. For discussion and analysis see Kino Kazue, "Inoue Kowashi no Tōsuiken no rikkenteki Tōgiyo Kōsō (2) ," *Geirin* 58 (October, 2009), 186-7. See also Itō, *Commentaries*, 89-90; Kaneko *Itō*, 2:484-6; George Akita, *Foundations of Constitutional Government in Modern Japan: 1868-1900* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 68; *MT* 6:513-8.

³⁸ *MT* 6:471-2.

literal way: if civilians are not to be involved in military affairs, military men should not be involved in civilian affairs either.

Yamagata, however, continued to alternate between civilian and military posts – a powerful figure meddling, puppeteering and interfering in civilian and military affairs alike.³⁹ The civilian prime minister still retained some control over the army minister, who was a member of his cabinet, but when the constitution was promulgated in 1889, he still had no real authority over the two other crucial elements of the military establishment, the Army Inspectorate and the General Staff. Indeed, the cabinet regulations formally recognized the chief of the General Staff's right to report directly to the emperor.⁴⁰

Far from being a turning point, the Constitution of Imperial Japan was merely another stepping stone in the road for *tōsui-ken* and military independence.⁴¹ According to article 11, "the Emperor has the supreme command of the Army and Navy," (*Tennō wa Rikukaigun o tōsui su*), and article 12 endowed him with the privilege to determine "the organization and peace standing of the Army and Navy." Article 67 determined that "those already fixed expenditures based by the Constitution upon the powers appertaining to the Emperor [...] shall be neither rejected nor reduced by the Imperial Diet, without the concurrence of the

³⁹ Nakano, *Origin*, 113; Yui, "Meiji Shoki," in Yui et al., *Guntai Heishi* 4:492-3; Hackett, *Yamagata*, 91; Ōe, *Sanbō Honbu*, 28, 54, 6-7; Drea, *Imperial Army*, 64; *KYAD* 2:760.

⁴⁰ This is the same article that required the army minister to report to the Throne only through the Prime Minister: "Every minister shall report from time to time to the prime minister in matters related to his duty. However, though the Chief of the General Staff shall report directly to the Throne on military matters, the army minister has to report to the prime minister." See: Cabinet regulations (1885), article 6, in Kaneko, *Itō* 2:486.

⁴¹ Kino, "Inoue Kowashi," 2:189-202 (Itō Myoji is quoted in pp.201-2).

Government," thus significantly reducing the leverage the parliamentarians might have had over the army's budget. In his official commentaries on the constitution, Itō Hirobumi emphasized that the emperor had personally led his army since antiquity, and that "a General Staff Office has been established for His Imperial Majesty's personal and general direction of the Army and Navy."⁴²

Nakano Tomio, a jurist who criticized the army's independence in the turbulent era of the 1930s, may have been right in his interpretation that, legally, the constitution did not permit the military to run its affairs outside of the cabinet's scope of control.⁴³ However that did not matter much. As Nakano himself admitted, the Constitution was not the turning point in civil-military affairs – only another milestone, and not the most important one, in the process of military empowerment that began in 1878.⁴⁴ Seen as such, it was all but natural that the constitution would often be interpreted in a way supportive of the army's point of view.

In 1891, for example, the leaders of the army were able to block an attempt by several veterans of the "four generals" faction, now entrenched in the House of Peers, to undo *tōsui-ken* by abolishing the independent General Staff altogether. The initiator of the attempt, former Deputy Chief of the General Staff Ozawa Takeo, was

⁴² Itō, *Commentaries*, 24-6.

⁴³ Nakano, *Origin*, 99-100. A similar interpretation is offered by Peter Wetzler, "Kaiser Hirohito," 618. According to Wetzler, the direct access of the chief of the General Staff to the throne was only in matters of strict military nature, i.e. secret orders, and even such conversations should have been reported later to the prime minister. That may have been true legally, but the most important thing was the way that the army interpreted the legal situation later.

⁴⁴ Nakano, *Origin*, 100. For a similar perspective see Umetani, *Gunjin Chokurei*, 113, 278.

accused of violating the constitution. As a result his initiative failed dismally, and he almost had his military rank and pension taken away.⁴⁵

The Riddle of the Military Reforms

Why were these complicated and awkward reforms initiated by the military establishment in the first place? What were the motives of their initiators? According to popular wisdom, the Japanese leadership decided to replace the French military model with the Prussian one after the end of the Franco-Prussian war, and the establishment of a General Staff, the institution most associated with Prussia, was part of that process.⁴⁶ However, the Franco-Prussian War ended in 1871 and the Japanese General Staff was established only seven years later, in 1878. In fact, before that date the armed forces were run according to the French monistic model: all power was concentrated in the Army Ministry. Though Yamagata, then in a minority opinion, was known to favor the Prussian model, there was no sign prior to 1878 that he planned to establish an independent General Staff.⁴⁷ Contrary to that, all of his efforts until the Satsuma Rebellion were directed to augment, not to decrease, the authority of the Army Ministry. The Staff Bureau, an embryonic General Staff, was established in 1871 as a section of the ministry. At no time before

⁴⁵ Ōe, *Sanbō Honbu*, 50-1.

⁴⁶ See for example: Yui, "Meiji Shoki," in Yui et al., *Guntai Heishi* 4:489; Ōtsuka, *Doitsu Shisō*, 92.

⁴⁷ Hackett, *Yamagata*, 82; Kurono, *Rikugun Daigakkō*, 20-1; Umetani Noboru, *Gunjin Chokuyu Seiritsushi* (Tokyo: Seishi Shuppan, 2008), 24.

1878 was there an attempt to place it directly under the Imperial Throne.⁴⁸ Katsura may have supported such reforms already in 1875, but by that time he was still powerless. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the Satsuma Rebellion was the main catalyst for the reforms of 1878.

But what actually happened during the Satsuma Rebellion that convinced Yamagata to change his previous line of military policy? In the memoirs of Katsura and the memoranda of Yamagata, as well as in the official histories of the Army Ministry and the General Staff, several explanations for the reforms are offered. A key position paper drafted by Yamagata and signed by Saigō Tsugumichi, explained that the times had changed, the armies of European countries had become more "developed" and Japan had to keep itself up to date by reinforcing the General Staff.⁴⁹ Neither here nor in his other writings, however, did Yamagata explain why exactly the General Staff had to acquire independent status from the civilian government.

In his memoirs, as well as in several letters to policymakers, Katsura Tarō tended to repeat the above, in addition to another important argument. The Satsuma Rebellion, he argued, proved that Japanese military command was inadequate and faulty. Here, Katsura had probably referred to the lack of coordination between the detachments of Yamagata and Kuroda during the war against Saigō Takamori and his rebel army. The official history of the Army Ministry,

⁴⁸ *RES*, 97-8, 127.

⁴⁹ *RES*, 148-50. These arguments were later reproduced in the official history of the general staff (*SHRS* 4:17), as well as by some historians. See for example: Matsushita, *Meiji Gunsei*, 2:5.

written at the beginning of the twentieth century under Yamagata's direction, provided a variation of the same argument. A system divided into three professional organs, a General Staff, Army Ministry and Military Inspectorate, each responsible for its own sphere, was far more efficient, far more able to quickly cope with unforeseen military challenges.⁵⁰ That argument is partially true: the lessons of the Satsuma Rebellion were certainly an important impetus for reform. Still, even though it may explain why three such organs of command were established, it still does not explain why they had to be independent of civilian control and subordinate directly to the throne.⁵¹

In fact, the explanations in the official sources make so little sense that some historians resorted to the personal level in order to explain the events of autumn 1878. The reforms, according to Hata Ikuhiko and Kurono Taeru, were designed first and foremost to satisfy Yamagata's unbridled craving for power.⁵² Apart from being yet another example for the almost universal animosity Yamagata evokes among historians, this argument makes little sense. Yamagata was certainly an ambitious person, but if he merely wanted to enhance his own power, why did he have to curtail the authority of the Army Ministry, fully controlled by himself and his cronies, in favor of the newly established General Staff? In addition, even the General Staff

⁵⁰ *RES*, 152. See also Kurono, *Rikugun Daigakkō*, 24-5,8-9; *KTHS* 165-7, 172, 243. A similar argument was reproduced by Matsushita, *Meiji Gunsei* 2:3-4.

⁵¹ Hata, *Tōsui-ken*, 72.

⁵² Hata, *Tōsui-ken*, 114-7; Kurono, *Rikugun Daigakkō*, 6-7, 28-34. Edward Drea (*Imperial Army*, 50), writes, for example, that the Army Inspectorate was designed by Yamagata to consolidate his own power, and by extension, that of the Satsuma-Chōshū clique. But if that was so, why did the new organ enjoy independent *jōsō* rights? And more than that, why were such rights given to Miura Gorō and Tani Kanjō, Yamagata's implacable enemies?

was not made omnipotent, as its power was limited and circumvented by the Military Inspectorate. And some of the military inspectors, men such as Tani Kanjō and Miura Gorō, were rivals, not allies of Yamagata.⁵³ The reforms, therefore, increased Yamagata's power at certain levels, but decreased it at others. In order to understand what he intended to achieve, it is necessary to take a step back and to reflect, yet again, on the dynamics of early Meiji politics and their convergence with the events of 1878.

The Logic of the Reforms: Consolidation and Dispersion of Power

In his account of early restoration politics, Michio Umegaki has argued that throughout the first decade of the Meiji Era, the Restoration Government was working on two seemingly contradicting dynamics. On the one hand, its members were mostly lower- and middle-ranking samurai from peripheral domains, people who would never have been entrusted with national power under the Tokugawa regime. Therefore, their rule over the new system was based on **dispersion** of power, namely – opening the gate of national power to newcomers and sharing it between them, for one of the things elite groups most fear is being tyrannized by one of their members. On the other hand, while in the government, they scarcely wanted to share their newly won power with every claimant, and that necessitated **consolidation** of power in the hands of a few. These contradicting dynamics of

⁵³ Miura, *Kanju*, 124, 35; Yui, "Meiji Shoki," in Yui et al., *Guntai Heishi* 4:491-2.

dispersion and consolidation, according to Umegaki, characterized the Restoration government from its inception.⁵⁴

In fact, every historical junction in the early Meiji years involved intricate renegotiations on the balance of dispersion and consolidation of power. Some actors were eliminated or excluded, others were strengthened, and yet others were readmitted to the ruling elites along with their allies. The military reforms of 1878 were in fact Yamagata's attempt to settle between these two contradicting dynamics inside the army, to reprogram the dispersion and consolidation of power in order to remedy what he had seen as severe deficiencies in the military system of the 1870s.

The official explanations provided by Yamagata and Katsura for the reforms, as we have already seen, were obscure, partial, dishonest or otherwise unsatisfactory. Why did they divide military command between three different powers and subordinate each of them separately to the Imperial Throne? The first and easiest thing to notice is that a major result of the reforms was consolidation of the military elite. The word "consolidation" is used here in Michio Umegaki's sense: by creating the principle of *tōsui-ken*, Yamagata and his advisors concentrated military power in the hands of a smaller number of people, while an entire category of power holders – civilian leaders – were excluded as much as possible.

Since he had created the Imperial Guard along with the Saigō brothers, Yamagata was constantly troubled with civilian interference in military affairs. In spring 1873, the cabinet attempted to grab the rudder of military power from the

⁵⁴ Umegaki, *After*, 179-83, 92.

Army Ministry and centralize it under their own control. Yamagata and his deputy lord, Saigō Tsugumichi, had bitterly resisted this move. The joint memorandum written by both men showed their deep disdain for "civilians" and their belief in the superiority of the army's meritocratic system.⁵⁵ Yet, the leaders of the government insisted on retaining military control. To Yamagata's great dismay, Home Lord Ōkubo, a civilian, took command over all loyalist troops during the Saga Rebellion.⁵⁶ Seen from Yamagata's point of view, the Taiwan Expedition was yet another chaotic affair, a strategic folly and an additional indication of the amateurish administration of the army by the civilians in the government.⁵⁷ Advising the throne on strategic matters, he had already emphasized in 1874, should have been the prerogative of the army lord.⁵⁸

The amorphous intentions of the government, pushed by the Popular Rights Movement, to open some kind of national assembly in future years, further aggravated Yamagata's fears. Given the possibility of the future inclusion of party politicians in the government, there was a danger that such civilians could influence the military through the Army Ministry.⁵⁹ Yamagata, it should be noted, was not the

⁵⁵ Ōshima, "Meiji Shoki Dajōkansei," 27, for analysis and discussion see *ibid*, p.12. Yamagata was to harbor this disdain throughout his life. See Lone, *Katsura*, 23.

⁵⁶ Lone, *Katsura*, 12; Ōe, *Sanbō Honbu*, 22-4; *KYAD* 2:334. In the official history of the Army Ministry, compiled in 1905 under Yamagata's auspices, all relevant army commanders are mentioned by name in the section dealing with the Saga Rebellion, but there is not even one word about the overlordship of Ōkubo. See *RES*, 105-6.

⁵⁷ *KYAD* 2:350; Lone, *Katsura*, 13; Kurono, *Rikugun Daigakkō*, 28.

⁵⁸ Yamagata Aritomo, *Yamagata Aritomo Ikenshō* (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1966) 57-60 (hereafter cited as *YAIK*, see especially p.60); *RES*, 108-9, 119, 131; Hackett, *Yamagata*, 73-4.

⁵⁹ Hata, *Tōsui-ken*, 71-2; Presseisen, *Aggression*, 61.

only one who feared such an outcome. Even Fukuzawa Yukichi, the leading public intellectual of early Meiji Japan – certainly not a Yamagata admirer – conceded that the Diet had to be kept out of military affairs. Otherwise, he warned, politicians might use armed units and turn the parliament from a venue for public debate into a literal battlefield.⁶⁰

Then there was the issue of military discipline. In his memoirs, in the midst of a typically evasive description of the General Staff reforms, Katsura briefly mentioned the Takebashi Incident of 23 August 1878. The reasons for that incident, he wrote, were well-known and it was needless to elaborate, but along with the lessons of the Satsuma Rebellion they made reform in the army all the more urgent.⁶¹ In that incident, artillery troops from the Imperial Guard rebelled in protest against postponement of payments, murdered some commanding officers, rioted near the Imperial Palace and even trained their cannons on the official residence of the Treasury Lord. "Even in my wildest dreams I did not expect such a serious incident," said Yamagata, obviously shocked. He was aware of the discontent in the Imperial Guard and expected some trouble, but was perhaps surprised by the magnitude.⁶² The riots, however, were suppressed on the same day. The authorities suspected that the mutinous troops were influenced by the Movement for Popular

⁶⁰ Fukuzawa Yukichi, "Teishitsu-ron," in Fukuzawa, *Nihon Kōshitsu-ron* (Tokyo: Shimazu Shobō, 1978), 37-40.

⁶¹ Katsura, *Jiden*, 94.

⁶² See Yamagata's letter to Itō, quoted in Umetani, *Gunjin Chokuyū*, 104. For discussion see: Sawachi, *Takebashi Jiken*, 312-4.

Rights, though a close reading of the testimonies of the rebels indicates that such influence, if existent, was meager at best.⁶³

For Yamagata, that was yet another validation of warnings he had made since 1873. Even before the October 1873 crisis he was unable to control the Imperial Guard units, who had shown more loyalty to politicians of their former domains than to their formal commander.⁶⁴ Military mutinies were rampant, and many of them, like the Saga and Satsuma rebellions, were caused by illicit horizontal connections between politicians and armed units. Already in January 1878, a short time after the end of the Satsuma Rebellion, Yamagata warned that the discipline of the soldiers had to be improved.⁶⁵ After the Takebashi Incident, however, he began to strongly associate these disciplinary problems with seditious civilian, political influence on the troops. Any political involvement in the armed forces was seen as a sure recipe for chaos and rebellion, and the leaders of the army were afraid that another uprising may occur at a moment's notice.⁶⁶

⁶³ See the verdict of the Military Supreme Court and the letter to Sanjō Sanetomi, quoted in Umetani, *Gunjin Chokuyū*, 104-5, as well as Kurono, *Rikugun Daigakkō*, 26-7; Tobe, *Gyakusetsu*, 66. For a book-length study of the Takebashi Incident see: Sawachi, *Takebashi Jiken*. For a more concise, better documented account of the incident and its legal and political repercussions see: *NSSS-M* 1: 469-510. The testimonies reproduced in *ibid*, 483-92 indicate that the catalyst for the incident was discontent over salaries and service conditions, not abstract ideologies or political affiliations.

⁶⁴ Hackett, *Yamagata*, 71; Umetani, *Gunjin Chokuyū*, 33-4.

⁶⁵ *RES*, 134.

⁶⁶ *Katsura Tarō Kankei Monjo*, ed. Chiba Isao (Tokyo Daigaku Shuppainkai, 2010), 326 (note: this is a book-form selection of Katsura's letters, and is different than the archival collection also called *Katsura Tarō Kankei Monjo* and cited here as *KTKM*); Hackett, *Yamagata*, 83-5; Tobe, *Gyakusetsu*, 67; Fujita Tsuguo, *Meiji Gunsei* (Tokyo: Nobuyamasha, 1992), 81-5. For a different perspective see Hata, *Tōsui-ken*, 97; Umetani, *Gunjin Chokuyū*, 103-4.

Based on this experience, Yamagata became certain that something had to be done to isolate the army from politics and keep civilians out of military affairs. "If reform is not done," Yamagata wrote Itō Hirobumi a short time before the Takebashi Incident, "I am deeply worried that the future goal of upholding military discipline is very much in doubt."⁶⁷ The drive for consolidation was comprised of two elements: building a supreme authority of military command, and excluding civilians (i.e. politicians), both in the government and in the future parliament from military decision-making.⁶⁸ This argument did not appear in Yamagata's formal position papers to the government, for obvious tactical reasons, but his intentions were betrayed by his request that the Imperial Rescript for Soldiers and Sailors would not pass through the hands of the Chief Minister, as was usually the case. It had to be given to the troops directly by the emperor. Even the most venerable civilian politician was not allowed to interfere in military affairs.⁶⁹

In 1881 there was yet another impetus for Yamagata to take a radical approach to depoliticize the army. His arch-rivals, the "four generals," submitted a strong-worded petition to the government against a corrupted deal, selling Hokkaido territories to private Satsuma businessmen at bargain prices.⁷⁰ That affair was an important part of a major political crisis, which ended with the dismissal of Treasury Lord Ōkuma Shigenobu from the government. The "four generals," Tani Kanjō, Miura

⁶⁷ Yamagata to Itō, reproduced in *KYAD* 2:782.

⁶⁸ Katsura, *Jiden*, 111-12; Hackett, *Yamagata*, 83; Tobe, *Gyakusetsu*, 67; Lone, *Katsura*, 12.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Hackett, *Yamagata*, 86. Original in Osatake, *Meiji Bunka*, 182. See also *KYAD* 2:810-2.

⁷⁰ For a detailed description of the crisis of 1881 see: Akita, *Constitutional*, 31-58; Kaneko, *Itō* 2:214-35. Compare with Kurono, *Rikugun Daigakkō*, 39-40.

Gorō, Soga Sukenori and Torio Koyata, were blamed by Yamagata and his cronies for taking Ōkuma's side in that political debate.⁷¹ That was yet another incentive to tighten and consolidate the military elite, barring and forbidding any political involvement of military leaders (with the sole exception of Yamagata and his closest cronies). Miura, narcissist as always, wrote in his memoirs that Yamagata's moves were done solely in order to "shut him up."⁷² That is naturally exaggerated. Yamagata had bigger worries than Miura and his three friends, loud and troublesome as they might have been. Still, there is no doubt that their oppositional activity inside and outside the army was yet another symptom of the phenomena of horizontal political connections he was set to fight against.

Yamagata's message did not remain only at the level of bylaws and regulations, and was also strongly expressed in two seminal ideological documents submitted to the troops in 1878 and 1882, respectively. The first, "Admonitions to Soldiers" (*Gunjin Kunkai*), was written by Yamagata's close colleague, Nishi Amane, and the civilian councilor Inoue Kowashi in the wake of the Takebashi Incident. The army, it warned the officers, was still in its infancy. Its body strength was growing, true, but the prevalent problems of discipline indicated that its spirit was yet underdeveloped. And without proper military spirit, the body is nothing but an empty shell. The need of the hour was to instill the old samurai values of loyalty, courage and obedience in the mass of soldiers of commoner background.

Obedience, even to unreasonable orders, should be unconditional, and that was

⁷¹ Miura, *Kanju*, 131-4; Tobe, *Gyakusetsu*, 67; Kobayashi, *Tani*, 113-14. For a partial translation and extensive discussion of the four generals' memorial see Teters, *Conservative Opposition*, 65-70.

⁷² Miura, *Kanju*, 135.

impossible without total detachment between the soldier and the seditious world of popular rights and civilian politics. Most of all, soldiers were forbidden to petition the authorities together or form parties or factions of any kind. Crucially, the appeal reminded the soldiers that in the glorious past the armed forces were "above politics" and answered directly to the Imperial Throne. The text implied that no civilian "politician," presumably not even the leaders of the government, had the right to give orders to the soldiers of the emperor.⁷³

The Imperial Rescript for Soldiers and Sailors, jointly written by Nishi Amane and Inoue Kowashi and then revised by Yamagata, conveyed the same message even more explicitly. Much of it repeated the gist of the Admonitions, implicitly suggesting that the first document was not effective enough. Unlike the stylized prose of the Admonitions, however, it was written in a clear, simple language that every recruit (or so it was hoped) could understand. And indeed, the Rescript became mandatory reading material that every soldier and sailor, especially since the mid-1920s, was expected to know inside out.⁷⁴ After a short paragraph summarizing the history of the Meiji Restoration, the Rescript reached its main point: the troops are the emperor's and they should be under exclusive Imperial control. Rectitude, honor, duty, condemnation of private violence and distaste of politics – all were strongly tied with the figure of the emperor, the *dai gensui*, supreme commander-in-chief. That message was even incorporated into the drama of the promulgation. Officially,

⁷³ The *Gunjin Kunkai* document is reproduced in full in *YAIK*, 75-83 (see especially pp.79-82). For discussion see also Drea, *Imperial Army*, 48.

⁷⁴ Oleg Benesch, *Inventing the Way of the Samurai: Nationalism, Internationalism and Bushido in modern Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 177.

the emperor "granted" the document to Army Lord Ōyama in a special ceremony.⁷⁵

He, the monarch, gave the message to the soldiers in the first person:

Soldiers and sailors! We are your supreme commander-in-chief. Our relations with you will be most intimate when We rely upon you as our limbs and you look up to Us as your head [...] The soldiers and sailors should consider loyalty their essential duty [...] **a body of soldiers or sailors wanting in loyalty, however well-ordered and disciplined it may be, is in an emergency no better than rabble.** Remember that, as the protection of the state and the maintenance of its power depend upon the strength of its arms, the growth or decline of this strength must affect the nation's destiny for good or for evil; **therefore neither be led astray by current opinions nor meddle in politics, but with single heart fulfill your essential duty of loyalty,** and bear in mind that duty is weightier than a mountain, while death is lighter than a feather. Never by failing in moral principle fall into disgrace and bring dishonor upon your name. [...] If you affect valor and act with violence, the world will in the end detest you and look upon you as a wild beast. Of this you should take heed.⁷⁶

Yamagata's move had far-reaching ideological repercussions. The warning against disciplined but disloyal troops was probably directed against units who joined forces with rebellious politicians, for how else, except for such illicit connections, could they be **both** disciplined and wanting in loyalty?⁷⁷

It is important to note, however, that Yamagata's drive was to consolidate, not to isolate military power. The two spheres, as Katsura wrote Kido already in 1876, were interconnected.⁷⁸ Unlike Kido Takayoshi, Yamagata and Katsura never

⁷⁵ Keene, *Emperor*, 366.

⁷⁶ *SOJT* 2:705-7 (emphasis is mine). The Japanese original is reproduced in Yui et al., *Guntai Heishi* 4:172-6.

⁷⁷ Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*, 53-4. Tobe, *Gyakusetsu*, 69-71, Yamagata's letter to Itō reproduced in *YKAD* 2:919-20.

⁷⁸ *KTHS*, 172.

resisted involvement of military men in civilian life – as long as this involvement was restricted to their own small group of leaders.⁷⁹ They themselves constantly meddled in politics, even while they stopped politicians from meddling in their own affairs. Indeed, on numerous occasions during the 1880s Yamagata, Saigō, Ōyama and Katsura had held civilian portfolios concurrently with their military assignments. Most crucially, Yamagata and Ōyama were both members of the powerful *Genrō* Council, who had decisive influence over the appointment of prime ministers during the 1890s and to a certain degree up until the 1920s.⁸⁰

That did not mean, however, that Yamagata projected or wanted the army to stage its own foreign policy or to independently attack other countries, as occurred in later decades. Limiting political involvement to himself and his cronies was perhaps the most crucial goal of the project of military consolidation. Other generals were ordered to not act independently in defiance of political authorities. Indeed, Yamagata attempted to counter such a danger by especially strict prohibitions included in the military penal code of 1881. The articles under the heading "arbitrary use of power" (*senken*) had stipulated, among other things, that "when a commanding officer has engaged in combat after having received notification of an armistice or peace, he shall suffer death" (69); "When a commanding officer has arbitrarily moved troops against orders or outside of the scope of his authority,

⁷⁹ As Shiba Ryōtarō has rightly remarked (*Kono Kuni* 4:134) Kido was perhaps the only leader who really believed in hermetic separation between the civilian and military spheres. See his strong words in *DKT* 2:238

⁸⁰ *KYAD* 2:759-60; Hata, *Tōsui-ken*, 112-3; Kurono, *Rikugun Daigakkō*, 31; R.P.G. Steven, "Hybrid Constitutionalism in Pre-war Japan," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 3:1 (Winter, 1977), 115. The gradual waning in the power of the *Genrō* is described in *ibid*, 117-8.

except in cases when this is unavoidable, he shall suffer death (70).”⁸¹ Therefore, martial law was severe and explicit as far as disobedience was concerned. The real test of such regulations, however, was in their enforcement when violated by a senior commander – and that would not happen for the next decade or so.⁸²

The drive of military consolidation, therefore, consisted of a systematic attempt to exclude politicians, even of ministerial rank, from military affairs, and bar soldiers and officers from political involvement. However, the reforms staged by Yamagata and Katsura in 1878 included a seemingly contradictory drive of power dispersion – a point usually ignored by most historians.⁸³ Just like many similar moves during the first decade of the Meiji Era, the reforms of 1878 had excluded some people from the room, but dispersed the remaining power more evenly among those who remained. The General Staff, Army Ministry and Army Inspectorate were independent of each other in the sense that none of their chiefs had a clear

⁸¹ For the original document see: *Rikugun Keihō* (1881), *Digitized Content, National Diet Library* (hereafter cited as *NDL-DC*), articles 50, 110, <http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/794418>. English translation adopted from Maxon, *Control*, 37-8. Maxon has translated the articles from the revised code of 1908. I have changed his translation only in places where the 1881 version was different.

⁸² In 1908, the army authorities inserted an additional prohibition made increasingly relevant by the expansion of the Japanese Empire. According to the revised Army Penal Code published in that year (article 35), "when a commanding officer has, without reason, initiated hostilities against a foreign country, he shall suffer death." For the original see: *Rikugun Keihō* in *Nakano Bunkō Hōrei Mokuji* (hereafter cited as *NBHM*), <http://www.geocities.jp/nakanolib/hou/hm41-46.htm#制作者註>. The English translation is taken from Maxon, *Control*, 37-8.

⁸³ See, for example, Drea, *Imperial Army*, 50. Kurono Taeru (*Rikugun Daigakkō*, 33-4) describes the establishment of the Army Inspectorate as part of a sub-chapter entirely devoted to Yamagata's unbridled personal ambition. The fact that by establishing this specific institution Yamagata actually dispersed some power to his rivals seemed to have completely escaped him. Umetani Noboru (*Gunjin Chokurei*, 278) speaks about the system created about 1878 as "Emperor-centered absolutism," ignoring the factionalism, lack of solid hierarchy and chaotic dispersion of power which characterized it almost to the end. It is indeed a little disconcerting to see how a usually careful scholar such as Umetani is still influenced by some simplistic generalizations characteristic of Japanese Marxist post-war historiography.

authority to either appoint or dismiss the others, a source of incessant factional strife in future years.⁸⁴ Far from centralizing power in the hands of one person, Yamagata had consolidated it and dispersed it at one and the same time, a complicated system that only he could control – and even that not perfectly.⁸⁵ There were no absolute power holders in the Imperial Japanese Army.

Lost in Translation: What Went Wrong?

The dramatic Prussian-German influence on the Japanese political structure in the pre-war years is almost undisputed among scholars of modern Japanese history. Some, like Bernd Martin, even believe that by choosing the "wrong" model, that of Germany, Japan went halfway down the road of militarism, aggression and national catastrophe.⁸⁶ Such claims are undoubtedly exaggerated: Japan was as influenced by other Western countries, especially France but also Britain and the United States, and this influence was never completely superseded.⁸⁷ Nor does it make sense to blame Prussian influence for everything that went wrong in Japan. In that context, it is instructive to note that the Prussian Army, the forerunner of the mature Meiji army, did not develop such severe tendencies of blatant, violent

⁸⁴ This definition is adopted from R.P.G. Steven's three conditions for separation of powers, see in "Hybrid," 101-2. See also Miura, *Kanju*, 174-5. The Army Ministry did not have the right to dismiss the officers of the General Staff. See: Ōe, *Sanbō Honbu*, 41.

⁸⁵ *KYAD* 2:789; Kikuta, *Naze Sensō*, 77-8.

⁸⁶ Bernd Martin, *Japan and Germany in the Modern World* (Providence, R.I: Berghahn Books, 1995), 52-6. For a similar approach see: Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925-1975* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1982), 36.

⁸⁷ On French military influence see: Matsushita, *Meiji Gunsei* 2:6-7; Kerst, *Meckel*, 56-7; Umetani, *Gunjin Chokuyu*, 23-30. For an example of the British and American influence on Japanese constitutional law see: Steven, "Hybrid", 99-133; George Akita, Hirose Yoshihiro, "The British Model: Inoue Kowashi and the Ideal Monarchical System," *Monumenta Nipponica* 49:4 (Winter, 1994), 117-19.

disobedience as its Japanese counterpart. One reason was that the emulation of the Prussian model was never as "broad, deep and faithful" as some scholars would like us to believe.⁸⁸ In retrospect, learning from Imperial Germany was a fateful decision, not necessarily because it was "the wrong model," as Bernd Martin has suggested, but because some of the crucial components were lost in translation.⁸⁹ Borrowing the explanation offered by Eleanor Westney in her discussion of French influences on the early Meiji police force, one might say the Imperial Japanese Army's understanding of the Prussian model was based on "imperfect information, in the sense of information on the formal system but not the informal."⁹⁰

Katsura advocated the Prussian model to the Japanese government as early as August 1875, but his reports focused on certain aspects and not on others. As he admitted later, his missives were intentionally concise, in order not to evoke redundant arguments among his influential readers in Japan. The main thrust of his argument was focused on the merits of Prussian dualism: the separation between military command and military administration. Katsura's time in Germany was mostly spent in the Inspectorate of the Third Prussian Army and in the War Ministry. Both of these organs had daily dealings with the General Staff, and it is therefore natural that Katsura became interested in the trinity of staff, ministry and

⁸⁸ Emily O. Goldman, "The Spread of Western Military Models to Ottoman Turkey and Meiji Japan," in Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff, eds., *The Sources of Military Change: Culture, Politics, Technology* (Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 53. Otherwise, Goldman's analysis of Japanese military change in light of neo-institutionalist sociological theories is highly illuminating, most particularly her emphasis on inter-service rivalry as motive for adoption of foreign ideas.

⁸⁹ Martin, *Japan and Germany*, 52-6.

⁹⁰ Westney, "Emulation," 318.

inspectorate.⁹¹ These three institutions, as we have seen, were adopted root and branch by the Japanese Army. In Germany, as in Japan, the military inspectors, chief of the General Staff and the war minister had every right to directly report to the emperor (*Immediatstellung/Immediatrecht*). All of them were directly subordinate to the supreme command of the monarch (*Kommandogewalt*), a construct from which the Japanese *tōsui-ken* developed.⁹²

However, there were some key differences between Germany and Japan of which Katsura and his fellow reformers might have been unaware. First of all, the Prussian *Kommandogewalt* and the Japanese *tōsui-ken* developed under different historical conditions, substantiated by different basic cultural, military and political assumptions. In fact, the concept of *Kommandogewalt* was born, in its modern form, out of a series of debates between Otto von Bismarck, Minister-President of Prussia (after 1871: Reich Chancellor), and Helmuth Graf von Moltke, chief of the General Staff. Both men, like other key figures in the Prussian ruling elites, agreed that the parliament should be excluded as much as possible from military affairs.⁹³ The

⁹¹ Katsura, *Jiden*, 73-4; Matsushita, *Meiji Gunsei* 2:7. It is very difficult to locate Katsura's original reports from Germany. In the archive of the National Defense Agency, only two short reports survived, and both of them deal with procedural issues related to the Japanese foreign students in Germany. Many reports on relevant issues survived in Katsura's collected papers, but some of them are dated to a later period and many are undated (for example 18:5-7).

⁹² Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640-1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 218, 23-32; Messerschmidt, "Die politische Geschichte," *Militär-geschichtliches Forschungsamt*, ed., *Deutsche Militärgeschichte* 2:299-300; Gerhard P. Gross, *Mythos und Wirklichkeit: Geschichte des operative Denkens im deutschen Heer von Moltke d.Ä bis Heusinger* (Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012), 59. It is important to note that the handbook "Duties of the General Staff" (*Der Dienst des Generalstabes*), one of the important military guidebooks of the German Imperial Army, offered in its opening chapter a lengthy justification for this privilege as a tradition going back to 1821. See: Paul L.E.H.A. Bronsart von Schellendorff, *Der Dienst des Generalstabes* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler und Sohn, 1884), 17-8, 22-5.

⁹³ Craig, *Politics*, 162.

question of the civilian government's right to be involved in military operations was, however, more complicated.⁹⁴ In the Austro-Prussian war of 1866, Moltke recommended occupying Vienna, and in the Franco-Prussian war of 1871 he strongly advised an advance into the south of France. In both cases his goal was to utterly destroy the fighting force of the enemy. Bismarck adamantly resisted these plans, as he feared that they may either precipitate the intervention of foreign powers or undermine his diplomatic efforts. In the end, in both cases, bitter debates ensued but Bismarck won the day.⁹⁵ Moltke, the chief of the General Staff, had written in disappointment to the emperor: "Up till now, I have considered that the chief of the General Staff (especially in war) and the federal chancellor are two equally warranted and mutually independent agencies under the direct command of Your Royal Majesty."⁹⁶

The words "especially in war" were crucial: Moltke did not dispute the supremacy of the civilian government in peacetime. Indeed, he did not even dispute that setting political goals to the army is the exclusive prerogative of the civilian government, and his only request from the minister-president was not to meddle in "professional" military issues in the course of a campaign. Bismarck, by contrast, believed that as a minister-president he had the right to veto operational moves with unwelcome political repercussions. Both he and Moltke, however, worked

⁹⁴ Jonathan Steinberg, *Bismarck: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 159-60.

⁹⁵ Otto von Bismarck, *Briefe an seine Braut und Gattin*, ed. H. Bismarck (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1900), 572-3; Craig, *Politics*, 199-204, 7-15; Azar Gat, *The Development of Military Thought: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 339-41.

⁹⁶ Translation in Gat, *Military Thought*, 338.

under the assumption that the military and the cabinet operate in parallel professional spheres, and the debates were mainly on the question of where to draw the borderline between the two.⁹⁷

The first crucial difference between Germany and Japan, in that sense, was a sociological one. In Prussia, many civilian and military leaders might have originated from the landed nobility, but as far as life experience and educational background were concerned they were two distinct groups. Politicians studied law and economics in state universities, while military men grew up in specialized army environments. They had different backgrounds, and therefore it made sense to assign each of them a separate sphere of activity. The struggles between them, at least until the First World War, tended to be merely on the proper division of labor between the two spheres. In the early Meiji Era the distinctions between the two groups were not as clear, as almost all potentates of the first generation of political leaders originated from the same cohort of Restoration leaders and their immediate cronies. Chief of the General Staff Yamagata, Home Lords Ōkubo and Itō, even Itagaki, leader of the opposition – all began their careers as domainal samurai, bureaucrats and military leaders at one and the same time. It was a novel idea, therefore, to define Ōkubo and Itō as "civilians" who had exclusive prerogative to

⁹⁷ For theoretical and historical background on the development of the ideology of military professionalism see: Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 7-98. Specifically on Prussia see: *ibid*, 99-109. One of the best primary sources on the Bismarck-Moltke debate is the War Diary of Crown Prince Friedrich (later Emperor Friedrich III) from the Franco-Prussian War. See: Kaiser Friedrich III, *Das Kriegstagebuch von 1870-71*, ed. Heinrich Otto Meisner (Berlin: K.F. Koehler, 1926), 319,25-6, 483-4, as well as Otto von Bismarck, *Die Gesammelten Werke* (Berlin: O. Stollberg, 1924) 6b:551-3. For discussion and analysis see: Christopher M. Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia: 1600-1947* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 515, 28-30; Craig, *Politics*, 195-6, 199-204, 7-15; Gross, *Mythos*, 45.

take foreign-policy decisions, and Yamagata as a "military man" whose responsibility should be confined to military operations alone. Itō and Yamagata, after all, had served together as commanders under Takasugi Shinsaku in 1864. None of them could be defined as more "soldierly" than the other.⁹⁸ Even when such ideas were imported to Japan from Germany, they had weak roots and were more easily violated.

Before 1878, the border between the military and civilian spheres was violated from both sides: Ōkubo involved himself with military command, while Yamagata interfered in politics. However, after the General Staff reforms, the military enjoyed institutional safeguards which effectively closed it to civilian influence. The leaders of the army, by contrast, still felt themselves competent to interfere in state affairs. Yamagata never used this leverage to stage a completely independent foreign policy, but with the next generation of not-as-careful military leaders, that was merely onestep away.

Secondly, and this was a crucial problem, the position and political role of the emperor was very different in Germany and Japan. The Prussian model, as Tamura Yasuoki had explained, was based on the Hegelian notion of an enlightened monarch delegating powers to educated bureaucrats.⁹⁹ The General Staff, fashioned by Helmuth von Moltke and his colleagues as an elite body directly subordinate to the throne, presumed an active monarch taking independent decisions based on

⁹⁸ Kitaoka, "Army," 70; Tobe, *Gyakusetsu*, 58-60, 67-8, 161; Huber, *Revolutionary Origins*, 173-5, 205

⁹⁹ Tamura Yasuoki, "Sensō-ron no Keifu (2): Tōsuiken Chūritsu o megutte," *Kōchi Daigaku Shakai Kagaku* 98 (July, 2010), 2-6, 8-9, 32-3.

professional advice. The power of the monarch was strengthened by the institution of the Military Cabinet, part of the palace apparatus, which controlled the promotions of military personnel. Its orders were binding even without a countersignature by the war minister, that is – it was independent of both the government and the General Staff.¹⁰⁰ Had Yamagata and Katsura established a powerful military cabinet inside the palace, preferably headed by a nobleman with military experience, the emperor might have gained a better institutional leverage over his armed forces. But they did no such thing. During his sojourn in Prussia, Katsura did not have access to the Imperial Palace in Berlin, and was naturally not exposed to the daily activity of the Military Cabinet. Therefore, it is not surprising that this institution was not emphasized in the reports he sent back to Japan.¹⁰¹

Lacking institutional leverage such as an independent palace military cabinet, the Japanese Emperor's day-to-day authority was never as strong, clear or active as the German Emperor's. Malleable as he might have been, Emperor William I was a *de facto* ruler. His was the last word and even Bismarck, at times, had to work hard to persuade him.¹⁰² The Japanese Emperor, by contrast, remained a hazy center up to 1945. The emperor, wrote Inoue Kowashi in a secret position paper, "governs the

¹⁰⁰ Steinberg, *Bismarck*, 163; Craig, *Politics*, 162-3; D.P.G. Hoffmann, "Kommandogewalt und Kriegsminister", *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft / Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* 68:4 (1921), "Kommandogewalt," 743.

¹⁰¹ There is an undated draft in Katsura's papers specifying the precise roles of the emperor's military adjutant. The author of this short draft (only part of it survived) mentioned several different models of this function, one of which closely resembled the Prussian military cabinet. It is unclear if Katsura himself wrote this note, and if so, when. In any case, the role of the military adjutant as it actually developed was limited to relatively weak liaison functions. See: *KTKM* 16:226, *MJPH-NDL*.

¹⁰² See, for example, Craig, *Politics*, 162-4; Bismarck, *Briefe*, 572-3. For several examples of William II's direct involvement in shaping foreign policy, see: Akita/Hirose, "British Model," 416-17.

people, [but] does not personally administer the government." Inoue's position might have been related to the resolution of the Meiji leaders not to involve the emperor in political debates which might undermine his prestige.¹⁰³ The emperor reigns over the realm, wrote Fukuzawa Yukichi, but he does not rule it. "It is disadvantageous for the country to involve our imperial house directly in politics."¹⁰⁴ As Hata Ikuhiko has noted, "in the debates and disputes about *tōsui-ken*, there are no examples of cases when the opinion of the emperor or his interpretation were quoted."¹⁰⁵

The passivity of the emperor made Yamagata's General Staff not only independent but also fragmented, because the various independent military organs did not have a strong monarch able to call them to task.¹⁰⁶ Just like in Germany, they struggled with each other to gain more influence and power, but as the final arbitrator at the throne was rarely active, settlements between them had to be made, as usual in Meiji Japan, through horizontal negotiations. As a result, the military establishment became dominated by an incessant factional struggle – usually between Yamagata's "Chōshū Clique" (more a social than a geographical

¹⁰³ Akira/Hirose, "British Model," 417, compare with Itō, *Commentaries*, 88, warning against a state of affairs as existed in ancient China when "important measures of state were also executed on the authority of an ex-Emperor, of the private wishes of the Emperor, or of written notes of ladies of the Court."

¹⁰⁴ Fukuzawa, "Teishitsu-ron," 26-7.

¹⁰⁵ Hata, *Tōsui-ken*, 26. For additional discussion of this question see: Wetzler, "Kaiser Hirohito," 616-7; Kitaoka, "Army," 70.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Lone's description of the emperor's function during the first Sino-Japanese War (*Katsura*, 39). For a brilliant contemporary analysis of the factional fights under the hazy Imperial center see: Fukuzawa, "Teishitsu-ron," 22-3. For a discussion on the haziness of imperial authority see also Haley, *Authority without Power*, 79-80.

concept) and a successive line of rival factions. The struggle went on even after the gradual demise of the Chōshū Clique in the 1920s between a whole plethora of successive cliques and sub-cliques. Fed by the weakness of the imperial center, debilitating factionalism remained an incurable problem of the Japanese armed forces up to 1945.

Future Repercussions

The *tōsui-ken* system created in 1878, with all of its flaws, was not an accident but rather a rational, effective solution to the problems of the preceding decade. For the future, it was to become virtually impossible for civilian politicians such as Etō Shimpei to rally military units. The chances that one general, such as Saigō Takamori, would be able to accumulate enough power to overthrow the entire system became less likely as well. The peculiar kind of military disobedience which plagued Japan before 1878, based on illicit horizontal connections between politicians and army units, disappeared for a long time. Indeed, it was almost 55 years until a rebellious group attempted to overthrow a government by a violent military revolt again.

For that reason, it would be wrong to draw a straight line between the defiance of Saigō Tsugumichi in 1874, during the Taiwan Expedition, and future, *tōsui-ken*-based disobedience. It is tempting to draw such a line, as both Saigō and later practitioners of military defiance utilized the imperial hazy center in order to justify their behavior. But in 1874, Saigō Tsugumichi did not argue that the army had a special tie to the emperor, or that the government did not have the right to issue orders to the army. He merely claimed that his orders were given in the form of an

imperial rescript, and therefore must be rescinded only by such a rescript – not by a mere cabinet order. In practice, however, he was moved to defiance by the pressure of Satsuma interest groups and armed shizoku volunteers, just the kind of illicit connections that Yamagata tried (with great success) to eliminate in 1878.

But the remedy Yamagata had used had unexpected side effects and his system, as time went on, became increasingly shaky and difficult to control. As many historians have argued, after he and the first generation of leaders departed from the scene, there was virtually no one with adequate social capital to orchestrate all of its components.¹⁰⁷ The peculiar formula of dispersion and consolidation of power chosen by Yamagata, Katsura and others, based on their imperfect understanding of the Prussian model, created a rich background for the future development of military disobedience. The military establishment was consolidated in such a way as to minimize civilian involvement in its professional sphere, without renouncing its right to have its own say in affairs of state.¹⁰⁸ That, in the future, enabled the army leadership to institutionally defy the cabinet.

On the other hand, and this has not yet adequately recognized by historians, power was also dispersed *inside* the military establishment, because the reformers failed to create a clear-cut vertical hierarchy. In the future, this failure would precipitate the phenomena of disobedience inside the officer corps itself, as it was

¹⁰⁷James Crowley, "From Closed Door to Empire: The Formation of the Meiji Military Establishment," in Silberman Bernard S. and Harootunian H.D., eds., *Modern Japanese Leadership: Transition and Change* (Tucson, Ariz.: University of Arizona Press, 1966), 284-5; Ben-Ami Shillony, *Revolt in Japan: The young Officers and the February 26, 1936 Incident* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), 6-7.

¹⁰⁸ Kurono, *Rikugun Daigakkō*, 7.

sometimes highly tempting to defy a commander from a rival military faction. Every faction could claim that it alone understood the will of the hazy Imperial center, and there was no strong overlord to arbitrate between these factions or to bind them to a clear-cut, central authority. The result, as events in the next decades would prove, was a military system prone to the evils of factionalism, defiance, and finally, also assassination and terror.

Chapter Six

Three Puffs on a Cigarette

General Miura Gorō and the Assassination of Queen Min

*This was a matter which I decided in the space of three puffs on a cigarette," [...] whether my behavior was right or wrong, only Heaven can judge."*¹

Lieutenant General Miura Gorō

In the early morning hours of October 8, 1895, the Royal Palace of Seoul was surrounded by Japanese and Korean troops, soldiers of the *Hullyeondae* unit trained by Japanese officers. These troops escorted an elderly Korean prince into the palace grounds in a daring attempt to seize the reins of power from the Queen of Korea and her family. Once the palace was surrounded, a group of Japanese officers, policemen and civilians, broke into the private apartments of Queen Min, hacked her to death with swords, slew several of her court ladies and burned their bodies on the lawn. The crown princess was wounded and beaten, the minister of the royal household slain, and all this horror happened in front of the shocked Korean monarch.

This act of coup d'état and regicide was cold bloodedly planned by the Japanese envoy, Lieutenant General Miura Gorō, along with his legation staff and the owner of the local Japanese newspaper. Not only did Miura fail to ask permission

¹ Miura, *Kanju*, 341, 47. English translation taken in part from Theodore M. Critchfield, *Queen Min's Murder*, (PhD thesis, unpublished: Indiana University, 1975), 94.

of the Japanese Government for such a dramatic operation, he worked hard to keep it in the dark, excluding even the consul of his legation from the plot. After the deed, he lied to the Foreign Ministry about his own involvement, concealing the truth as long as possible. For this blatant defiance of government authority, Miura and his group of cutthroats were ordered back to Japan, arrested and placed on preliminary trial on charges of conspiracy and murder. The Hiroshima Court for Preliminary Inquiries, however, ruled that the evidence was "insufficient" to open formal proceedings.

The murder of Queen Min was far from the worst atrocity committed by the Japanese Empire, even by the standards of the Meiji Period. Only shortly beforehand, during the First Sino-Japanese War, General Ōyama's Second Army had perpetrated a massacre in the Chinese city of Port Arthur, in which several thousands of civilians were killed.² But Unlike the nameless victims of Port Arthur, Queen Min was a famous individual. Her brutal murder, along with those of her female attendants, struck a chord with both contemporary and later observers, maybe because it sat so well with the "damsel in distress" theme prevalent in Western imagination. In recent decades, the queen has increasingly been depicted as a martyr in South Korean popular culture as well, being the subject of novels, movies, a television drama and even a musical.³

² Drea, *Army*, 86-7.

³ On the reception of Queen Min in contemporary South Korea see: Tatiana Simbirtseva, "Ubiistvo v Dvortse Kyonbokkun", *Vostochnaya Kolleksiya* 3:18 (Autumn 2004), 129; Hata Ikuhiko, "Binhi Satsugai Jiken no saikōsatsu", *Seikei Kenkyū* 43:2, 59-61; Shimamura Hatsuyoshi, "Zai Korian no Mune no uchi: Binhi Ansatsu to Seiryaku Kekkon: Chōsen Heigō 100 toshi wo mukae", *Kairo* 2010:3, p.164. The assassination of Queen Min resonated strongly in 1972, almost eighty years later, when the wife of President Pak Chong-hee was shot dead by a Korean resident of Japan. After the event, Korean demonstrators accused Japan of "murdering our empress again". For the testimony of the Japanese

The dramatic events of October 8, 1895, as we shall see, have a historical significance far exceeding their sensational dramatic character. In fact, they were a historical conjuncture, a meeting of several factors joining together to produce dire consequences. That fateful autumn morning saw the convergence of two distinct roads of violent disobedience. One, from "above", was the military *tōsui-ken* tradition, brought to Korea by Miura Gorō, a former general who led, to a large extent, his own private foreign policy. However, Miura – a person known for his consistent opposition to the Meiji leaders – had given this tradition a twist of disdainful defiance. Miura's attitude converged with an altogether different tendency, that of defiance from "below" – the *shishi* tradition of grass-root rebels and assassins, whose political optimism tempted them to believe that problems could and should be solved by the elimination of prominent individuals.

Finally, *tōsui-ken* defiance from "above" combined with *shishi* optimism from "below" in a joint operation of "escape to the front", an attempt to honor the emperor and fulfill the goals of national policy faster and better than the allegedly hesitant Tokyo Government.⁴ This, as we shall see, had ominous consequences for

ambassador to Korea at the time see: Tsunoda Fusako, *Binhi Ansatsu: Chōsen Ōchō maki no Kokubo* (Tokyo: Shinchō Bunko, 1993), 16-17.

⁴ "Sugimura Fukashi nado Hikoku Jiken Chijutsusho" (hereafter quoted as "Sugimura Chinjutsusho"), in *Chōsen Kōshō Shiryō*, Itō Hirobumi. ed., (Tokyo: Hisho Ruisan Kankōkai, 1936), 2:526-7, 33 (hereafter cited as *CKS*); Kobayakawa Hideo, *Bingō Soraku Jiken*, 35. This handwritten manuscript, a first-hand account written by a participant in the palace raid, was probably composed shortly after the annexation of Korea in 1910. its modern Japanese translation, published fifty years later in a non-fiction collection, was believed by some scholars to be faked (Critchfield, *Murder*, 8-9), but the original was rediscovered later and bequeathed to the National Diet Library by a descendent of Adachi Kenzō. Critchfield argued, among other things, that one of its paragraphs seems to be a paraphrase from Adachi Kenzō's memoir, but the reason is clear: Adachi's notes on the manuscript may show, as Kim Moonja rightly assumed (*Chōsen Ōhi Satsugai to Nihonjin: Dare ga shikunde dare ga Jikkō shita no ka*, Tokyo: Kōbunken, 2009, 284-5), that Kobayakawa had used it as a source for his own memoirs. The classical Japanese original is kept in the Modern Japanese Political History Materials Reading Room at the National Diet Library, Tokyo, Shushū Bunsho, no.1195).

the future, as the borderline between the army and grassroots violent activists became increasingly blurred, resulting in the delegation of military power to the hands of dubious private agents. This process was to repeat itself again in later years, on a much larger scale, hand in hand with the increasing expansion of the Japanese Empire.

In order to demonstrate this point, we shall closely examine the Queen Min assassination affair as a multi-layered event. We will first discuss the historical and political background of late Choson Korea, an extremely violent society in which political assassinations were almost routine, then we will turn to the three components comprising the event itself: the strategy advocated by Japan's professional diplomats in Seoul in face of the dire situation in 1895, the personality and influence of Miura Gorō, and the activity of the *sōshi*, the political ruffians who killed the queen. The plot, as we shall see, was dependent on each of these three components. The decision to kill the queen was born out of their combination on that blood-soaked early morning of October 8, 1895.

Setting the Stage: The Korean Monarch as a Disrespected Center

The drama of October 10, 1895, cannot be understood separately from the historical and political background of the kingdom in which it took place. Korea was ruled for several decades by King Gojong, who replaced his late predecessor on the throne in 1864. As he was merely a boy of twelve at the time, the affairs of the

kingdom were actually managed by his blood father, Heungseon, better known by his official title, *daewongun*. Ten years later, at age 22, Gojong officially became a ruling king.

In theory, the Kingdom of Choson, as Korea was known at the time, was an absolute monarchy. Ruled for centuries by the Yi Dynasty, it was a suzerainty of China, but according to established tradition the Chinese rarely interfered in its day-to-day affairs, entrusting them instead to the discretion of the king. From 1873, Gojong became known as a weak individual, "more or less a non-entity", as Itō Hirobumi put it later.⁵ Replacing the formal regency of the *daewongun*, the king "ruled" the country but in practice was puppeteered by court factions, powerful ministers, his first consort Queen Min (Myeongseong) and her family members. "Unfortunately for the land," wrote the British observer Isabella Bird, "he [the king] is persuadable by the last person who gets his ear."⁶ After the country was forcibly opened by the Japanese in 1876, the foreign envoys, Japanese, Chinese, Russians and Americans, joined the struggle for hegemony in Seoul.

The "opening of Korea" resulted in a game of musical chairs between the foreign powers, as each dominated the court in turn. The Japanese gradually gained a foothold in the early 1880s, and were almost expelled by the Chinese in 1884, only to return a decade later as a result of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-5). By then, the

⁵ Ernst Satow to Lord Salisbury, 23.10.1895, in George A. Lensen, *Korea and Manchuria between Russia and Japan: the Observations of Sir Ernst Satow, British Minister Plenipotentiary to Japan (1895-1900) and China (1900-1906)* (Tallahassee, Florida: 1966), 52. Compare with the description of Isabella Bird, *Korea and her Neighbours* (Bristol/Tokyo: Ganesha publishing, Edition Synapse), 2:43-4.

⁶ Bird, *Korea* 2:43-4.

Russian Empire had emerged as a dominant power, and squabbled with the Japanese over the Korean spoils. But even during the decade of Chinese dominance, and certainly afterwards, no single power was ever able to dominate Korea entirely, and several government ministries as well as military units were controlled by different countries or foreign advisors, who had their own independent agendas.

But the Korean game was internal as well as external. Almost every foreign power had its own Korean allies, and the alliances between internal factions and foreign countries constantly shifted and changed. Indeed, the royal weakness expressed itself not only in foreign policy, but also internally. There was rarely a time when the king dared to resist a faction that controlled the palace. Therefore occupying the royal residence became a routine way of taking power. In 1882, traditionalist forces led by the *daewongun* occupied the royal palace and executed their rivals.⁷ In 1884 reformist groups, with the support of elements from the Japanese Legation and idealist students from Keiō University repeated this exercise, treating their rivals in the same manner of murderous brutality.⁸ And in some of these cases, confidants, ministers and close advisors of the king were executed on the palace grounds, sometimes before his very eyes.⁹

The manifest weakness of the royal center had given rise to a factionalism even more debilitating than in Japan. As there was nothing to bind the Korean

⁷ Woonsang Choi, *The Fall of the Hermit Kingdom* (Doobs Ferry, N.Y.: Oceana Publications, 1967), 17-19; Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995), 54.

⁸ Choi, *Hermit Kingdom*, 21-3; Critchfield, *Murder*, 31-7.

⁹ Critchfield, *Murder*, 37.

factions to each other, neither a strong state hierarchy nor even the *myth* of an omnipotent imperial center, factional strife in late Choson Korea was governed by the rule of "the winner takes all."¹⁰ The ambition of each faction, wrote Homer Hulbert, an American missionary with an intimate knowledge of the Seoul court, "was to gain a place where, under the protection of the government, he might first get revenge upon his enemies and then, secondly, seize upon their wealth."¹¹ That was true in varying degrees for almost all factions, reformist and conservative alike, regardless of their affiliation and declared ideals.

Yet, the system of the disrespected royal center had other peculiarities which gave Queen Min certain advantages over rival faction leaders. Disrespected as it may have been, the king was still the center. The power of Queen Min derived from the fact that, by definition, she was constantly close to the king. Other factions may have controlled the cabinet, but she had dominance over the Royal Court.¹² Even the most powerful minister, the king's own father, could be exiled either inside or outside Korea, and he actually was – several times. The queen, by contrast, could not be separated for long from the king unless demoted to the status of a commoner, and it was difficult to convince Gojong to do that.¹³

¹⁰ Sugimura Fukashi, *Meiji 28 nen Zaikan Kushinroku* (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1981), 146-7.

¹¹ Homer B. Hulbert, *The Passing of Korea* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1969), 47. For a similar description see Choi, *Hermit Kingdom*, 15.

¹² For more information of the tension between cabinet and court see: Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 147; Ishizuka Eizō, "Chōsen Jijō Chōsa (Kadai)", in *Miura Gorō Kankei Monjo*, Yamamoto Shirō, ed. (Tokyo: Meiji Shiryō Kenkyū Renrakukai, 1960), 72-3 (hereafter cited as *MGKM*).

¹³ D'Anethan to De Bulet, 10.10.1895, in Lensen, George A., *The D'Anethan Dispatches from Japan, 1894-1910: The Observations of Baron Albert d'Anethan, Belgian Minister Plenipotentiary and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps* (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1967), 54; *NSSS-M* 2:214.

Queen Min evoked contradictory feelings in different observers, but no one doubted the force of her personality. "She was wise and highly energetic," wrote the Russian envoy Karl Weber.¹⁴ The traveler Isabella Bird, who met her several months before her death, remembered that her "eyes were cold and keen, and the general expression [was] one of brilliant intelligence."¹⁵ By her cunning and charisma, she obtained constant access to the center and was able to exercise significant influence on politics – by no way absolute, and varying according to circumstances, but influential she always was.¹⁶

By 1894 there were numerous political factions in Korea, forming a highly complicated map of rivalries and shifting alliances. Factions constantly split, individuals moved from one group to another, and the groups were aligned towards different foreign powers at different times. The **Min faction**, centered around the queen and her family, enjoyed dominance and considerable influence on the throne. This faction cooperated closely with the Chinese, whilst they retained their power in Korea. Later, it tilted towards an alliance with Russia.¹⁷ The **reformists**, who had seen

¹⁴ K.I. Weber, envoy in Seoul, to the Foreign Ministry, St. Petersburg, 29.11.1895, reproduced in *Rossīia i Koreiā : nekotorye stranītsy istorii (konets XIX veka) : k 120-letīiu ustanovleniā diplomaticheskikh otnoshenīi*, A.V. Turkunov, ed., (Moskva: Moskovskii gos. institut mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenīi (Universitet) MID Rossii, 2004), 315 (hereafter cited as *RIK*).

¹⁵ Bird, *Korea* 2:39. For a similar description of the queen see Afanasii Seredin-Sabatin, to the Russian deputy consul in Chifu (Yantai), 30.10.1895, Arhiv Venshnei Politiki Rossiskei Imperii (hereafter cited as *AVPRI*), Fond 143, Opis 141, Kitaiskii Stol, attachment to number 121-1895 (hereafter cited as *Sabatin's report AVPRI*), 20.

¹⁶ Simbirtseva, "Ubistvo", 139.

¹⁷ Weber to the Foreign Ministry, 29.11.1895, *RIK*, 315. In the 1890s, as a result of economic interests, the building of the Trans-Siberian railway and a new, aggressive ideology of manifest destiny (advocated by a school called the "Easterners", *Vostochniki*), Russia became greatly interested in the Far East. Korea, who could supply an ice-free harbor and thus access to the Pacific, was especially important in the larger Russian schemes. For background see: Andrew Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy, 1881-1904* (New York: Octagon Books, 1977), 41-93.

Japan as a model for the future development of Korea, had not recovered since the failure of their coup d'état in 1884. Their exiled leader, Pak Yonghyo, was still in Japan as a political fugitive. Finally, there was the faction of the *daewongun*, the old arch-conservative, marginalized, frustrated and practically confined to his rural villa in Kongdok-ri. Formerly an implacable enemy of Japan, by 1895 the *daewongun* was glad to cooperate with anyone ready to restore his former power.¹⁸

The Impending Crisis: Japan's Dilemma in Korea

With the failure of the pro-Japanese coup of 1884, Japan became a relatively marginal factor in Korean politics, though it retained a strong economic foothold in the country. The Tianjin Agreement, signed in April 1885, secured Korean "independence", and China and Japan agreed to consult each other before sending troops to the kingdom. In practice, however, China did not honor the agreement, and dominated Korean politics throughout that decade.¹⁹ The Japanese, increasingly unhappy with that arrangement, were reluctant to confront China on the peninsula. In 1894, however, a peasant rebellion led by a xenophobic religious sect called the *Donghak* (Eastern Learning), reshuffled the cards of the Korean game. Though the *Donghaks* were supported by a number of Japanese adventurers, they were in essence deeply hostile to Japan. Their military achievements, therefore, alarmed the Japanese Government, which dispatched an expeditionary force to check their advance. The risky attempt of Japan's foreign minister, Mutsu Munemitsu, to use

¹⁸ Duus, *Abacus*, 52-5, 88-9; Critchfield, *Murder*, 60. For a concise description of the sectional map in Seoul by a contemporary witness, see the report of the Russian architect Sabatin, *Sabatin Report – AVPRI*, 19-21.

¹⁹ Malozemoff, *Policy*, 56; Duus, *Abacus*, 54-5.

this as an opportunity to challenge Chinese dominance in the peninsula resulted in a war between the two powers.²⁰

After a chain of military victories on land and sea, Japan won the war with China in the spring of 1895, but the Chinese departure from Korea left the Japanese statesmen in a dilemma as for their future policy. As several scholars have already written, Japan did not have a pre-ordained plan to annex Korea, though this option, always on the table, was increasingly growing in popularity among the Japanese elites.²¹ The military consensus in Japan, shaped by strategic thinkers such as Yamagata Aritomo, had seen Korea as a security threat, "a dagger pointed at the heart of Japan." And therefore Japan was unwilling to see a foreign power, such as China or Russia, dominating Korea politically or militarily. Since, according to this line of thinking, the chaos in Korea was likely to tempt such foreign powers to intervene, Japan was obliged to insist on far-reaching reforms in order to safeguard Korea's "independence." In this context, as Peter Duus has noted, the meaning of the word "independence" was Korea's disengagement from any foreign power apart from Japan.²²

During the war, in the summer of 1894, the Japanese envoy to Korea, Ōtori Keisuke, decided to overthrow the Korean government, dominated by the queen and her pro-Chinese Min faction. He therefore struck a deal with the *daewongun*,

²⁰ Malozemoff, *Policy*, 52-6; Andre Schmid, *Korea between Empires, 1895-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 25-7; Duus, *Abacus*, 68-70.

²¹ Duus, *Abacus*, 425. Regarding the development of the idea of annexing Korea, see for example the discussion held on 26 September, 1895, between British Envoy Ernst Satow and Prime Minister Itō, Satow to Salisbury, 27.9.1895, reproduced in Lensen, *Satow*, 44-5.

²² Duus, *Abacus*, 49-52, 64-5 (the paraphrase is from pp.69-70).

allowing him to occupy the royal palace with the assistance of Japanese troops. This attack, generally in line with Japanese foreign policy, was nothing new or surprising, as the palace had been occupied several times in the past by various factions. The king and the queen were unharmed, and Ōtori's emissary, first secretary of the legation Sugimura Fukashi, even turned down the *daewongun's* request to assassinate his Min rivals.²³ But the old prince, ossified conservative as he was, failed to satisfy Japanese demands for reform, and the queen quickly regained her former influence. His policy in shambles, Ōtori was replaced by former Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru, one of the founding fathers of the Meiji regime and an experienced politician with immense prestige.²⁴

Inoue attempted an altogether different policy to Ōtori's. A short while after his arrival, he proclaimed a new strategy, forcing the king to exclude *both* the queen and the *daewongun* from politics.²⁵ However, the astute Inoue soon recognized that unlike the *daewongun*, the proximity of the queen to the throne could not be ignored, so he shifted gears. Giving up on his insistence that the queen should be excluded, he now attempted to co-opt her into his plans, creating a delicate balance between her and the other political factions.²⁶ On the one hand, as a token of reconciliation, he offered her a large monetary endowment and promised her

²³ NSSS-M 2:212; "Sugimura Chinjutsusho", CKS 2:530; Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 46-7, 54, 8.

²⁴ NSSS-M 2:212; Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 71-4, 86-7; "Sugimura Chinjutsusho", CKS 2:533.

²⁵ Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 90-4, 6-7. And see article 4 of the Korean declaration of independence as cabled by the American envoy in Seoul. John M.B. Sill to the Secretary of State, 17.1.1895, *Korean American-Relations: Documents Pertaining to the Far-Eastern Diplomacy of the United States*, ed. George M. McCune (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2:350 (hereafter cited as *KAR*).

²⁶ "Okamoto Jinmon", CKS 2:470; Tsunoda, *Binhi Ansatsu*, 277.

Japanese protection whenever she felt herself in jeopardy. Unlike other male diplomats, Inoue was also able to meet the secluded Queen face to face.²⁷ On the other hand, to balance her power, he brought the leader of the reformist faction back from his exile in Japan, and installed him as home minister and later as prime minister. All in all, he strived towards the same goals as his predecessors: reforming Korea in order to forestall future rebellions and "secure its independence" from any foreign power except for Japan.²⁸

In spring 1895, however, Inoue's policy began to encounter difficulties. Japan was winning decisive military victories over Qing China, culminating in the removal of Chinese influence in Korea via the Shimonoseki Treaty of April 17, 1895. Japanese power on the peninsula, however, suffered a setback six days later, when the empire had to bow to the "Triple Intervention" of Russia, France and Germany and give up the Liaotung Peninsula, the main territorial gain obtained in the wake of the Sino-Japanese War.²⁹ Souring the impression of Japanese victory, the Triple Intervention prompted the queen to increasingly turn to Russian help and advice to counter the Japanese.³⁰ At the same time, the influence of the Japanese advisors in the various

²⁷ Kuzu Yoshihisa (Kokuryūkai) ed., *Tōa Senkaku Shishi Kiden* (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1933-6) 1:520 (hereafter cited as *TSSK*); Ko Teung Chai Pan-So, Supreme Court, to Justice Minister Yi Pom Chin, "Official Report on Matters connected with the Events of October 8th, 1895, and the Death of the Queen" (hereafter cited as "Official Korean Investigation"), reproduced in *The Korean Repository*, Seoul (hereafter cited as *TKR*) 3(1896):131-2; Adachi Kenzō, *Adachi Kenzō Jijoden* (Tokyo: Shinjusha, 1960), 52.

²⁸ Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 89-105; The gist of Inoue's intended reforms is well illustrated in a memorandum penned by Ishizuka Eizō, a Japanese advisor to the Korean cabinet, written during Inoue's tenure (precise date unknown), "Chōsen Jijō Chōsa (Kadai)", *MGKM*, 72-80.

²⁹ *NSSS-M* 2:211; Satow to Salisbury, 27.9.1895, in Lensen, *Satow*, 45. On the triple intervention see the detailed description by Malozemoff, *Policy*, 62-8.

³⁰ "Sugimura Chinjutsusho", *CKS* 2:529; Hata, "Binhi Satsugai", 70.

Korean ministries quickly diminished, and they found themselves increasingly ignored. They started appealing the legation to do *something* to improve their standing.³¹

Meanwhile, the security situation in the country went from bad to worse. Not only was the countryside, plagued by incessant violence, floods and cholera, extremely difficult to control, but the Korean Army itself did not have a semblance of unity.³² Different units were loyal to different factions, and even worse – to different foreign states and foreign advisors. Two battalions of the army, known as the *Hullyeondae*, were trained and held by the Japanese. The Palace Guard and the police, by contrast, were loyal to the Min faction. Therefore, their relations with the *Hullyeondae* were stained with animosity. Clashes between the police and *Hullyeondae* troops became common throughout the summer of 1895, an ill omen that was crucial to subsequent events.³³

The Beginning of a Plan: Dissent of the Professionals

Sugimura Fukashi, who was legation first secretary and acting envoy by the summer of 1895, had been a dominating presence in the Seoul legation since the early 1880s. A veteran of the Taiwan Expedition, he gradually won a reputation as an experienced Korean hand, and his name was widely known in Japanese foreign policy circles. His constant presence in Seoul certainly contributed to his renown.³⁴

³¹ TSSK 1:514-8.

³² Tsunoda, *Binhi Ansatsu*, 276-7.

³³ "Hullyeondae Kidō ni tsuite An zen-Gunmudaijin Naihō", 18.8.1895, *MGKM*, 84-5.

³⁴ Duus, *Abacus*, 67.

Accordingly, when Sugimura turned against Inoue and his conciliatory policy, the latter's status in Seoul became difficult to maintain.³⁵ Unlike Inoue, Sugimura had constantly advocated a relentless struggle against the Min faction – which he saw as the source of all evil, corruption and tyranny in Korea, and to defeat the queen he was even ready to ally with the conservative *daewongun*, Japan's former enemy.³⁶

Another related group of key actors was the cohort of Japanese advisors to the Korean Court and government ministries. These people were closely tied to the Japanese Legation; so closely tied, in fact, that they must be seen as an integral part of their country's diplomatic corps, in comparison to other foreign advisors, from Germany or America for example, who were more independent in the field.³⁷ The most influential member of this group was Okamoto Ryūnosuke, veteran of the Satsuma Rebellion. In 1878, as a battalion commander, he became complicit in the Takebashi Incident, the soldier's uprising which shook the Japanese leadership. After the uprising had failed, Okamoto survived a suicide attempt.³⁸ He was not executed, but barred from ever joining the army or the civil service again. In 1895, however, he had played an altogether different role as advisor to the Korean Court.³⁹ Later defined by Miura as an "expert to the *daewongun*", he was the contact person

³⁵ "Sugimura Chinjutsusho", *CKS* 2:530.

³⁶ Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 89-90.

³⁷ Adachi, *Jijōden*, 53-4; "Sugimura Chinjutsusho", *CKS* 2:527.

³⁸ Nakusa Morio, *Uyoku Rōnin Tōjō: Okamoto Ryūnosuke no Hikari to Kage* (Tokyo: Sōfūsha, 1980), 27.

³⁹ "Rikugun Shosa Okamoto Ryūnosuke hoka san me no Shokei", 22.3.1879, *NA-JP*, Gyōsei Bunsho, Naikaku-Sōrifu, Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:6, 2A-009-0, Hitoe 00659100; Tsunoda, *Binhi Ansatsu*, 21-4; Yamagata Hojirō, "Chōsen Ōhi Jiken", *Gunji Kenkyū* 3:1 (1938), 45-54 (the testimony of General Kususe Yukihiko, as related to Yamagata), 48.

between the Japanese legation and the discredited prince, keeping the communication channels between the two sides intact. "Without Okamoto," Miura had said, "it was impossible to do anything with the *daewongun*, everybody knew that."⁴⁰ But as long as Inoue was the envoy, Okamoto could not convince the legation to form such an alliance. The advisor, therefore, was greatly frustrated with the envoy's policy of balance. As he testified later, "it was inadvisable to wait for Inoue to make up his mind."⁴¹

Events in the summer of 1895 gave the plan an air of urgency. In July, Inoue returned to Tokyo for consultations, and his policy, already in difficulties, quickly collapsed in his absence. The pro-Japanese, reformist prime minister, feeling, as Sugimura had put it, that he was "sitting on a volcano", decided to act on his own accord against the Min faction.⁴² But his plot was discovered and the coup plan soon collapsed. The prime minister was subsequently dismissed by the king and escaped to Japan.⁴³ Inoue hurried back to Korea and attempted to reinstate working relations with the queen, but his clock was already ticking fast. In fact, Okamoto had secretly written to Tokyo and asked that Inoue be replaced by someone like General Tani Kanjō or General Miura Gorō.⁴⁴ Both men, members of the conservative opposition,

⁴⁰ "Miura Jinmon" in *CKS* 2:420.

⁴¹ "Okamoto Jinmon" in *CKS* 2:455. Regarding the mutual hatred of Inoue and the *daewongun* see: Horiguchi Kumaichi, *Gaikō to Bungei* (Tokyo: Daiichi Shobō, 1934), 128-9; Nakusa, *Uyoku*, 364.

⁴² Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 148; Hata, "Binhi Satsugai", 70-1.

⁴³ *NSSS-M* 2:214-5.

⁴⁴ "Okamoto Jinmon", "Sugimura Chinjutsusho", *CKS* 2:462, 529-30.

were political rivals of Inoue and the other Meiji oligarchs. After some debates, the government accepted Okamoto's plea and replaced Inoue with Miura.

Why exactly Miura Gorō was appointed envoy to Korea is a matter of serious controversy among historians. The fact that Inoue, his predecessor, warmly recommended him was interpreted by some as "proof" of Inoue's complicity in the plot to kill the queen, but this assumption cannot be substantiated.⁴⁵ Inoue was probably looking for someone inexperienced and easy to manipulate behind the scenes, as he indeed tried to manipulate the new envoy, unsuccessfully, in the first weeks of September.⁴⁶ Foreign Minister Mutsu strongly resisted the appointment, other cabinet ministers supported it, and finally Prime Minister Itō decided to approve it, based on a recommendation from General Tani Kanjō, Miura's colleague in the conservative opposition.⁴⁷

General Tani's responsibility for Miura's appointment is tinged with sad irony. A hero of the Taiwan Expedition and the Satsuma Rebellion, Tani had called for an occupation of Taiwan and South China in 1874. Since then, however, he had become a staunch anti-imperialist, the only major military figure consistently opposing territorial expansion.⁴⁸ In his letter to Prime Minister Itō, Tani emphasized the need for Miura to stop interfering in Korean affairs, restrain the *sōshi*, the Japanese political ruffians who roamed the Korean countryside, and stop treating Korea as if it

⁴⁵ Hata, "Binhi Satsugai", 73.

⁴⁶ Critchfield, *Murder*, 88.

⁴⁷ Hata, "Binhi Satsugai", 76-7.

⁴⁸ Teters, *Conservative Opposition*, 36-8.

belonged to Japan. Additionally, he emphasized, Miura was to be accompanied by a worthy advisor, the writer, journalist, and Harvard graduate, Shiba Shirō.⁴⁹

Thus, when Miura arrived in Seoul in September, he carried with him contradictory expectations. General Tani, his friend in the conservative opposition, had hoped he would be softer than Inoue. Softer, that is, to the Koreans, and stricter with the lawless elements in the Japanese community.⁵⁰ Okamoto, however, expected him to be more hawkish, bellicose and "resolute" than Inoue was. It was up to the new envoy and his advisor, Shiba, to decide which of the two roles to fulfill.

Navigating without a Compass: Miura Gorō in Seoul

Miura Gorō, originally a Chōshū retainer, began his political career as a protégée of Kido Takayoshi. The embittered, ailing Chōshū leader saw great promise in his young colleague. "Miura is a sincere man, reserved in speech, my true friend," he wrote in his diary in 1877, pleased with his protégée's military success in the war against Saigō Takamori, "and he reveres me as an elder brother. I have long deplored that his ability has remained undiscovered while sycophants of clever words were promoted in office." Kido was particularly impressed by the fact that Miura was the only commander who was able to keep "strict discipline" in his camp.⁵¹ The excerpts

⁴⁹ Tani to Itō, July 1895 (day unclear), *TKI* 2:599-600. For discussion and analysis, see Kim, *Chōsen*, 104-7; Hata, "Binhi Satsugai", 76-7.

⁵⁰ After the assassination, Tani was shocked, dismayed and deeply disappointed by Miura's behavior. See *TKI*; Hata, "Binhi Satsugai", 78-9.

⁵¹ *DKT* 3:477.

from Kido's diary are interesting, as his impressions of Miura were radically different from the notoriety he acquired in later years. Miura, universally known for his crude and direct style, was anything but "reserved in speech". One may guess that Yamagata, whose policy Miura attacked by every possible means, would not have described him as very disciplined either.

Known to later generations mainly for his involvement in the Queen Min assassination affair, Miura is widely perceived as a staunch military expansionist. In fact, he was not. During the 1880s he was one of the most bitter and loud opponents of the government's policy of military expansion, calling instead to keep the army as a small defensive force.⁵² Like his colleagues in the "four generals" faction and the conservative opposition in general, he was highly antagonistic both to the Popular Rights Movement and the government of the Meiji oligarchs, but it seems that his criticism was mostly reserved for the latter. The tradition of Kido Takayoshi, his beloved late teacher, was interpreted by him as a vow to eradicate the Chōshū and Satsuma cliques (*hanbatsu*), and to work for the nation as a whole without any partisan interests. Though he never called to resist the government violently and did not overstep the boundaries of loyal opposition, Miura had always seen the politicians in power as nothing but wirepullers of sinister and selfish "cliques". In addition, being a rude, outspoken man, he never hid his opinion even during his years in active service. For these reasons Yamagata had foiled an attempt of the

⁵² Kitaoka, "army", 71-2; Drea, *Imperial Army*, 65-6; Teters, *Conservative Opposition*, 1-20, 36, 53-4, Hata, "Binhi Ansatsu", 77.

conservative opposition, supported by the emperor, to appoint him as the chief of the General Staff.⁵³

It is therefore unsurprising that such a man was not enthusiastic about following orders from leaders he had loathed and disrespected. "This was a matter which I decided in the space of three puffs on a cigarette," he admitted later in his memoirs, when referring to the assassination of the queen, "I made my decision and resolutely carried it through. I was surprisingly unconcerned about the government at home. [...] Whether my behavior was right or wrong, only Heaven can judge."⁵⁴ Even when he worked for national goals, Miura was always an oppositionist at heart, subordinate to Heaven – not to the government. And that is the key to understanding his later behavior as diplomatic envoy in Seoul.

A man of such a character, ostensibly with minimal diplomatic skills, was put in charge of the Korean situation under difficult, almost impossible conditions.⁵⁵ Miura himself recognized the insurmountable difficulties and his own inability to solve them, and therefore refused the post three times, just as he had turned down a previous request to serve as an envoy in France.⁵⁶ He warned his superiors that he had no knowledge of the current trends in global politics, that he lacked the diplomatic skills, and must follow a clear line of national policy if there was to be any

⁵³ Miura, *Kanju*, 120-3, 350-1; Teters, *Conservative Opposition*, 58-9, 67-8; Toyabe Shuntei, "Miura" in *Shuntei Zenshū* (Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1909) 2:178,80.

⁵⁴ Miura, *Kanju*, 341, 47 (English translation taken in part from Critchfield, *Murder*, 94). Miura used the character 天 (*ten*) implying heaven in a transcendental, religious sense.

⁵⁵ "Sugimura Chinjutsusho", *CKS* 2:530.

⁵⁶ Miura, *Kanju*, 319; "Sugimura Chinjutsusho", *CKS* 2:530-1.

chance of success. The Foreign Ministry failed to answer or to send Miura policy instructions, probably because its leaders, too, were not sure where they were headed. As if anticipating the negligence of the ministry, Miura complained that he was going to Korea as a sailor forced to "navigate the sea without a compass in a moonless, starless night."⁵⁷

Upon his arrival, Miura had to decide how to deal with Queen Min. In his memoirs, he recalled that she was a "highly talented" woman who, bypassing her husband, served as the "true monarch of Korea". At his first royal interview, he noticed that the queen spoke to the king from a rear room behind the throne.⁵⁸ During that interview, Miura declared that unless summoned by the royal couple, he would remain in the legation, copy holy sutras and enjoy the natural beauty of Korea.⁵⁹ Beyond the niceties, Miura strongly suspected that the queen looked down on him as a dim-witted soldier, and planned to take advantage of his weakness to disband the *Hullyeondae*.⁶⁰ If that was indeed the case, his declared intention of turning the legation into a Buddhist retreat certainly strengthened that impression. Needless to say, unlike Inoue, Miura had no chance to personally negotiate with the secluded queen. He recognized her power, but could not approach her – and

⁵⁷ Miura, "Taikan Seisaku ni kan suru Miura Shinkōshi, Ikensho: Taikan Seisaku no Kunrei wo matsu", *Nihon Gaikō Bunsho*, Gaimushō, ed. (Tokyo: Gaimushō Chōsabu, 1947-53), 28:438-9 (hereafter cited as *NGB*). Compare with Sugimura's version in "Chinjutsusho", *CKS* 2:530-2.

⁵⁸ Miura, *Kanju*, 324.

⁵⁹ Tsunoda, *Binhi Ansatsu*, 283-4.

⁶⁰ Miura, *Kanju*, 324-5. Adachi Kenzō, as well, recalled that the Korean Court had treated Miura with disrespect, see *Jijoden*, 56.

therefore felt helpless and clueless.⁶¹ Two other possible solutions, employing a woman to negotiate with the queen or keeping Inoue Kaoru as a diplomatic tutor, were rejected. The idea of using a woman was, according to Miura, "rejected from above", and Inoue was pushed back to Japan. The new envoy was too haughty to accept tutelage.⁶²

The Japanese position in September 1895 was therefore one of weakness. The legation was headed by an inexperienced, ignorant personality. The cohort of professional diplomats and advisors, devoid of leadership, felt powerless to remedy the constantly aggravating situation. Okamoto, for one, believed that a violent showdown was likely to take place sooner or later.⁶³ Barred from the palace, estranged from the queen, lacking allies and outsmarted by the Russians, they were constantly afraid that their last vestige of power, the *Hullyeondae* battalions, would be destroyed altogether, thus sweeping away the remnants of Japanese influence in Korea.⁶⁴ As a result, they yearned for strong measures against the Min faction to prevent the looming disaster. Miura, aggressive by nature, concurred. But for anything, any measure at all, Korean allies were needed, and they were in short supply.

The Korean Counterparts: Miura and the *Daewongun*

⁶¹ "Okamoto Jinmon", *CKS* 2:469.

⁶² Critchfield, *Murder*, 88.

⁶³ "Okamoto Jinmon", *CKS* 2:470-2.

⁶⁴ Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen" *NGB* 28:554.

It was clear to Miura, his colleagues, and the Japanese advisors in the Korean government that nothing could be done in that country without an alliance with at least one Korean faction, preferably more. The most natural allies of the Japanese were the soldiers and officers of the *Hullyeondae*. They were trained by Japan, and their mere livelihood was dependent upon close cooperation with that country. As they were universally seen as a pro-Japanese force, it was clear that they owed their existence to Japanese bayonets.⁶⁵ Colonel Woo Beomseon, commander of the *Hullyeondae's* second battalion, was a particularly trusted ally of the Japanese.⁶⁶ The commander-in-chief of the force, however, was not as reliable. Colonel Hong Kyedong, as it was known, was a confidant of the queen.⁶⁷

But officers of the *Hullyeondae*, useful as they might have been, could not take the rudder of the government in Korea. For that purpose, an alliance with a senior Korean politician was necessary. The Japanese were finally able to secure the cooperation of some cabinet ministers, including the newly appointed prime minister, but that did not seem to be enough. It was also questionable whether such people could do anything by themselves.⁶⁸ They therefore had to acquire an ally with a strong influence over the court, and that could only be the *daewongun*. A channel of communication with the old prince, eager to find new allies, was created through the good services of intermediaries such as Okamoto and the deputy consul of the

⁶⁵ Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 24-6.

⁶⁶ Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 179-80.

⁶⁷ Kikuchi, *Chōsen Ōkoku*, 510-11; Tsunoda, *Binhi Ansatsu*, 315. Hong had personally saved the queen during the coup of 1882. See Critchfield, *Murder*, 25.

⁶⁸ Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 178.

Japanese Legation, who communicated with the classically educated *daewongun* by exchanging essays and poems in literary Chinese.⁶⁹

According to his own version, Miura was very reluctant to cooperate with the *daewongun* at first, and it took some effort to convince him to confirm the alliance.⁷⁰ But as he came with little knowledge of Korea, it was natural that his decisions would be dependent on the consensus already formed by the legation staff. Like Sugimura and the other diplomats he felt the pressure of fast unfolding events. If he dallied, the *Hullyeondae* or the *daewongun* might start a rebellion by themselves, leaving the Japanese on the sidelines. The *daewongun*, Miura emphasized, was also in a dire financial situation, so the time was ripe to pressure him into concessions.⁷¹

Indeed, only the weakness of the Japanese position in Korea and the sense of emerging catastrophe, combined with Okamoto's persuasive power and prior knowledge of the *daewongun*, could justify such an alliance. The *daewongun*, after all, was a highly unattractive ally. An attempt to join forces with him had failed miserably only a year before, after he reneged on all his promises and secretly tried to collaborate with the Chinese. It was this very betrayal which prompted Inoue to halt the cooperation with the old prince, known not only as a conservative and xenophobe, but also as a man with a proven record of guile and lies. The Japanese,

⁶⁹ Horiguchi, *Gaikō to Bungei*, 120-7; "Miura Gorō Jinmon Chōsho" (hereafter cited as "Miura Jinmon") in *CKS* 2:409-11, 20. Compare with Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 48, and Uchida Sadatsuchi, "Ōjō Jihen" *NGB*:555-6 .

⁷⁰ Miura, *Kanju*, 328-9, 46-7. This version is confirmed by the testimony of Okamoto, who took great pains to convince Miura to work with the *daewongun*, see: "Okamoto Jinmon", *CKS* 2:470-1, though in Okamoto's testimony Miura seemed a little bit less reluctant to work with the *daewongun*.

⁷¹ "Miura Jinmon" in *CKS* 2:412-3, "Okamoto Jinmon" in *ibid*, 468-70, 3; Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 171.

Sugimura cautioned Miura, had "got their fingers burned" with the *daewongun* before. Now, however, Miura, Sugimura and their colleagues believed they had no choice. The alliance with the *daewongun* was an act of desperation.⁷²

The new alliance, as Sugimura told one of the Japanese advisers, had to be accompanied by "decisive action" – words would hardly be enough.⁷³ Pieces of the puzzle seemed to fall into place, as the other allies of the Japanese, such as the prime minister and senior officers in the *Hullyeondae*, agreed to cooperate in reinstating the *daewongun* to power.⁷⁴ The negotiations with the old prince took some time, and their final result is still a matter of controversy. Kim Moonja and Tsunoda Fusako may be right in arguing that a solid written agreement with the *daewongun* was never signed, and the text of the agreement, as it appears in Miura's private papers may not be authentic. Certainly, Miura and his advisors had an interest in overplaying the *daewongun's* involvement in order to legitimize their own deeds as a mere attempt to help him.⁷⁵ But the *daewongun's* eagerness to exploit the results of the coup after the assassination of the queen disproves such attempts at apologetics. The *daewongun* was not forced by the Japanese to cooperate, and he had formed a sort of alliance with them; hazy and unwritten, maybe, but an alliance all the same. In any case, it was not until October 5 when the

⁷² Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 171-2; Nio Koreshige to the Finance Minister, 11.10.1895, *CKS* 2:502-4; Kim, *Chōsen*, 326-7.

⁷³ "Okamoto Jinmon", Nio to the Finance Minister, 11.10.1895, *CKS* 2:471-3, 504; Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 171; The text of the agreement with the *daewongun* is reproduced in *ibid*, 172-3.

⁷⁴ Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 178-80.

⁷⁵ Kim, *Chōsen*, 261-2, 75; Tsunoda, *Binhi Ansatsu*, 287-300. The main primary source for the negotiations is the memoirs of Deputy Consul Horiguchi Kumaichi, but their reliability is certainly open to question. See: *Gaikō to Bungei*, 113-34.

Japanese themselves believed that they had won over the *daewongun*. By that time, the decision to kill the queen was already made.⁷⁶

The Fox Hunters: Seoul's *Sōshi* and the Decision to Kill the Queen

The decision to kill the queen was not an inevitable part of the plan devised by "professionals" such as Sugimura and Okamoto. The *daewongun*, after all, could be installed in the palace without much bloodshed, as had actually been done the year before, in 1894. In fact, the idea of killing Queen Min did not originate in the Japanese Legation, but rather among a motley group of Japanese adventurers affiliated with a nationalist organization known as the *Ten'yūkyō* (Heavenly Grace and Chivalry), and a Seoul-based Japanese newspaper.⁷⁷ The plot of October 1895 came into being only when this idea, which came from below, converged with the plans from above devised by Miura and his colleagues.

These people, who finally killed the queen, were known in the Japanese legation and community as *sōshi*, a term which literally means "manly fighters". However, in the 1880s, it became a common tag for "young, politically engaged men who took up the cause of expanding popular rights", most prominently by violent

⁷⁶ The Hiroshima court ascribed the decision to kill the queen to the meeting between Miura, Fujimura and Okamoto on October 3. See: "Decision of the Japanese Court of Preliminary Inquiries" (hereafter cited as "Japanese Court Decision"), *TKR* 3(1896):123. Compare with: "Miura Jinmon" in *CKS* 2:415. For discussion see Hata, "Binhi Satsugai", 82.

⁷⁷ According to Tsunoda (*Binhi Ansatsu*, 347) these sentiments had a widespread echo not only among the *sōshi*, but also in the Seoul Japanese community and among the corps of Japanese advisors. About the formation of the *Tenyūkyō* see: Chae, Soo Do, "'Tenyūkyō' ni kansuru ikōssatsu", *Chūō Daigakuin Kenkyū Nenpō: Hōgaku Kenkyūka*. 30 (February, 2001), 441-2.

means.⁷⁸ The *sōshi*, described by the contemporary press as youths with torn clothes, shabby long hair and dirty countenances, traced their ancestry both to the *shishi* of the 1860s and the *shizoku* rebels of the 1870s, such as Saigō Takamori's Satsuma Army. However, unlike the *shishi*, the term *sōshi* often carried negative connotations closer to the English word "thugs".⁷⁹ No longer interested in full-scale rebellion against the system, the *sōshi* worked for politicians in the Movement for Popular Rights, guarding their assemblies, collecting intelligence and using violence against political rivals of all kinds. Politically, they were associated with two of the guiding ideas of the Movement for Popular Rights: greater political participation for the Japanese people at home, and an assertive foreign policy abroad. Indeed, many of them preferred to see themselves as "heroes" (*yūshi*) or as "commoner *shishi*" (*minkan shishi*) a term that carried clear oppositional, anti-establishment connotations.⁸⁰ As a group with ambiguous goals and unclear means, it was natural for them to imitate the *shishi* both ideologically and organizationally. They too, were violent, optimistic, looked down on careful planning and adored alcohol and exciting adventures.

⁷⁸ Eiko Maruko Siniawer, *Ruffians, Yakuza, Nationalists: The Violent Politics of Modern Japan* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2008), 43. For more information about the term see: Sasaki, *Shishi to Kanryō*, 113-5.

⁷⁹ Sasaki, *Shishi no Kanryō*, 113-16. See especially: Tokutomi Sōhō, editorial in *Kokumin no Tomo 7* (August, 1887), "Sōshiron", *Shinonome Shinbun*, 23.1.1888, both reproduced in Sasaki, *Shishi to Kanryō*, 253-7.

⁸⁰ Kikuchi Kenjō, *Chōsen Ōkoku* (Tokyo: Minyūsha, 1896), 503; *TSSK* 1:517; Chae, "Ten'yūkyō", 440, 45-7. For discussion about the terminology see Tsunoda, *Binhi Ansatsu*, 302-3. Kobayakawa, for example, had used the terms *dōshi* (brethren), *yūshi* or *minkan shishi* to describe his friends, while the term *sōshi* is used to describe the regular soldiers from both sides. See: *Bingō*, 41, 52, 75, 88, 91-2.

During the 1880s several *sōshi* immigrated to Korea under the aegis of a local Japanese law firm, in fact a center for nationalist ruffianism. There, in the new Japanese settlement, the social gap between the *sōshi* and the other settlers was not as large as in Japan, and as a group of bravados in a dangerous world they enjoyed much greater prestige. Japanese in Korea possessed the right of extraterritoriality, so the *sōshi* were not bound to Korean law. Members of the *Tenyūkyō* roamed the Korean countryside, helped anti-government rebels and engaged in brawls, often treating the local villagers roughly. The Korean countryside was lawless in any case, and the local police did not have any right to arrest or to try them. As the Japanese Legation and army command recognized their usefulness as freelance intelligence agents, Japanese law enforcers turned a blind eye to their activities. After they robbed explosives from a Japanese-owned mine, the legation denounced them as brigands, but did nothing tangible to stop them.⁸¹

Many of the *sōshi* were educated professionals of samurai background: pharmacists, monks, teachers, lawyers, martial artists and writers. Others were simply unemployed adventurers or professional toughs in the "silent house" (*Museikan*), the *sōshi* band of the opposition's Freedom Party.⁸² A significant number were journalists in Seoul, working in a Korean-Japanese bilingual propaganda newspaper, published by the reporter Adachi Kenzō under the auspices of the

⁸¹ Chae, "Tenyūkyō", 442, 45; Siniawer, *Ruffians*, 55-6. For good descriptions of the *Tenyūkyō* see also 66; Benesch, *Inventing the Way*, 68-9; Kang Ching-Il, "Tenyūkyō to 'Chōsen Mondai': 'Chōsen Rōnin' no Tōgaku Nōmin Sensō e no Taiō to kanren shite", *Shigaku Zasshi* 97:8 (1988), 1322-35

⁸² Terasaki Yasukichi (alias Takahashi Genji), "Terasaki-shi Sekijitsudan" in Itō Chiyū, *Itō Chiyū Zenshū* (Tokyo: Heibonsha), 12:439-40; Kang, "Tenyūkyō", 1325-6, 42

Japanese Legation.⁸³ The reporters and editors of *Kanjō Shinpō*, led by Adachi and his chief editor, Kunitomo Shigeaki, were socially tied to members of the *Tenyūkyō*. Importantly, most of them came from Kumamoto, a Kyushu city looking toward Korea from the other side of the narrow sea. Influenced by the strong imperialist sentiments prevalent in this prefecture, the Kumamoto *sōshi* were known to be relentless advocates of military expansionism, associated with the nationalist Kumamoto *Kokken-tō* (Kumamoto State Power Party).⁸⁴ Adachi and his toughs had also a rich history of violence. Being involved in the anti-government campaign during the debate on the unequal treaties, they changed sides in 1892 and employed violence against oppositionists in behalf of the Home Ministry. During the Sino-Japanese War, Adachi, with some fellow military correspondents, was reportedly involved in a massacre of Chinese merchants.⁸⁵ Now, the newspaper *Kanjō Shinpō* became a new center for ruffianism. The Harvard graduate Shiba Shirō, Miura's personal advisor, joined the newspaper as a reporter. Not only did he not help his boss to fight the *sōshi*, as Tani Kanjō had expected, but he ended up becoming a *sōshi* himself.⁸⁶

The *sōshi* had long clamored for a more hawkish policy, and were highly unsympathetic to Inoue's conciliatory diplomacy.⁸⁷ Closely following the tradition of

⁸³ "Sasa Jinmon", *CKS* 2:487.

⁸⁴ Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 41-2, 6-7; Hata, "Binhi Satsugai", 82-3.

⁸⁵ Kim, *Chōsen*, 298-301.

⁸⁶ *TSSK* 1:517; Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 46-7; Kang, "Tenyūkyō", 1329

⁸⁷ *TSSK* 1:516-7.

shishi political optimism, they had no patience for the complicated strategies of professional diplomats. Korea, as far as they were concerned, was a depraved society without effective laws, fallen from its past grandeur, full of evil and corruption which had to be eradicated by force. It was also, however, a civilization similar to that of Japan, a sister country which had to be redeemed.⁸⁸ Just like the assassins of Iwakura in 1874, the *sōshi* believed that radical change for the better could be made by getting rid of specific individuals, who were demonized accordingly. For the journalists of the *Kanjō Shinpō* and their friends, the demon was Queen Min.⁸⁹

Political concerns mixed with misogyny, as the powerful woman was seen not only as a political rival about to "sell" Korea to the Russians, but also as an unworldly, demonic presence.⁹⁰ Adachi Kenzō, the owner of *Kanjō Shinpō* and the leader of this group of *sōshi*, described her in his memoirs as "that bewitching beauty, who cunningly, ubiquitously and treacherously manipulated virtuous men for over a generation."⁹¹ Kikuchi Kenjō wrote about her in the same vein as the "wickedness at the king's side" (*Ōgawa no Kanja*) that had to be swept away.⁹² According to the retrospective account of the nationalist organization *Kokuryūkai*, a society closely

⁸⁸ A good example for this worldview is a book written one year after the incident by Kikuchi Kenjō, one of the *sōshi* who reinvented himself later as a popular historian of Korea. See: *Chōsen Ōkoku*, 159-61, and also Kang, "Tenyūkyō", 1343-5. For the larger context of this type of Japanese image see Schmid, *Korea*, 116-17, 21-3, as well as Duus, *Abacus*, 59-60.

⁸⁹ Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 33; Kang, "Tenyūkyō", 1345.

⁹⁰ Kikuchi, *Chōsen Ōkoku*, 504; Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 33.

⁹¹ Adachi, *Jijoden*, 62.

⁹² Kikuchi, *Chōsen Ōkoku*, 503.

associated with the *Tenyūkyō* and one of the best sources for the *sōshi* mentality of the time, the queen was a "vampire woman" (*yōfu no jōsei*), "a master of plots, sly, jealous and cruel". The account admitted that Queen Min was "one of these rare heroic and strong women of East Asia." But her power was selfish and destructive, feminine in the worst sense of the word. In the same vein, Kobayakawa Hideo described the queen as the "greatest woman in our generation", stronger even than the "heroic" *daewongun*, but also as a puppet master of an entire country and the source of all evil ("the evil root") in Korea.⁹³ This peculiar combination of admiration and hatred of the queen's supernatural presence was best reflected in a bizarre description offered by the *sōshi* Kikuchi Kenjō. After the queen had died, he wrote, her blood soaked into the earth, flowers fell from the trees and the "wind was crying through the pines" either from sorrow or glee.⁹⁴

Already in the summer of 1895, in a meeting with Okamoto, some *sōshi* and their allies were advocating "settling scores" with the queen. Their language was even clearer than that. In his testimony, Okamoto said that the "Japanese *sōshi* maintained that XX had to be eliminated." The name of the victim was censored in the report, but given the intention of "settling scores" mentioned earlier, it is not difficult to understand to whom they referred. In addition, the censored part of the report contained two characters, a perfect fit for the Japanese terms for "the queen" (王妃 – *Ōhi*), or "Queen Min" (閔妃 – *Binhi*).⁹⁵ That may be interpreted as an

⁹³ Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 32-3.

⁹⁴ Kikuchi, *Chōsen Ōkoku*, 516.

⁹⁵ "Okamoto Jinmon" in *CKS 2:464-5*, corroborated by Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 33. For further evidence see Hata, "Binhi Satsugai", 68.

attempt by Okamoto to shift his own guilt to the *sōshi*, but in their own account they wrote about the matter in almost identical terms. "The only way to save Korea was to bury Queen Min. Slaughter Queen Min! Bury Queen Min!"⁹⁶ That sentiment also took the form of an "escape to the front", as many *sōshi* believed they merely had to strengthen the resolve of their "soft", "cowardly and timid" government.⁹⁷ While Inoue and his superiors in Tokyo hesitated, the *sōshi* gave their enthusiastic support to the *daewongun*, hailed by Kikuchi and Kobayakawa as the "old hero".⁹⁸ And they eagerly waited for an opportunity to strike.

This energy from below converged with the plans hatched in the legation. Upon his arrival in Seoul, Miura was quickly connected with the *sōshi* through his advisor Shiba Shirō. In any case, Miura was known as person with strong ties in the *sōshi* world.⁹⁹ Around September 19, the connection was reinforced when the new envoy met Adachi Kenzō for a working session. Adachi was well-acquainted with Miura, as they were both active in the movement against the government's plan to revise the unequal treaties in the late 1880s. Therefore, the newspaper owner, fed up with the "failure" of Inoue's policy, was greatly heartened to see Miura in Seoul.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ TSSK 1:522.

⁹⁷ TSSK 1:538, 45. And compare with Kikuchi, *Chōsen Ōkoku*, 511.

⁹⁸ Kikuchi, *Chōsen Ōkoku*, 501-3; Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 34,6.

⁹⁹ Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:559; Critchfield, *Murder*, 81, 147; Hata, "Binhi Satsugai", 77; Nakusa, *Uyoku*, 366.

¹⁰⁰ Adachi, *Jijoden*, 54-5. Kobayakawa (*Bingō*, 42) dates the conversation to October 1st.

In their talk, the new envoy asked Adachi whether he had any young men available for a "fox hunt". Adachi understood this immediately for what it was: a plot to assassinate the Queen of Korea. Fox spirits disguised as cunning, evil and beautiful royal women were common household stock in Japanese, Chinese and Korean folklore. The description sat nicely with the misogynist views espoused by Adachi and his fellow *sōshi*. Their cooperation with Miura, as it seemed, was a natural one.

According to Adachi's own testimony, "his heart leaped with joy" when he heard about the plan. Before they parted, Miura warned him to keep the matter in the utmost secrecy.¹⁰¹ Adachi cautioned Miura that his employees in the newspaper were gentle by nature, and thus it might be advisable to recruit more appropriate people from Kumamoto. Miura answered that it did not have to come to that – Adachi should rely on his own resources.¹⁰² In response, the newspaper owner recruited a group of *sōshi*, including all the reporters and editors from his paper. These people, essentially private citizens, were responsible for the bloodiest part of the mission: to kill the queen herself. Miura's advisor, Shiba Shirō, served as the liaison person between his boss and Adachi's *sōshi*.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Adachi, *Jijoden*, 56-8; Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 42; Okamoto later tried, disingenuously, to deny the extent of involvement of Adachi's *sōshi* in the operation, see "Okamoto Jinmon", *CKS* 2:483. This conversation is reported only by two sources, Adachi and Kobayakawa (the latter does not mention the term "fox hunt"), but its authenticity can still be considered solid. The *sōshi* undertook the attack on the queen, they were organized by Adachi and, as Sasa testified, believed they were working on behalf of Miura ("Sasa Jinmon", "Shūketsu Kettei Setsumeisho", *CKS* 2:489, 538). Therefore, a working session between the two men, in which the operation was discussed, most probably took place, and the date offered by Adachi seems very reasonable. In addition, the term "fox" was mentioned by Okamoto again in his operational orders to the troops, as if to mimic's Miura's language (see below).

¹⁰² Adachi, *Jijoden*, 56-7.

¹⁰³ Hata, "Binhi Satsugai", 80.

The optimism of the *sōshi*, mixed as it was with the demonization of the queen, created a bloodthirsty enthusiasm unmatched by anyone else in the legation. One of the *sōshi*, Hirayama Iwahiko, told Adachi's wife, a short time before the operation, that "you must be sorry you were born a woman", implicitly, because she could not take part in the exciting "manly" adventure. Another reporter, Kobayakawa Hideo, almost burst in tears when told by Adachi to remain behind and watch the production of tomorrow's newspaper. Had he missed such an opportunity, he said, he would regret it all through his life. During the raid, he felt that he and his friends were just like "heroes of a novel."¹⁰⁴ The enthusiasm of the *sōshi* was so great, that Okamoto had feared that left to themselves, they would get out of hand and confront the Korean Government independently.¹⁰⁵

According to the verdict of the preliminary court in Hiroshima, the decision to kill the queen was formally proclaimed in a meeting held at the Japanese Legation on October 3 between Miura, Sugimura and Okamoto. Having "received a request from the *daewongun*", the envoy and his two advisors decided not merely to force the latter's entry into the palace but to kill Queen Min.¹⁰⁶ In implementing the plan, they decided to use all means at their disposal – Japanese soldiers, Korean *Hullyeondae* troops and of course – the *sōshi*, "the young men who deeply lamented the course

¹⁰⁴ Adachi Yukiko, "Yukiko no Shokanroku", in Adachi, *Jijoden*, 68-9; Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 59, 81.

¹⁰⁵ "Okamoto Jinmon" in *CKS* 2:451.

¹⁰⁶ Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:559; "Japanese Court Decision", *TKR* 3(1896):122.

of events."¹⁰⁷ Three days later, Miura had given similar orders to Colonel Mayahara, one of the instructors of the *Hullyeondae*.¹⁰⁸

Originally, Miura had scheduled the plan for mid-October. Events, however, interfered, as the queen prepared her own strike. For several days, officers of the *Hullyeondae*, especially the commander of the second battalion Woo Beomseon, visited the legation and warned that an action against them by the queen was imminent.¹⁰⁹ On the 7th, the Korean War Minister visited the Japanese Legation, and advised Miura that the court had decided to finally disband the *Hullyeondae*. The king, he said, was sick with their constant squabbles with the Seoul police. However, the royal center, pathetic as it was, did not have power to actually disband the units, and therefore the minister dully implored Miura to do so by himself. The irascible Japanese envoy, unable to control his rage, shouted "You fool! Never!" and kicked "that fellow" out of the room.¹¹⁰ According to Miura's version in his interrogation, the minister conceded to Sugimura, who waited for him on the first floor, that the Min faction had also planned to assassinate leading pro-Japanese politicians and "take Russia's side". The visit of the war minister, in any case, convinced the plotters

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Hata, "Binhi Satsugai", 84.

¹⁰⁹ Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 176.

¹¹⁰ Miura, *Kanju*, 326, compare with "Miura Jinmon" in *CKS 2:417*, and An's own version: An Kyong-su, "Hullyeondae Kidō ni tsuki An Zengunmu Daijin Naihō", in *Meiji Shiryō*, Yamamoto Shirō, ed. (Tokyo: Meiji Shiryō Kenkyū Renrakukai, 1960), 8:85-6. See also Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen" *NGB 28:554*, and Sugimura's version in *Zaikan*, 179-80. For a timeline of events on October 7 see Hata, "Binhi Satsugai", 87.

that the operation had to be carried through sooner than planned.¹¹¹ The raid on the palace was scheduled for the morrow, October 8th.¹¹²

At the final hour, there was a last-ditch attempt by Inoue Kaoru to prevent disaster. The former envoy, who felt that something was about to go amiss in Seoul, telegraphed Miura and implored him to go to the palace, speak with the king and queen and "try to control the violence of the court", that is – to prevent the disbandment of the *Hullyeondae* by means of negotiation. Sugimura and Miura, however, gave an evasive reply. They wrote back that "warnings will not be effective. The situation is very dangerous, and it is difficult to know when an incident will occur."¹¹³ From that reply, Inoue could probably understand that Miura planned to act violently, perhaps even occupy the palace, but he could not have guessed that Miura's real intention was to kill the queen whom he, Inoue, had personally offered Japanese protection if she was ever in danger.

The Assassination of the Queen

Okamoto was given, as usual, the responsibility of liaison with the *daewongun*. Accompanied by Deputy Consul Horiguchi, Police Inspector Ogiwara and his troops, they made way to the former regent's residence. Before setting out,

¹¹¹ "Okamoto Jinmon", *CKS* 2:474; Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 179-80.

¹¹² "Japanese Court Decision", *TKR* 3(1896):123; "Miura Jinmon" in *CKS* 2:417; Adachi, *Jijoden*, 58-9; Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 181; "Hikoku Kususe Yukihiko Chūsa Kyūjutsu", *Nikan Gaikō Shiryō: Kankoku Ōhi Satsugai Jiken*, ed., Ichikawa Masaaki, (Tokyo, Hara Shobō, 1953) vol. 5:132 (hereafter cited as *NKGS*).

¹¹³ Sugimura, *Zaikan*, 182.

Ogiwara instructed his men to change to civilian clothes, i.e. to turn themselves effectively into *sōshi*. Okamoto strictly warned the *sōshi*, whom he had seen as rude and untrustworthy, to keep completely silent during his discussion with the *daewongun*.¹¹⁴

The operation formally began in Kongdok-ri, the rural abode of the *daewongun*. Around 2 a.m., upon arrival at his villa, Okamoto, Ogiwara and Horiguchi went in for a talk, accompanied by some of the Koreans.¹¹⁵ It took a long conversation of "two or three hours" to convince the old man to come along, but Okamoto finally succeeded in this task.¹¹⁶ The group united with another squad of *sōshi* en route to the palace, and the whole force of thirty-odd *sōshi* and Korean civilians, accompanied by *Hullyeondae*, Japanese army officers and consular policemen, went ahead to the royal quarters. The *sōshi* were dressed in a motley of Korean, Western and Japanese clothes. According to the account of the *Kokuryūkai*, "some were armed with swords, some with sticks and some with pistols [...] indeed they looked like a gang of highway robbers. But in the midst of this chaos there was unity and a resoluteness of mind and action." Near the palace, the assault teams were joined by Japanese soldiers from the Consulate Guard Unit.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:556; "Japanese Court Decision", *TKR* 3(1896):123; "Okamoto Jinmon", *CKS* 2:475; Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 56-7; Yamagata, "Chōsen Ōhi Jiken", 48.

¹¹⁵ "Sasa Jinmon", *CKS* 2:489; Kikuchi, *Chōsen Ōkoku*, 511-3. Okamoto had spent the previous days in Inchon, pretending he was going to depart for Japan, in order to avoid suspicion. See: "Okamoto Jinmon", *CKS* 2:473-6.

¹¹⁶ Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:556.

¹¹⁷ *TSSK* 1:528. The *Kokuryūkai*'s description was probably based on the memoir of Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 81. See also: Adachi, *Jijōden*, 58-9; Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:556. Compare with *Sabatin's report AVPRI*, 4.

At around 5 a.m., when the raid was about to begin, the Korean collaborators inside the palace fulfilled their own part of the plan. As if playing the role of a Shakespearian villain, the Vice Minister of Agriculture used his position as a favorite of the queen to convince her that no harm would come to her from the Japanese. Did not Inoue promise to protect the safety of the royal couple in times of need? He advised her to therefore neither hide nor flee.¹¹⁸ And flee she did not, until it was too late. Other collaborators, no less dangerous, made sure that the Palace Guards were emasculated. Under the noses of the two foreign advisors, the American General William McDye and the Russian Afanasii Seredin-Sabatin, soldiers were quietly removed from the guard to other assignments, modern weapons were taken away and officers were won over. Crucially, no guards were posted on the path leading to the quarters of the queen. The later testimonies of Seredin-Sabatin, McDye and others portrayed a reality of utter incompetence and chaos.¹¹⁹

The king, alarmed by the noise outside, quickly dispatched one of his confidants to alert the American and Russian envoys and ask for their help.¹²⁰ At around five a.m., some of the Japanese policeman, using folding ladders, climbed the

¹¹⁸ "Official Korean Investigation", *TKR* 3(1896), 132-3. Seredin-Sabatin did not write about the collaborators, but he did mention that the Palace Guard had dwindled on the crucial night of October 7. Sabatin's Report *AVPRI*, p.3.

¹¹⁹ Sabatin's Report *AVPRI*, 3-4; Sabatin, "Korea Glazami Rasiyam", *Sankt Peterburskie Vedmosti*, 16.5.1896 (Julian - 4.5), pp.15-16; Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:557; "Assassination" in *TKR* 2(1895):386-7. General Dye's report is highly apologetic – a spirited defense of his actions as military advisor to the Palace Guard before and during the assassination in response to the accusations of Isabella Bird (*Korea* 2:73). Still, the utter incompetence of the guard that day was well reflected even in this self-serving testimony. See: "General William Dye on 'Korea and her Neighbors'", letter to the editor, November 1898, in *TKR* 5(1898), 440 ; Kikuchi, *Chōsen Ōkoku*, 515-16; Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 88-9.

¹²⁰ Testimony of U Pom-chin, previous Minister of Commerce and Agriculture, in K.I. Weber to Foreign Minister Prince Alexei Lobanov-Rostovskii, 9.10.1895, *RIK*, 283; Allen to the Secretary of State, 10.10.1895, *KAR* 2:359.

walls and opened the gates from the inside.¹²¹ Colonel Hong Kyedong, the commander of the *Hullyeondae*, was one of the plot's first victims. Not privy to the conspiracy and loyal to the queen, he tried to stop his own troops ("you shall not enter!") and was shot to death by a Japanese officer.¹²² There were some shots exchanged, but soon the rest of the Palace Guard officers abandoned their men, who, left leaderless, tried simply to run away and save their lives. The road, according to the *sōshi* Kobayakawa, was littered with discarded caps, weapons and uniforms. General William McDye, the American advisor of the Guard, tried to rally a few dozen troops in a small alleyway, but they were "too excited" to obey him.¹²³ The Japanese soldiers reformed in military order inside the palace, surrounding the inner chambers and blocking all escape routes. Having their way cleared, the *sōshi* went in for the kill, accompanied by some Japanese officers, probably clad in civilian attire.¹²⁴ According to the official Korean investigation report:

The Japanese *sōshi*, numbering thirty or more, under the leadership of a head Japanese, rushed with drawn swords into the building, searching the private

¹²¹ Sabatin's report *AVPRI*, 3; Adachi, *Jijoden*, 61; "Okamoto Jinmon", *CKS* 2:477-8; *TSSK* 1:529-30; Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:557.

¹²² Kikuchi, *Chōsen Ōkoku*, 515; Hata, "Binhi Ansatsu", 90.

¹²³ Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 89; "Assassination" in *TKR* 2(1895), 387-8; "Official Korean Investigation" in *ibid* 3(1896), 142; Sabatin's Report *AVPRI*, 3-4; "Okamoto Jinmon", *CKS* 2:477-8. Compare with a much less flattering description by Adachi, leader of the *Sōshi* (*Jijoden*, 61). According to Adachi, McDye looked and behaved like a pathetic old man, who removed his hat to "give respect" to the invading Japanese troops (this description might have been based on Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 91). For a similar description see also the *Kokuryūkai* version, *TSSK* 1:529, and Kikuchi, *Chōsen Ōkoku*, 515-16.

¹²⁴ Hata, "Binhi Satsugai", 92-3. From Japanese testimonies, we know that officers were among the *sōshi* who entered the inner chambers, but three witnesses, two Koreans and one Russian, testified that the uniformed soldiers surrounded the compound, while non-uniformed men were the once who went inside. See: H.N. Allen to the Secretary of State, 10.10.1895, *KAR* 2:357-8; Sabatin's report *AVPRI*, 4; interrogations of Lieutenant-Colonel Yi Ha-gyun, Colonel Hyun In-tak by K.I. Weber, #211 Seoul, October 1895, *AVPRI*, appendixes 4,5. However, the Korean investigation report ("Official Investigation Report", 127) argued that uniformed Japanese officers had entered the inner rooms of the palace as well, so it is impossible to be certain about this point.

rooms, seizing all the Palace women they could catch, dragging them round by the hair and beating them and demanding to know where the Queen was.¹²⁵

According to Takahashi Genji, the two main political groups of *sōshi*, the Freedom Party and the Kumamoto Party, had competed with each other over who would find the queen first, a competition which no doubt contributed to the brutality of the entire operation.¹²⁶ The Russian advisor Seredin-Sabatin, fearful for his life, asked for Japanese protection, which was given to him, and had to witness the invaders pushing the hapless court ladies out of the low windows and dragging them by their hair across the mud.¹²⁷ All the while the *sōshi* had sought through elimination (literally) to locate the queen. "The heroes of Korea," wrote Kikuchi Kenjō, "thinking of these long years of silent pain, were looking for the queen across the halls".¹²⁸ Initially the suspicion fell on two of the court ladies, who were slashed by swords. The minister of the royal household, trying to protect the ladies' quarters with his body, was killed by a Japanese officer.¹²⁹ The queen was subsequently found in a

¹²⁵ Korean Official Report in *TKR* 3(1896), 125-6. Compare with the testimony of the Korean crown prince in Weber to Lobanov-Rostovskii, 9.10.1895, *RIK*, 282, and the censored testimony of Okamoto, "Okamoto Jinmon", *CKS* 2:480-1. The parts related to the murder act were censored, but still, the fact that killing the queen was the mission of the *sōshi* is relatively clear in context. A fuller, more candid Japanese account, from the *sōshi*'s point of view, can be found at *TSSK* 1:530, Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 100 and Kikuchi, *Chōsen Ōkoku*, 516-17.

¹²⁶ Terasaki (Takahashi), "Setsujitsudan", 442-3.

¹²⁷ "Sabatin's Report" *AVPRI*, 5-7.

¹²⁸ Kikuchi, *Chōsen Ōkoku*, 516. And compare with a much less flattering description of the carnage in Uchida's report, "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:557-8.

¹²⁹ Prosecutor Kusano to Justice Minister Yoshikawa, 9.11.1895, reproduced in Yamabe Kentarō, "Binhi Jiken ni tsuite", *Koria Hyōron* 6:48 (Oct., 1964), 50; Weber to Lobanov-Rostovski, 9.10.1895, testimony of the Korean crown prince, *RIK*, 277-8, 82.

room by one of the *sōshi*, maybe Takahashi Genji (or, according to another version, an army lieutenant).¹³⁰ The killer threw her down, jumped on her breast three times with his shoes and then hacked her with his sword. Satisfied with their deed, the *sōshi* took the body of the queen to the lawn and burned her with kerosene.¹³¹

When the editors of the local English language journal, *The Korean Repository*, hastened to the scene they have found that the "great front gate was guarded by Japanese troops, and more could also be discerned inside. A surging crowd of Koreans could be seen at the far end [...] and among them were the palace women."¹³² The American envoy, who hastened to the scene with his Russian colleague, witnessed "evil looking Japanese with disordered clothes, long swords and

¹³⁰ According to Uchida's first report to Deputy Foreign Minister Hara, an army lieutenant killed the queen. See: Hara Keiichirō, Yamamoto Shirō,, *Hara Kei o meguru Hitobito* (Tokyo: Nihon Hōsō Shuppan Kyōkai, 1981), 152-3; Uchida to Hara, 1.11.1895, *NKGS* 5:153; Military Police Colonel Hayashi to Deputy Army Minister Kodama, 12.11.1895, *NKGS* 8:206, implies that he belonged to the secret service and his name was Miyamoto Taketarō. In his formal report to Saionji, Uchida raised the issue again, but as one possibility among many ("Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:558). Kim Moonja (*Chōsen*, 254-8) has chosen to adopt this version, perhaps uncritically, without paying due attention to the other options (for example Takahashi's incriminating letter, see below).

¹³¹ Takahashi remained unrepentant throughout his life, see his "Setsujitsudan", 444-5; Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:558; Hillier to the Foreign Office, October 1875, *British National Archives* (hereafter cited as *BNA*) FO 228 1884, p.267. The murder of the queen was described both by the crown prince (Weber to Lobanov-Rostovskii, 9.10.1895, *RIK*, 282, Allen to the Secretary of State, 10.10.1895, *KAR* 2:358) and by a palace maid, a testimony reproduced in "Assassination", *TKR* 2(1895):388-9, and compare with the Kokuryūkai version, *TSSK* 1:530. Takahashi's identity as the killer of the queen was suggested by Uchida (see above), based on an incriminating letter he had written at the day after the event. But in this letter, Takahashi expressed his fear that he had killed another woman, "a beauty" and the royal household minister, "a loyal retainer", instead of the true enemy – the queen. This letter was not published in *NGB*, but it is kept in Inoue Kaoru's private papers at the National Diet Library. See: Takahashi Genji to Suzuki Shigemoto, 8.10.1895, *Inoue Kaoru Kankei Monjo* 58:25, *MJPH-NDL*. In the ruling Takahashi was referred to by his other name, Terazaki Yasukichi.

¹³² "Assassination", *TKR* 2(1895):390.

sword canes" hurrying around.¹³³ Sugimura's fervent request to conceal Japanese involvement was in vain. The *sōshi* were just too proud of what they were doing.¹³⁴

Amidst all the carnage, the *daewongun*, backed by *Hullyeondae* and Japanese bayonets, emerged and took control of the palace. According to Miura, who met him a short time later, the old prince was "beaming with delight."¹³⁵ In two proclamations, signed by the "Committee of National Independence", he vowed to "aid His Majesty, expel the low fellows [...] save the country and introduce peace."¹³⁶ In an especially cruel gesture, he tried to force the king to degrade his slain consort into the rank of a commoner. Probably, as the British Legation assumed, the purpose was to block the future way of her son to the throne, clearing the way for the *daewongun's* own grandson. Gojong, however, in a rare display of courage, refused to cooperate, and even told his father that "you can cut my fingers off, but I will not sign your proclamation." The *daewongun* was forced to issue the edict without the royal seal, endorsed only by the ministers of the new, pro-Japanese cabinet. Most of the foreign diplomats in Seoul refused to recognize it as a royal act.¹³⁷

¹³³ H.N. Allen to the Secretary of State, 13.10.1895, *KAR* 2:359 and compare with Satow to Salisbury, 18.10.1895, in Lensen, *Satow*, 50, Saionji to Nishi, 9.10.1895, *NGB* 8:496-7, Miura, *Kanju*, 338 and Adachi, *Jijoden*, 62, Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 93, as well as to the report, "Keijō Henji no Kōhō" published in *Tōhoku Nippō*, 24.10.1895. According to this newspaper's report, the swords of the *sōshi* were "soaked with fresh blood."

¹³⁴ Critchfield, *Murder*, 135-6.

¹³⁵ Kikuchi, *Chōsen Ōkoku*, 516-17; Tanaka, "Binhi Ansatsu", 74.

¹³⁶ *Daewongun*, proclamation no. 2, reproduced in "Assassination", *TKR* 2(1895):389.

¹³⁷ "Official Korean Investigation", *TKR* 3(1896), 135. According to another version, also quoted by Weber, the king mentioned his hand, not his fingers. See also, for the absence of the royal seal, in Weber to Lobanov-Rostovskii, 12.10.1895, *RIK*, 290-1; Allen to the Secretary of State, 13.10.1895, *KAR* 2:362; Testimony of U Pom-chin, in Weber to Lobanov-Rostovskii, 9.10., 7.12.1895, *RIK*, 283, 98-9; Hillier to the Foreign Office, October 1875, *BNA* FO 228 1884, p.268-9; Saionji to Hayashi and Nishi,

After the assassination, Miura and his accomplices seem to have panicked at the results of their own deeds. At first, even the king did not suspect Miura himself, and believed, according to a report submitted by the Russian Legation, that the assassination was an initiative of Okamoto and the other Japanese advisors. While a trail of evidence led to the legation, Miura tried to cover himself as much as possible by lying to the representatives of the other powers.¹³⁸ His attempts at a whitewash, however, were poor at best. Apart from the fact that so many observers, Korean and Western alike, had seen the Japanese troops and the *sōshi* in the palace, Miura and Sugimura left a trail of evidence regarding their own involvement. Indeed, when Korean royal emissaries hurried to the Japanese Legation to urgently summon Miura to the palace, they found him with Sugimura dressed and with sedan chairs ready and waiting outside the door, suggesting that they knew something was amiss.¹³⁹ Everything in their behavior that morning smacked of complicity.

In the afternoon, speaking in an emergency meeting of the diplomatic corps, Miura was confronted with accusations from the other envoys, especially those from Russia and America. When the Russian Envoy, Karl Ivanovich Weber, insisted that Japanese with naked blades were seen at the crime scene, Miura lamely replied that some Koreans may have donned Japanese garb and used Japanese swords.¹⁴⁰ The

18.10.1895, *NGB* 28:520. An English translation of the royal edict was produced in *ibid*, 270-1, as well as in "Assassination", *TKR* 2(1895):331. The original, in classical Chinese, is reproduced in *NGB* 28:505.

¹³⁸ Weber to St. Petersburg, 9.10.1895, reproduced in *RIK*, 275.

¹³⁹ "Korean Official Report", *TKR* 3(1896):127.

¹⁴⁰ Miura, *Kanju*, 338-9. Compare with: Weber to Lobanov-Rostovskii, 9.10.1895, *RIK*, 278-80; Kikuchi, *Chōsen Ōkoku*, 517-8.

next day, he employed the newly installed Korean cabinet in his attempt at a cover-up, arranging an assurance from the new war minister that some Korean rebels were dressed in Japanese clothes, and that "no Japanese" were present at the disturbances. Three Korean scapegoats were chosen for the executioner's axe.¹⁴¹

Miura's blatant lies not only to the Koreans and the other envoys but also to his own government proved that he did not operate under explicit or implicit instructions from Tokyo.¹⁴² On the same morning, at eight o'clock, he had already telegraphed Acting Foreign Minister Saionji and assured him that the whole incident was a fight between Korean troops. The fate of the queen, he emphasized, was still unknown.¹⁴³ It is astounding that Miura, as a diplomat working for the Japanese government, held it in such a low regard as to feed it with the same lies he told the foreign envoys that very same day. As Consul Uchida Sadatsuchi, the supreme Japanese judicial authority in Seoul, wrote in rage, Miura did not make any

¹⁴¹ Allen to the Secretary of State, 10.10.1895, *KAR* 2:361; "Korean Official Report", *TKR* 3(1896):129-30; Miura to Saionji, 10.10.1895, 9 am, *MGKM*, 91. The correspondence between Miura and Foreign Minister Kim is reproduced in *NGB* 28:502-6. Kunitomo repeated the same lie about the Korean dressed in Japanese garb in his interrogation at the Seoul Consulate, 12.10.1895, *Inoue Kaoru Kankei Monjo* 58:27 (hereafter cited as *IKKM*), *MJPH-NDL*. About the Korean scapegoats see Tsunoda, *Binhi Ansatsu*, 430-1.

¹⁴² However, this is far from being uncontested. In October 1895, Seredin-Sabatin had already written to tell the Russian consul in Chifu that the Japanese government was behind the affair ("Sabatin's report *AVPRI*, 17-18). Kim Moonja, the author of the newest work on the affair in Japanese, believes that Miura and his accomplices had killed the queen according to the will of the Japanese government. Though Kim closely analyzes the evidence and draws on a wide array of primary sources, some of them rare, she is not able to prove her main argument. Nor is she able to explain why Miura lied to Saionji as if he had merely obeyed orders. See Kim, *Chōsen*, 258-9, 360-5.

¹⁴³ Miura to Saionji, 8.10.1895, 8:00 am, *MGKM*, 87.

distinction between "inside" and "outside", foreign diplomats and his own government, treating everyone outside his circle of conspirators as an outsider.¹⁴⁴

Saionji, who suspected foul play, explicitly asked Miura whether Japanese subjects were involved in the killing of the queen.¹⁴⁵ In response, Miura admitted that the queen "might have been" killed, but the alleged involvement of Japanese subjects was still "under investigation." In the evening, Miura went one step further, and conceded to Saionji that some Japanese might have been involved as minor players but "did not do violence". He condemned yet again the evil of the queen's influence, a disease that afflicted the entire Korean system, and hinted that something had to be done to stop the disbandment of the *Hullyeondae* and the total expulsion of Japanese influence from Korea. All the while, Miura pretended that he was investigating the affair, "updating" his minister every few hours, as if he was not the main initiator of the plot. His whole writing style, admitting the facts in small increments while repeatedly insisting on the legation's innocence, resembled a delinquent schoolboy stretching his rhetorical powers to postpone an inevitable confession.¹⁴⁶

But even the Japanese government, rarely keen to punish its own offenders, could not ignore the growing evidence indicating Miura's complicity. Consul Uchida Sadatsuchi was not privy to the conspiracy, and after its execution was horrified that

¹⁴⁴ Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:559.

¹⁴⁵ Saionji to Miura, 8.10.1895, 15:00, *MGKM*, 88.

¹⁴⁶ Miura to Saionji, 8.10.1895, (3pm, 8pm, 11pm), 14.10.1895 (3 pm), *MGKM*, 87-9, 93; Miura to Itō, 14.10.1895, *NGB* 28:513-14. Compare with: Nio to the Finance Minister, 11.10.1895, *CKS* 2:502-6.

Japanese subjects were involved in such a plot. All the more, he was chagrined that his own subordinates from the police plotted with Miura behind his back.¹⁴⁷ Uchida's original instinct was to whitewash the entire affair to save embarrassment for his government, especially because at first he was not completely certain that Tokyo was not behind the operation.¹⁴⁸ But when he was convinced that the assassination was Miura's private venture, particularly after a senior diplomat, Komura Jūtarō, was sent by Tokyo to investigate, Uchida could not conceal facts from his own superiors at Miura's behest.¹⁴⁹

Thus, following a common pattern for organizations being investigated, the investigator from outside (Komura) forged a natural alliance with the outsider of the organization (Uchida). To assist Komura, the consul conducted his own thorough investigation of the affair, and on November 15 released to Tokyo a detailed, candid report incriminating Miura, the legation staff and the *sōshi* alike, with an explicit recommendation to punish them accordingly.¹⁵⁰ Uchida, who decided to expel some of the *sōshi* from Korea, had to endure violent threats from elements in the Japanese community. A highly unpopular figure among the *sōshi*, he was seen as whistleblower because he was the only truly **obedient** official in the Japanese

¹⁴⁷ Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen" *NGB* 28:553-4, 9.

¹⁴⁸ In a dispatch to Hara, dated 19.10, Uchida was still uncertain whether the assassination was committed by command from Tokyo, though he assumed that this was not the case. Hara/Yamamoto, *Hara Kei*, 154.

¹⁴⁹ Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:553,5, 61; Hara/Yamamoto, *Hara Kei*, 152-3.

¹⁵⁰ "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:252-62. See especially pp.558-61.

Legation.¹⁵¹ He felt himself committed to the formal hierarchy of the Foreign Ministry more than to the private network centered on the unholy trinity of *sōshi*, diplomats and advisors in the Japanese Seoul community.

Response under Fire: The Trial in Hiroshima

The foreign envoys in Seoul did not try to violently engage the Japanese, but they certainly showed signs of discontent. No one believed the denials of Miura and his Korean allies, and soon it became common knowledge that the incident was planned by the Japanese Legation.¹⁵² A few days after the assassination of the queen, in a joint show of forces, the Russian and American envoys landed a small number of marines from their men-of-war in the harbor "in order to protect the king."¹⁵³ On February 11 the king and the crown prince, hidden in women's sedan chairs, escaped to the Russian Legation and "ruled" the country under Weber's warm embrace.¹⁵⁴ With the Russian envoy's cooperation, the king restored the queen to her former exalted status, overthrew the pro-Japanese cabinet and declared Japan's leading collaborators as traitors.¹⁵⁵ The pro-Japanese prime minister and some of his

¹⁵¹ Uchida Sadatsuchi, "Taikansha Seimeihyō", *IKKM* 58:56, *MJPH-NDL*; Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:261-2; *TSSK* 1:537.

¹⁵² D'Anethan to de Bulet, 17,26.10.1895, *D'Anethan Dispatches from Japan*, 54; Weber to Lobanov-Rostovskii, 7.12.1895, *RIK*, 298-9; Nio to the Finance Minister, 11.10.1895, *CKS* 2:503-4; Komura to Saionji, 17.10.1895, *NGB* 28:518.

¹⁵³ Hillier to Foreign Office, 11.10.1875, *BNA FO* 228 1884, p.272; Miura to Saionji, 10.10.1895, 9 a.m., *MGKM*, 91.

¹⁵⁴ "The King at the Russian Legation", *TKR* 3(1896):80-9; "Official Korean Investigation", in *ibid*, 140-1.

¹⁵⁵ "Official Korean Investigation", *TKR* 3(1896):80-9.

colleagues were subsequently lynched by an angry mob, along with some Japanese civilians.¹⁵⁶ A short epoch of Russian dominance was opened in Korea.

The Japanese government, taken aback by the international turmoil, disavowed all responsibility for the event. In a conversation with Ernest Satow, the British envoy in Tokyo, two days after the assassination, Acting Foreign Minister Saionji assured him that "the Japanese Government would view with the greatest displeasure the participation of Japanese subjects in a treasonable conspiracy against the sovereign of a friendly state."¹⁵⁷ In addition, the acting foreign minister was afraid lest Miura or the "criminal *sōshi*" initiate a battle with Russian and American troops, and he ordered the envoy to restrain the ruffians and keep the Japanese troops inside their barracks.¹⁵⁸ From the same reason, the home minister proposed Prime Minister Itō to issue an imperial edict, preventing additional *sōshi* ("rowdy folk") from traveling to Korea.¹⁵⁹

Soon, both Komura in Seoul and the authorities in Tokyo understood the extent of Miura's complicity, and he was recalled to Japan along with Sugimura, Okamoto and the *sōshi*.¹⁶⁰ Many of them, according to later testimonies, believed that a prize was waiting for them at the harbor. Others had dreams of rallying the

¹⁵⁶ For three eye testimonies of this lynching see "The King at the Russian Legation", *TKR* 3(1896):86-9. Tsunoda, *Binhi Ansatsu*, 447.

¹⁵⁷ Satow to Salisbury, 16.10.1895, in Lensen, *Satow*, 47. Compare with: Saionji to Nishi, 9.10.1895, *NGB* 28:496-7.

¹⁵⁸ Saionji to Miura, 11.10.1895 (3 pm), *MGKM*, 91-2.

¹⁵⁹ Nomura to Itō, 13.10.1895, *NA-JP*, Gyōsei Bunsho, Naikaku-Sōrifu, Dajōkan-Naikaku Kankei:6, 2A-011-00 • rui 00741100.

¹⁶⁰ Saionji to Miura, 17.10.1895 (6pm), *MGKM*, 94-5; *Tōhoku Nippō*, 22.10.1895.

Tokyo *sōshi* in support of the *daewongun's* government.¹⁶¹ Upon their arrival in Hiroshima, however, they were arrested on charges of murder and conspiracy to commit murder.¹⁶² A confession admitting personal involvement in the killing caused the public prosecution to indict one of the *sōshi*, Hirayama Iwahiko, on a charge of "willful homicide", and Takahashi Genji admitted killing at least one woman.¹⁶³ The preliminary trial, similar in nature to a grand jury process in the United States, took place before Justice Yoshioka Yoshihide in the Hiroshima Court for Preliminary Inquiries.

The decision of the Hiroshima court, published on January 20, is a curious document. Its description of the events up to the entry of the Japanese *sōshi* to the palace was surprisingly honest, so that even the Korean Committee of Inquiry, established by the king under Russian auspices on February 11 used it as a source for the facts of the case. That is somewhat strange, because if the Japanese judge had wanted to hush up the affair completely, he could have accepted the numerous excuses Miura made after the assassination. However, the court report not only described the events accurately, but also ascribed to Miura a clear-cut intention to commit homicide. However, as the Korean committee rightly stated, "the judgment of the Japanese Hiroshima court, after stating that 'about dawn the whole party [...] entered the palace [...] and at once proceeded to the inner chambers,' stops abruptly in its statement of facts, but says, 'notwithstanding these facts there is no sufficient

¹⁶¹ *TSSK* 1:538.

¹⁶² *Tōhoku Nippō*, 24.10.1895; "Sasa Jinmon", *CKS* 2:488.

¹⁶³ Japanese Court Decision, 20.1.1896, *TKR* 3(1896):122-5; Takahashi to Suzuki, 8.10.1895, *IKKM* 58:25, *MJPH-NDL*; Kusano to Yoshikawa, 9.11.1895, Yamabe "Binhi Jiken", 50.

evidence to prove that any of the accused actually committed the crime originally mediated by them." All defendants were acquitted on the ground of insufficient evidence.¹⁶⁴

The proceedings seem even stranger, when one closely reads the minutes of the court interrogations staged by Judge Yoshioka, and other documents associated with the court. The prosecutor, for a start, asked Consul Uchida to deliver all available evidence to the court.¹⁶⁵ In the interrogations, it seemed that Yoshioka really attempted to incriminate the defendants, systematically and resolutely. He pressed Okamoto for more information, and sternly warned him to conceal nothing from the court. In the last part of the questioning, he even attempted to put pressure on Okamoto to admit that the murder of the queen was planned.¹⁶⁶ In another case, he blamed one of the young *sōshi*, Ieiri Kakichi, for stealing an ashtray from the palace. Ieiri, deeply offended to be accused of such a dishonorable crime as theft, defiantly exclaimed that they entered the palace "only" to kill the queen. The judge grilled Kunitomo Shigeaki in his cross examination, pressing him to implicate both himself and his friends.¹⁶⁷ Yoshioka therefore tried, and was indeed able to establish, a solid evidential basis to indict at least some of the defendants. The problem lay elsewhere.

¹⁶⁴ "Official Korean Investigation", *TKR* 3(1896):125; "Japanese Court Decision", *TKR* 3(1896):124-5.

¹⁶⁵ Public Prosecutor Kusano to Consul Uchida, 27.10.1895, *NKGS* 5:138.

¹⁶⁶ "Okamoto Jinmon", *CKS* 2:448, 482. Again, the interrogation is partly censored, and the conclusion above is based on close reading of the parts before and after the censored lines.

¹⁶⁷ "Kunitomo Jinmon", *CKS* 2:493-501.

The acquittal of the defendants was based, according to the verdict, on Article 165 of the Meiji Code of Criminal Procedure (*Keiji Soshōhō*). This article endowed judges with a sweeping power to acquit a defendant whenever they believed that the evidence for the case was inadequate.¹⁶⁸ The Meiji judicial system empowered the magistrates with considerable authority to evaluate which evidence is "sufficient" and which is not, based on the judicial principle of "common sense" (*dōri*).¹⁶⁹ In an apologetic document, drafted after the trial either by the court or the Japanese government, the court's decision was defended on purely legalistic arguments. The evidence, according to this document, had proved that the defendants entered the palace with "determination" to kill the queen, but did not prove that they were the ones who killed her. In addition, several people had already been condemned by a Korean court for the same offence.¹⁷⁰

The construct separating "determination", "result" and "action" was awkward to say the least, but still it was accepted by Theodor Critchfield as correct from a strictly juristic point of view. The Japanese action, he writes, was authorized by the *daewongun* in the name of the king, and the Hiroshima court could not doubt the legitimacy of a Korean act of state.¹⁷¹ However, even from such a narrow

¹⁶⁸ *Keiji Soshōhō*, (Osaka: Osaka Asahi Shinbun sha, 1890-1), art. 165, pp.50-1. For an online version see: <http://kindai.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/795135/33> .

¹⁶⁹ John Haley argues that "common sense" was often used to adapt the letter of the law to existing values. See: Haley, *Authority without Power*, 85.

¹⁷⁰ "Okamoto Ryūnosuke hoka 47 mei Yoban Shūketsu Kettei ni Hinan wo hai suru Riyū Setsumeisho" (hereafter cited as "Setsumeisho"), *CKS* 2:537-9. Ironically, this document was also presented to the public in a censored version, a fact which naturally did not contribute to its reliability and/or persuasive power.

¹⁷¹ Critchfield, *Murder*, 128-9.

viewpoint the court's arguments seem to defy reason.¹⁷² The facts mentioned at the verdict certainly supported the conspiracy indictment, and as for the act of homicide itself, there was solid evidence against at least four of the *sōshi* and two of the policemen.¹⁷³ Consul Uchida, eager to incriminate the defendants, had sent ample additional evidence to the court.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, Judge Yoshioka did not invite key foreign witnesses, nor even considered their written testimony, meticulously taken by Uchida.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, the fact that Yoshioka acquitted *all* defendants of *all* charges could not be explained exclusively through recourse to the legal realm.

Did the government interfere to save the defendants? Most historians tend to take this as self-evident.¹⁷⁶ But we have no documentation to prove such an allegation, and by 1895, governmental interference in the work of the courts was far from being universally accepted. Only four years before, in 1891, the President of the Supreme Court parried the pressure of the government to condemn to death a policeman who assaulted the Russian Crown Prince, sentencing him to life imprisonment instead.¹⁷⁷ A year later, the government had the president sacked for improper behavior (gambling in a tea house), and both incidents evoked sharp controversy, public attention and press coverage. Therefore, by 1895, the independence of the courts was still a matter of contention which could arouse

¹⁷² For Uchida's description of the events in the palace see "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:557-8.

¹⁷³ Haruta to Kodama, 9, 22.11.1895, *NKGS* 5:201, 31; Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:557-8.

¹⁷⁴ See for example: Uchida to Hara, 1.11.1895, to Kusano, 12,19.11.1895, *NKGS* 5:153, 218,24,34-5.

¹⁷⁵ See for example General McDye's testimony, taken by Uchida (20.11.1895), *NKGS* 5:269-74.

¹⁷⁶ Critchfield, *Murder*, 229-30.

¹⁷⁷ *NSSS-M* 2:151-5; Teters, *Conservative Opposition*, 111-14.

public ire.¹⁷⁸ If the government indeed interfered in Yoshioka's work, it probably did so very secretly and no evidence remains. Furthermore, some of the correspondence between Saionji and his diplomats expressed a consensus that adequate punishment, rather than whitewashing, may serve the reputation of the government better.¹⁷⁹ Miura might have been excused for political reasons, but exonerating the *sōshi* was not necessarily in the Japanese government's best interest. Therefore, the assumption prevalent among scholars that the verdict was engineered by the Japanese government, while impossible to dismiss, has to be seriously doubted.

Another option, no less probable, is that the acquittal was solely the decision of Judge Yoshioka. Certainly, it was not his initial intention, as the investigation he conducted was serious and resolute. He could have changed his mind, or got cold feet somewhere in the middle, whether due to his appreciation of the perpetrators' patriotism and pure motives (another legacy from the time of the *shishi* - signs of such sentiments can be seen in the verdict), or a certain unwillingness to sour the relationship between Japan, the *daewongun* and the new puppet regime in Korea.¹⁸⁰

A short time beforehand, a military tribunal of the Hiroshima Fifth Division had acquitted all the military personnel involved, and its story, almost untold in existing literature, seems rather different from that of the Hiroshima Court.

¹⁷⁸ *NSSS-M* 2:176-94 (see especially pp.189-91).

¹⁷⁹ See for example Kurino to Saionji, 22.10.1895, *NGB* 28:522-3; Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen", Saionji to the Japanese envoys, "Ōhi Satsugai Jiken Keika Tsūhō no Ken", 8.11.1895, *NGB* 28:561, 67-8.

¹⁸⁰ See especially the first page of the ruling, "Japanese Court Decision", *TKR* 3(1896):122. There is evidence, however, that the government took a keen interest in the development of the investigation and in the force of the evidence gathered, see for example: Justice Minister Yoshikawa to Privy Councilor Kuroda, 10.11.1895, reproduced in Yamabe, "Binhi Jiken", 50.

Throughout October, the military investigators seemed quite willing to believe that the officers and soldiers on trial were not involved in the atrocity. Gradually, however, they felt that there were substantial contradictions in their testimonies, and asked the Army Ministry for permission to send investigation teams abroad in order to interrogate military personnel stationed in Korea.¹⁸¹ But in early November, the investigators began to express increasing sympathy for the defendants and their families, especially because they acted under orders, and Japanese martial law was unclear on the question of whether subordinates had the right or duty to disobey illegal orders.¹⁸²

Finally, after consulting the Army Ministry, the tribunal decided to acquit all defendants of murder, conspiracy to murder and infringement of authority, because they acted under orders which seemed to them legitimate. Surprisingly, the judges emphasized that subordinates must refuse orders which are clearly illegal, unjust or beyond the commander's authority, and if they obey, they cannot be exempted from criminal responsibility. Yet, in face of the evidence in its possession, the court ruled that the military defendants neither heard about a plan to kill the queen nor gave a hand to such a plan – their role was merely to safeguard the gates and ease the *daewongun* into the palace. If the ruling of the Hiroshima court was motivated by political reasons, then its military counterpart preferred to whitewash the affair in

¹⁸¹ Inoue and Haruta to Deputy Army Minister Kodama, correspondence from October and November, *NKGS* 5:139-40, 52, 5, 63, 276. The request to send investigation teams to Korea is on p.196.

¹⁸² This question was discussed in a long letter from Investigator Inoue to Deputy Minister Kodama, 19.11.1895, *NKGS* 5:228-30, and see also pp.248-9. About the (lack) of notion of illegal command in the Japanese Army see: Yoshida Yutaka, *Nihon no Guntai: Heishitachi no Kindaishi* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2002), 146.

order to reinforce its view of military obedience. Had there been any illegality here, it was implied, the responsibility rested not with the soldiers, but with Miura.¹⁸³

An Echo for the Future: The Purchase Power of Optimism

The assassination of Queen Min, in some sense, was a unique, unprecedented event. True, attempts to kill Queen Min were made several times before, in the abortive coups d'état of 1882 and 1884. Violent occupation of the palace, ending with executions of ministers, happened almost routinely every few years in late Choson Korea, nor was it the first time the Japanese were involved in such attempts. Envoy Ōtori, as we have seen, orchestrated a successful palace raid only a year before, in 1894, again in collaboration with the *daewongun*. But previous attempts to kill the queen were made by Koreans. The Japanese, on the other hand, took great care not to harm members of the royal family when they occupied the palace. In other words, it was the combination of regicide **and** Japanese involvement which turned the Queen Min incident into a major, unprecedented event.¹⁸⁴ It is therefore instructive to make sense of the underlying factors behind its execution and long-term ramifications.

There are several ways to make sense of what happened on October 8, 1895, and all are related to the intricate relationships between the perpetrators, and their

¹⁸³ On December 19, Inoue asked for permission to return to Tokyo in order to discuss the evaluation of the evidence with the Army Ministry. Possibly, the joint decision to acquit the defendants was made in that meeting. See: Inoue to Kodama, 19.12.1895, *NKGS* 5:274-5. For the final decision of the military tribunal see *ibid*, 308-12.

¹⁸⁴ That was probably the answer to Sugimura's angry rhetorical question of why the government approved the coup of Ōtori in 1894 but condemned that of Miura at the following year. See: "Sugimura Chinjutsusho", *CKS* 2:533-4.

attitude towards their victim. First, there is a gender issue lying at the heart of the matter, almost always overlooked by historians and observers. Not a few scholars, and Hillary Conroy is only one example, were outraged by the fact that a "defenseless" woman was murdered by a gang of male cutthroats, but little attempt was made to understand this horrific event in the context of the prevailing gender ideology of the time.¹⁸⁵ The politics of Meiji Japan were based on a clear separation between men and women. The former belonged to the public sphere and the latter, to the realm of domesticity. After the Meiji Restoration, almost all major leaders agreed that the emperor must "reform" himself as a manly ruler.¹⁸⁶ The way to do that, of course, was to remove him from the influence of the court ladies in Kyoto. Feminine involvement in politics was seen as backward and evil – part and parcel of Japan's "feudal" past.

Korean court culture also demanded strict seclusion of women. In a sense, this tradition was more stringent than in Japan, as the court ladies were not to be seen by male guests. Still, that culture did allow a handful of elite women, such as Queen Min, to be involved in politics from behind the coulisses. It was just this sort of involvement which confronted the Japanese with considerable difficulties. On the one hand, as Miura and his staff fully recognized, the queen was one of the most powerful politicians in the country. On the other hand, she was hidden – and Japanese diplomats could scarcely even speak with her, let alone apply crude pressure as was frequently the case with male politicians. By applying careful

¹⁸⁵ Conroy, *Seizure*, 306-7.

¹⁸⁶ Gluck, *Modern Myths*, 73-94; Fujitani, *Monarchy*, 174-83; *DKT* 1:72-3.

diplomacy, Inoue was able to approach the queen – but Miura could scarcely do the same. Of course, the Japanese could have sent a woman to negotiate with the queen, as the Russians and the Americans did, and Miura even recognized the possibility in his memoirs. But as he said, "it was rejected from above".¹⁸⁷ The gender ideology of the Japanese did not permit them to employ women in sensitive political roles, and therefore barred them from communicating with the queen.¹⁸⁸

Failures of communication, as often happen in such cases, bred growing anger, resentment and hatred, as seen in almost all accounts of the Japanese involved in the assassination.¹⁸⁹ The *daewongun* betrayed and harmed Japan at least as much as the queen, but he was never as maligned by the Japanese. In fact, after the event he was lionized by *sōshi* such as Kikuchi Kenjō as the "old hero" and even compared to Napoleon.¹⁹⁰ Combined with the misogynist ideology of manly brotherhood concocted by Adachi and his fellow *sōshi*, it was natural to demonize a powerful female as a "bewitching beauty", "fox" or "vampire woman". As "decent women" remained in their home and hearth, the political woman had to be a monster, demon, fox or vampire. Killing her was not murder, but rather a form of exorcism. The *sōshi* referred to the murder using the verb *hōru* (to slaughter an animal), another sign for the same tendency of de-humanization.¹⁹¹ This deep-

¹⁸⁷ Sabatin's report *AVPRI*, 21-2; Bird, *Korea* 2:37,42,73; Miura, *Kanju*, 324-5.

¹⁸⁸ *TSSK* 1:522. See also Sabatin's report *AVPRI*, 22.

¹⁸⁹ *TSSK* 1:521; Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 33.

¹⁹⁰ Kikuchi, *Chōsen Ōkoku*, 501-2.

¹⁹¹ *TSSK* 1:522.

rooted misogyny, along with the competition between the two groups of *sōshi*, could explain the fury of the killers and their brutality during the operation.¹⁹²

The second important factor, also almost always overlooked, was the unique personal background of the major architect of the conspiracy, Miura Gorō. In one of his apologetic statements to the court, the former envoy had written, in the form of a rhetorical question, that it defied reason to assume that he, a man with "military habits" would behave in such an "erratic and unrestrained way" (*fukisoku hōjū no kōi*).¹⁹³ But in fact, Miura's actual "erratic and unrestrained" behavior was in perfect harmony with his military habits. Unlike his predecessors in the Seoul Legation, he was a product of the disobedient "habits" groomed by the military *tōsui-ken* tradition: disdain of civilian superiors and the absence of a clear hierarchy within the officer corps itself.

Indeed, Miura did not have much respect for superiors, either in the military or outside it, especially when they did not bother to give him explicit instructions.¹⁹⁴ As a member of the losing military faction of the "four generals", he loathed the leaders of the army and the government, looking down on them as selfish "clique leaders". Only someone like him could tell a subordinate such as Consul Uchida that the perpetrators would keep the matter secret, "even when questioned in a court of law."¹⁹⁵ Only such a man could negotiate directly with Imperial Headquarters in

¹⁹² Bird, *Korea* 2:65; Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:557-8; Terasaki (Takahashi), "Setsujitsudan", 442-3. Compare with Sabatin's report *AVPRI*, 4-10.

¹⁹³ "Miura Gorō Jijitsu Teisei Negai", 12.12.1895, *CKS* 2:524-5.

¹⁹⁴ "Sugimura Chinjutsusho", *CKS* 2:526.

¹⁹⁵ Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28-1:560.

defiance of diplomatic procedure, pressure the government to give him the right to mobilize troops in order to suppress bandits, and then use this privilege to murder the queen of another country.¹⁹⁶ And all of this was done in the space of "three puffs on a cigarette", without pausing even once to consider the foreign policy of his own government.¹⁹⁷

But the ramifications of the affair are beyond Miura. The key issue here was that an official representative of the Japanese state, a diplomat and former general, had used a group of civilian riff-raff to follow an independent course in foreign policy. That was a symptom of a historical process with far-reaching consequences: the gradual disappearance of the gap between "defiance from below" and "defiance from above".¹⁹⁸ Both roads of disobedience had their roots as far back as the late Tokugawa Period. During the 1860s, the gap between the rank and file *shishi* and their political leaders was not as great, as they all belonged to the same networks of conspirators. In the next decade the gap grew wider, as the leaders became more entrenched in their positions with every failed revolution or assassination attempt. It was easier for rank-and-file samurai to communicate with leaders such as Takasugi Shinsaku and Kido Takayoshi in the 1860s, harder but still possible to have a dialogue with Ōkubo or Saigō in the 1870s, and extremely difficult to approach Itō or

¹⁹⁶ *Tōhoku Nippō*, 27.10.1895; For discussion on the question of the authority to mobilize troops, see Kim, *Chōsen*, 130-6.

¹⁹⁷ The *sōshi* Kobayakawa Hideo (*Bingō*, 33, 52) rightly defined Miura's decision as a *dokudan* (arbitrary decision) without the orders or even tacit approval of the Japanese government.

¹⁹⁸ Such terms may remind the reader of Maruyama Masao's famous distinction between "fascism from below" and "fascism from above". I have intentionally refrained from using these terms, since in 1895 Fascism hardly existed, and it would be both misleading and anachronistic to define either Miura or the *sōshi* as "fascists". For Maruyama's view see: *Thought and Behavior*, 25-84.

Yamagata in the 1880s and 1890s, except for few well connected individuals.

Defiance from above, based on *tōsui-ken* ideology, remained the prerogative of an exclusive, small group of top military commanders.

Grassroots militants, reincarnated as *sōshi*, had their own assigned place in the new world of oligarchic rule and party politics. They could use violence against political rivals, operate under the protection of party leaders and generally enjoy themselves in a rowdy sort of way. But as "professional" political bullies, they could no longer hope to substantially change the Meiji system by sheer force, except perhaps through a handful of powerful bosses who gradually became part of the political elite. Their influence was still existent, but limited. Though the police tolerated their violence, they were often punished, especially when they "crossed the line" by engaging in truly dangerous activities such as assassination attempts.¹⁹⁹ Their optimism about their ability to change the system through defiance or rebellion from below, in other words, was very limited. Had optimism been a currency, then one may say that its "purchase power" substantially decreased in the Japanese mainland throughout the late 1880s and early 1890s.

In Korea, however, the situation was very different. There, as Takahashi Genji put it, he and his friends could "work for the country without atoning for one's sins and be cleared of all charges."²⁰⁰ As we have seen, the power, influence and self-confidence of the *sōshi* significantly increased upon their arrival in that troubled kingdom. There they enjoyed extraterritoriality and immunity from the law, and they

¹⁹⁹ Siniawer, *Ruffians*, 54, 87; Kang, "Ten'yūkyō", 1341.

²⁰⁰ Terasaki (Takahashi), "Setsujitsudan", 440. See also Kang, "Ten'yūkyō", 1341.

could inflict violence with impunity. Useful to the army as intelligence agents, the Japanese Legation, the only authority which could punish them, turned a relatively blind eye to their behavior, giving them much greater freedom of action than they ever had in Japan. In the general lawlessness of Korea, a country which was ruled by feuding, and sometimes warring factions, violence was in any case the norm. Crucially, it gave birth to the same process we witnessed in 1870s Japan: the belief that through assassination of specific "demonic" individuals, such as the queen, the political Gordian knot could be disentangled. In other words, in Korea, the currency known as "violent optimism" had **much** more purchase power than it did in Japan. It was therefore perfectly reasonable to use it more often, and in abundance.

The result was a similar process to that defined by Prasenjit Duara as "state involution", the entrustment of state authority to private agents acting on behalf of the state and yet not an official part of its apparatus. The constant association of state and private agents in these transactions of power prompts the former to fall into the influence of the latter, as the official and private realms bleed into each other.²⁰¹ In the specific case of Japan, the constant use made by military officials, either active or retired (such as Miura), of *sōshi* as cutthroats and intelligence agents in Korea and Manchuria, formed such strong connections between the foreign policy establishment, the army and the private nationalist organizations, that in future years it became very difficult to draw clear borderlines between these three authorities.

²⁰¹ Prasenjit Duara, "State Involution: A Study of Local Finances in North China: 1911-1935", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29:1 (Jan., 1987), 135-6.

During the assassination of Queen Min this process was made evident when Ogiwara's policemen and the Guard's officers shed their uniforms and virtually blended with the *sōshi*. As the newspaper *Tōhoku Nippō*, put it, "for the sake of our country, we must deeply regret the fact that some of our diplomats and soldiers adopted the behavior of *sōshi*", a complaint echoed by Consul Uchida.²⁰² There is no better example of this hybridity than Okamoto Ryūnosuke, a former rebellious officer who led the *sōshi* into action as a quasi-establishment figure, an advisor to the Korean government unofficially affiliated with the Japanese Legation. With the passage of time, individual army officers became associated with wild, private nationalist societies more than with their official commanders, recreating the horizontal bonds between army units and politicians that Yamagata Aritomo strived to eliminate throughout the 1880s.

That process certainly did not begin in 1895, and one can find its roots as far back as the cooperation between Keiō students and the Japanese Legation in the Korean abortive coup of 1884. The Queen Min assassination suggests a road not taken, and herein lies its importance. Its exceptional nature had given the Japanese government the opportunity to punish the perpetrators severely, thus slowing down the process of involution, halting or even reversing it. The failure of Judge Yoshioka to do this, whether due to his own discretion or government interference, obliterated this golden opportunity. Thus, the latent structure of involution kept its

²⁰² "Chōsen Kyōhen to Naikaku", *Tōhoku Nippō*, 24.10.1895; Uchida, "Ōjō Jihen", *NGB* 28:562; "Hikoku Kususe Yūkihiko Chūsa Kyūjutsu", *NKGS* 5:132; Kim Moonja (*Chōsen*, 310) simplified this highly complicated process into a one dimensional conspiracy theory: that the army merely used the *sōshi* as a smoke screen to hide its activities. This is, however, only a half truth, as the "army" was never a unified body, and the interaction between *sōshi* and military factions influenced and changed both sides.

existence, a ticking time bomb destined to explode in the late 1920s. First came Korea, and Manchuria was next in line.

Chapter Seven

Coup D'etat in Three Acts:

The Taishō Political Crisis, 1912-3

Soldiers and ships of war are like sharp tools – dangerous things to handle.

The Japan Daily Herald, 7.5.1874

Political, military and institutional power, strong as it may be in theory, is never fully realized until tested in a confrontation of some kind. The emperor, for example, theoretically possessed unlimited authority to command the army, but as the Meiji and Taishō emperors never forced the hand of military leaders, their power was never tested. In the same vein, Japan may have been building its military capabilities throughout the Meiji Era, but until tested on the ground against China (1894-5) and Russia (1904-5), the empire was not yet considered a first-rate military power by other countries.

The same also applied to the independence granted to the military establishment under the *tōsui-ken* system. True, individual military leaders made use of it, but occasionally and sparingly at the very best. The successful attempts of the military leaders to block constitutional challenges to the *tōsui-ken* system in the 1880s and 1890s involved a brutal struggle with the "four generals" faction and its

allies, but did not overstep the boundaries of legality. Individual army commanders behaved independently, at times, during the First Sino-Japanese War, but that could be ascribed to faulty communications and misunderstandings more than to outright disobedience.¹ The Queen Min incident, despite its international ramifications, was still on the margins of the empire, and furthermore, it was engineered by an individual general and not by the army as an institution. In the Meiji Era, the army had never tried to make use of the full extent of its autonomous power, or to overthrow a cabinet which defied its will. Apparently, the military leaders were too cautious to rock the boat in such a way.²

Such a move against a reigning cabinet, which amounted almost to a bloodless coup d'état, was first attempted in 1912. This event, the opening act of a major upheaval known as the "Taishō political crisis" (*Taishō Seihen*), and its dramatic ramifications on future developments, are the subject of the present chapter. The events of the Taishō political crisis will be described here with a special emphasis on the disobedience of the army and the navy towards civilian cabinets. Other, more "civilian" and "grassroots" aspects of the crisis, such as the mass movement "to protect the constitution" and the role of the political parties, were no less important, but in this chapter they shall only be described briefly, as a general context for the true subject of our discussion: the evolution of military disobedience in the early twentieth century.

¹ Drea, *Imperial Army*, 89.

² Tobe, *Gyakusetsu*, 158-9.

A Short Blanket: The Squabble on the Budget in the late 1900s

After the Russo-Japanese War, the growing complexity of the state became alarmingly evident in Japanese governing circles. The *genrō*, Meiji oligarchs such as Itō Hirobumi, Yamagata Aritomo and Inoue Kaoru, were slowly, but steadily withdrawing from the scene, leaving it open to the next generation of leaders. Itō was assassinated by a Korean nationalist in 1909, and advancing age gradually eroded the power of both Yamagata and Inoue.³ Katsura Tarō and Saionji Kinmochi, the protégées of Yamagata and Itō, respectively, were the most prominent representatives of the new generation of leaders, and during the first decade of the twentieth century they took turns at the helm of the government. These two leaders, more than their predecessors, faced considerable difficulties controlling the entire breadth of an increasingly convoluted government apparatus.

Some of the complication arose from the sheer number of groups vying for power. Business circles, growing in influence, demanded the ear of policy makers. The army, no longer fully under Yamagata's control, was insistent about keeping its power intact. The Imperial Navy, emboldened by its achievements in the Russo-Japanese War, demanded its own share of the pie after long, painful years in the shadow of the army. Influenced by the expansionist ideology of the American naval thinker A.T. Mahan, the navy advocated making sea power the foundation of national defense, even to the degree of making the war fleet an independent force

³ Peter Duus, *Party Rivalry and Political Change in Taishō Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 11.

under the emperor.⁴ Different segments of the bureaucracy, especially in the Home Ministry and the Treasury, were powerful actors which statesmen could ignore only at their own peril.

This situation, difficult in any case, was further complicated by the entrance of the political parties into the intricate power struggle. The old Freedom Party, reincarnated in 1900 as *Rikken Seiyūkai* (Association of Friends of Constitutional Government, hereafter "*Seiyūkai*") abandoned its uncompromising oppositional attitude to the government and the bureaucracy. In that year, it formed a political alliance with Itō Hirobumi, considered the more moderate of the Meiji oligarchs, and later accepted the nominal leadership of his protégée, Saionji Kinmochi. The real leader of the party, however, was the chairman of its executive body, the shrewd politician Hara Kei (Takashi). Though leading a policy of compromise with the ruling establishment, Hara strove steadily to increase the power of the *Seiyūkai* at the expense of the oligarchs and their "cliques", with a single goal in mind: a government fully controlled by political parties and lower house majorities.⁵

All the power factors described above, the *Genrō*, businessmen, generals, admirals, bureaucrats and party politicians, were tied to each other in informal groups, yet another manifestation of the phenomenon of private horizontal networks prevalent in Japanese politics since the late Tokugawa Period. True, the

⁴ Tazaki Suematsu, *Hyōden Tanaka Giichi: Jūgonen Sensō no Genten* (Chōfu-shi: Heiwasenryaku sōgō Kenkyūjō, 1981), 1:356-9, 62-3.

⁵ Najita Tetsuo, *Hara Kei in the Politics of Compromise, 1905-1915* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 105-6, 208-9; Duss, *Party Rivalry*, 3,8-13, 29-31; Banno Junji, *Taishō Seihen: 1900-nen Taisei no Hōkai* (Kyoto: Mineruba Shobō, 1982), 72; Toshitani Nobuyoshi, "Meiji Kempō Taisei to Tennō: Taishō Seihen Zengo wo chūshin toshite", *Hōgaku Shinpō* 83:10-2 (1977), 72-3; "Hara Naishō no Hirikken", *Osaka Asahi Shinbun*, 20.8.1912.

hierarchy of the state was much stronger in 1912 than in the 1870s, but at certain points in time it could not withstand the pressure exercised by private networks, civilian and military alike. The Taishō political crisis of 1912 was one of these seminal moments.

Around 1912, the weakness of the system as a whole emanated from the basic contradictions between plans, visions and ambitions held by members of different factions, often intensely hostile to each other. As the imperial center was, as always, hazy and hidden, there was no one who could serve as a final arbitrator to solve the contradictions between the different visions for future national policy. While each vision could, perhaps, be implemented in isolation from the others, they could not exist in unison. The problem was first and foremost economic: these plans required funds – enormous amounts, and the state did not have the ability to finance all of them at the same time.⁶

Hara Kei, the driving spirit behind the first Saionji Cabinet of 1906, wanted to build a power base for the *Seiyūkai* by forming a strong network of patronage in the provinces, his famous "pork barrel" policy. In order to forge ties between the local branches of the *Seiyūkai* and influential strongmen throughout Japan, he had promised an abundance of "candies" to local allies in form of schools, bridges, dams and most of all – train stations and railway lines. These expensive plans, known at the time as Hara's "positive policy", became the core strategy of the *Seiyūkai*.⁷

⁶ Ōtsu Junichirō, *Dai Nihon Kenseishi* (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1969-70), 6:752; Ōe, *Sanbō Honbu*, 127; Banno, *Taishō Seihen*, 9-13.

⁷ Najita, *Hara*, 60-2; Duus, *Party Rivalry*, 31-3; For a critical contemporary perspective on Hara's policy, see: "Hara Naishō no Hirikken", *Osaka Asahi Shinbun*, 20.8.1912.

The armed services, however, had their own costly plans. After the Russo-Japanese War the empire had solidified its control over Korea, which was finally annexed in 1910, and in addition extracted a wide array of privileges and concessions in South Manchuria. Three years before, without consulting the government, the General Staff devised a "national defense plan" for operations in the continent, requiring additional four divisions. These plans bore the signature of Emperor Meiji and thus were seen by the army as sanctified and unchangeable. The navy, painfully aware of the technological obsolescence of its fleet and worried about a possible confrontation with the United States, advocated even more expensive schemes for naval enlargement.⁸ The army received two of the four divisions in 1907, but the first Saionji Cabinet (1906-8), as well as the subsequent second Katsura Cabinet (1908-11), dilly-dallied with the army's demands for two additional divisions with one hand, brushing off the navy with the other.⁹ The plans, however, were never rejected altogether, in order to prevent a complete break with the armed services. Instead, they were delayed on an annual basis.¹⁰ Similarly to the inter-domainal alliance of the early 1870, the late Meiji political game was based on a delicate balance between different factions. A grave insult to one of them,

⁸ "Chōsen Shidan Secchi", *Osaka Asahi Shinbun*, 20.8.1912; J. Charles Schencking, *Making Waves: Politics, Propaganda and the Emergence of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1868-1922* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 139; Tazaki, *Tanaka*, 364-5; Toshitani, "Meiji Kempō", 75-6; Ōe, *Sanbō Honbu*, 117-18, 24-5.

⁹ Yamamoto Shirō, *Taishō Seihen no Kisoteki Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobō, 1970), 43-4; Takakura Tetsuichi et. al., *Tanaka Giichi Denki* (Tokyo: Tanaka Giichi Denki Kankōkai, 1957-8), 2:485-6 (hereafter cited as *TGD*); Schencking, *Waves*, 139-40,5; Ōe, *Sanbō Honbu*, 118.

¹⁰ Uehara to the cabinet, reproduced in *TGD* 2:492.

especially the army or the navy, could result in damage to that balance, leading to unexpected and probably disastrous results.

The situation, however, became truly impossible during the second Saionji Cabinet, which came to power in August 1911. During that year the external debt of Japan, already high after the Russo-Japanese War, was skyrocketing.¹¹ Prime Minister Saionji and his finance minister realized that a policy of fiscal retrenchment was inevitable. Both leaders decided to accompany the new policy with tax cuts, as demanded by large segments of the business community and the population at large.¹² That, of course, made it more difficult to find any funds for Hara's "positive policy", and the leader of the *Seiyūkai*, entrenched in his powerful position as home minister, resisted. As usual, a compromise was reached: government expenses would be cut, but without obliterating the railway projects, indispensable to the maintenance of the *Seiyūkai's* patronage networks in the provinces.¹³

This compromise had to leave somebody unhappy, probably an actor lacking strong presence at the negotiation table. In 1912, the army was designed by the government leaders to play such a role – and the two major policy makers, Hara and Saionji, decided to postpone, yet again, the authorization of the long-promised two

¹¹ Banno, *Taishō Seihen*, 10.

¹² *Hara Takashi Nikki*, eds. Hara Keiichirō, Hayashi Shigeru, (Tokyo: Fukumura Shuppan, 1965-9), 3:187 (hereafter cited as *HTN*). For details on the retrenchment plans, see the speeches of Saionji and Yamamoto in the Imperial Diet, 23.1.1912, reproduced in Ōtsu, *Kenseishi* 6:668-70; Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 179; *TGD* 2:501; Kaigun Rekishi Hozonkai, ed., *Nihon Kaigun shi* (Tokyo: Kaigun Rekishi Hozonkai, 1995), 2:214; Banno, *Taishō Seihen*, 10.

¹³ Uehara to Yamagata, 23.10.1912 in *Yamagata Aritomo Kankei Monjo*, ed. Shōyū Kurabu Yamagata Aritomo Kankei Monjo Hensan linkai, (Tokyo: Shōyū Krabu, 2004) 1:221-2 (hereafter cited as *YAKM*); *HTN* 3:254, 9; Gotō to Katsura, 5.9.1912 in *Katsura Tarō Kankei Bunsho*, ed. Chiba Isao, (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 2010), 179-80 (hereafter cited as *KTKB*); Kyofuji Koshichirō to Prime Minister Saionji, 16.11.1912, *JACAR*, Ref. B03030229900, p.1.

divisions.¹⁴ The decision seemed to be politically feasible at the time. Public opinion, influenced by the economic slump and the liberal press, was increasingly hostile to the army's endless demands for more funds. The rivals of the army did not oppose of the formal ideology of *fukoku kyōhei* ("rich country and strong army"), but refused to equate it with endless imperial expansion and believed that economic prosperity was more important than military strength.¹⁵ There was hardly a time in prewar Japanese history, perhaps except 1921-2 (the last years of the failed Siberian Intervention) when public opinion was so critical of the army.¹⁶ Hara had probably seen it as a signal to strongly resist the establishment of the new divisions in the fiscal year of 1912.

In addition, during 1912, Prime Minister Saionji diverged from the defense policy of previous cabinets in a fateful way. While previous cabinets brushed off the demands of navy and army alike, Saionji decided to veto the army's plans, while giving generous budgetary handouts to the navy.¹⁷ This decision, yet again, bowed to public opinion as expressed in the liberal press: the exploits of the navy in the Russo-Japanese War had gradually endeared it to significant parts of the press.¹⁸ A

¹⁴ *HTN* 3:244; Tanaka Giichi, "Zōshi Mondai Keii" in *TGD* 2:515; Banno, *Taishō Seihen*, 11.

¹⁵ See for example: "Rikugun no Kakuchō danjite fuka", *Tōyō Keizai Shinpō*, 15.7.1912, pp.8-10

¹⁶ About public opinion in the wake of the Siberian Intervention see: Dunscombe, *Siberian Intervention*, 4.

¹⁷ Uehara to Terauchi, 29.10.1912; Gotō to Katsura, 5.9.1912, *KTKB*, 180-1; *Takarabe Takeshi Nikki: Kaigun Jikan Jidai*, Banno Junji et. al, eds. (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1983), 2:100 (hereafter cited as *TTN*); *HTN* 3:257; Tazaki, *Tanaka*, 309-10; Schencking, *Waves*, 148-50.

¹⁸ Some newspapers, though, were hostile to both armed services. See for example: "Rikugun no Bōchō danjite fuka", *Tōyō Keizai Shinpō*, 15.7.1912, reproduced in Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 723-5. Even this article, thoroughly hostile to the navy's demands, grudgingly acknowledged their popularity among the public. See also Tazaki, *Tanaka*, 369; Schencking, *Waves*, 138.

commentator in the journal *Taiyō*, for example, had noted that Japan's national defense must be based first and foremost on sea power. The demands of the army for expansion were not related to legitimate security concerns, only to "daydreams of aggressors and imperialists."¹⁹ This kind of mood made it easier for the government to turn down the army's request, while promising to use the money saved through the retrenchment to gradually fulfill the navy's plan. The intense inter-service rivalry made this struggle especially bitter and emotionally charged.²⁰

The army could not stomach a situation where the navy got all it wanted while its own plans were constantly frustrated.²¹ The preference for one armed service and discrimination against the other undermined the balance, and for that reason, it became increasingly difficult to delay a confrontation over the budgetary issue as in previous years. A feeling of a looming zero sum struggle slowly pervaded the minds of decision makers in the army, navy, cabinet and *Seiyūkai* alike.²²

¹⁹ Jōzai Tagao, "Doku Usoroku", *Taiyō*, August, 1912 (1), p.141.

²⁰ "Niko Shidan Zōshi Mondai Oboegaki: Terauchi Naikaku Jitsugen Keikaku" (author unknown, September 1912) in *Terauchi Masatake Kankei Monjo*, ed. Yamamoto Shirō, (Kyoto: Kyoto Joshi Daigaku, 1984), 533 (hereafter cited as *TMKM*); *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun*, 26.10.1912; Gotō Shimpei in a conversation with the Russian ambassador: H.A.Malevsky-Malevich to Foreign Minister S.D. Sazonov, 12.12.1912, reproduced in V.E. Molodiakov, ed., *Katsura Taro, Goto Simpēi i Rossiia : Sbornik Dokumentov 1907-1929* (Moscow: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2005), 87; Hirata Tōsuke to Katsura (December 1912, precise day unclear), *KTKB*, 324-5, and also *TGD* 2:485.

²¹ Yamagata-Saionji conversation, 10.11.1912, reproduced in full in *TGD* 2:495-7, and for Yamagata's version see Irie Kan'ichi, *Taishō shoki Yamagata Aritomo Danwa Hikki: Seihen Omoidegusa*, ed. Itō Takashi, (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1981), 31-4. Compare with the report of an earlier conversation between Yamagata and Saionji, in August, in Gotō to Katsura, 5.9.1912, *KTKB*, 181-2, and with Tanaka's position, "Zōshi Mondai Keii", *TGD* 2:508, 13. For an insight into feelings in the navy see *TTN* 2:124.

²² Tanaka to Katsura, 17.12.1912, *KTKB*, 250.

A good example of that feeling, from the army's side, was a series of memoranda written by General Tanaka Giichi, the influential chief of the Military Affairs Bureau in the Army Ministry. In these letters, Tanaka bemoaned the passive attitude of the government in face of the chaos created in China by the republican revolution of 1911. The Russians were advocating their own rights in Manchuria, and for the Japanese it was a golden opportunity to demand a larger slice of the Chinese melon. To fortify Japan's "special rights" in Manchuria and Mongolia, as well as to guard against a potential Russian attempt to restage the conflict with the Japanese Empire, the army had to obtain two more divisions.²³

These professional arguments, however, were not the main problem. Rather than dealing with the issue as a legitimate debate about defense policy, Tanaka and his colleagues began to regard it as a conspiracy hatched by a malicious, cunning enemy.²⁴ How else could one explain the government's animosity to the army and its preferential treatment of the navy and the political parties? The "anti-militarist politicians" in the parties and the cabinet, claimed Tanaka's colleague, Colonel Ugaki Kazushige, did not share the army's foresight for the nation's "posterity", being obsessed instead with private interests, the greed of businessmen and "economic trifles".²⁵ As a result, Tanaka complained that the "deteriorating fortress" of the army was about to give in to the government's "assault", a lethal blow against the

²³ Tanaka, "Zōshi Mondai Keii", *TGD* 2:506-13.

²⁴ Tanaka, "Zōshi Mondai Keii", *TGD* 2:514-6.

²⁵ Op cit. in Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 176-9; Tanaka Giichi, "Zōshi Mondai no Keii", reproduced in *TGD* 2:506-7. And compare with Uehara's appeal to the cabinet, reproduced in *TGD* 2: 491-2. See discussion in Ōe, *Sanbō Honbu*, 124-5.

imperial regime itself.²⁶ What was at really at stake here was military independence from civilian rule, the *tōsui-ken* ideology which had stood at the basis of military thinking since 1878. The appropriate response in such a case, according to Tanaka, was to "manufacture an excuse precipitating the mass resignation of the cabinet."²⁷ If the government was an enemy, then it had to be defeated by a formidable countermove – a military coup d'état of one form or the other.

In order to understand the nature of the army's scheme, which stood at the heart of the bloodless coup d'état that followed, we must pause and take a look at a peculiar system which had developed since 1900, an offshoot of the *tōsui-ken* ideology. It was this system, called the *bukansei*, and the political tools it had generated, which turned the budgetary disputes of autumn 1912 into a government crisis, and finally, into a military coup d'état.

A Sword wielded by the Army: The *Bukansei* System

The basic framework of the army's scheme was based on a footnote to a imperial ordinance from 1900, known as *Gen'eki Bukansei* (active duty ministry). This footnote stipulated that the army and navy ministers had to be generals and admirals **on active duty**.²⁸ The law was far from being revolutionary. Prior to this,

²⁶ Tanaka to Terauchi, 30.3.1912; Terauchi to Katsura, 17.10.1912, *KTKB*, 250, 82-3; Tanaka to Terauchi, 21.2., 30.3.1912; Uehara to Terauchi, 31.3, 29.10, 1912; Uehara to Katsura, 17.11.1912, *KTKB*, 98-9. "Niko Shidan", *TMKM*, 583-5, for analysis of this position see Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 179.

²⁷ Tanaka to Terauchi, 30.3.1912.

²⁸ "Chokurei dai 193: Rikugunshō Kansei", 19.4.1900, appendix, p.15, footnote no.1, *Jacar*, Ref.A03020460500. For analysis see: Sven Saaler, *Zwischen Demokratie und Militarismus: die*

army and navy ministers (with one exception) were selected from the active duty roster, but in 1900 this custom was turned into law.²⁹

In face of the increasing influence of the *Seiyūkai* and other political parties in the civilian cabinet, the *Gen'eki Bukansei* not only tightened the control of the military establishment over its ministers, but also gave the generals and the admirals a handy tool to threaten unfriendly cabinets. As generals and admirals on active duty were relatively susceptible to pressure applied by military power holders, the army or navy could theoretically withdraw their minister and refuse to appoint a new one, thus forcing the cabinet to resign. Before 1900, the government could, again theoretically, counter that threat by appointing a retired general or admiral, but the *Gen'eki Bukansei* rule made that impossible. However, until 1912, the army and the navy never dared to precipitate a crisis by withdrawing their own ministers. In that year, both services did just that against two successive cabinets, thus throwing the entire state into a prolonged, bitter political crisis.

How could the army and navy *actually* prevent an active duty general or admiral from serving as a minister? We shall discuss this crucial question further below, but for now it may be instructive to examine the process by which army ministers were appointed shortly prior to the crisis. As the *bukansei* law did not ascribe a precise procedure for this process of selection, the decision about which

Kaiserliche-Japanische Armee in der Politik der Taishō-Zeit, 1912-1916 (Bonn: Bier'sche Verlagsanstalt, 2000), 35-6.

²⁹ Tobe, *Gyakusetsu*, 157. The only exception to that rule was Katsu Kaishū, a civilian but an old naval hand, who served as the Lord of the Navy (then the equivalent of a minister) from 1873 to 1879, see *ibid.*

general to appoint was made collectively inside the military elite, along the unofficial lines of the private, horizontal network that governed the army. As we have seen in chapter five, power in the military establishment was dispersed between different agencies, and no single individual was completely in charge. Figures like Yamagata were highly respected, but they did not make decisions without giving due weight to the consensus formed by the senior generals. In practice, deliberations about the appointment of new ministers were made along the lines of a formidable but informal network, commonly known as the "Chōshū Clique".

It is important to note that the name of this group is somewhat misleading. The former Chōshū domain, a feudal entity roughly equivalent to today's Yamaguchi Prefecture in Western Japan, was one of the domains which led the Meiji Restoration in 1868. The private, horizontal network of generals, bureaucrats, politicians and journalists known as the Chōshū Clique, however, was not a regional organization. It differed greatly from the domain cliques of the 1870s, organizations such as Saigō Takamori's faction, which truly represented the special interests of former domains and geographical regions (for example Chōshū, Tosa or Satsuma). The Chōshū Clique, as it had evolved since the 1880s, had little to do with the regional interests of the residents of Yamaguchi Prefecture. Instead, it was a group of highly-placed individuals who had known and trusted each other for many years. This clique had strong presence in the bureaucracy and in both houses of the Imperial Diet. It had some allies in the conservative segments of the press, and, crucially, also in the Army Ministry, the General Staff and the higher echelons of the

officer corps, where it concentrated around the figures of Field Marshal Yamagata and his protégée, former Prime Minister Katsura Tarō.³⁰

Most, but not all, members of the group hailed from the Chōshū Domain, and they were usually united by a common political outlook. All of them venerated Yamagata, supported expansion to the Asian mainland in some form or another, believed that the army should be independent from the government and resisted the influence of political parties in military affairs.³¹ Crucially, they had all advocated a hard-line position in the debate about the two divisions. Because the Chōshū Clique still stood at the center of military decision making in 1912, new army ministers could not be appointed without its support. According to General Tanaka Giichi, the head of the Military Affairs Bureau at the Army Ministry and a key figure in the clique, the minister had to be a person whose "military views" and "political views" harmonized, a general sound in body and mind, able to represent the interests of the army in an "even fight" with the government. Tanaka and his Chōshū Clique colleagues, in other words, were not electing a leader for the military establishment, a man who can create and implement policy, but rather a mouthpiece for the consensus already formed inside the army.³²

In April 1912 Army Minister Ishimoto passed away, opening a period of deliberations inside the Chōshū Clique about the choice of his successor. Tanaka and

³⁰ Ōtsu, *Kenseishi* 6:671; Saaler, *Militarismus*, 70-1; Tobe, *Gyakusetsu*, 165; Duus, *Party Rivalry*, 37.

³¹ Saaler, *Militarismus*, 71-7. See Najita, *Hara*, 233 (note no.10) about the influence of Yamagata as the "glue" holding the network together.

³² Tanaka to Terauchi, 21.2, 30.3 (last lines from the letter). For a different interpretation, see Tobe, *Gyakusetsu*, 175.

his close colleague, the governor general of Korea Terauchi Masatake, discussed the appropriate qualifications for the new minister. Then, the matter was raised before Field Marshal Yamagata, who proposed four possible candidates. The list was subsequently passed to Katsura, who proposed candidates of his own, as well as to Chief of the General Staff Hasegawa and his deputy. Finally, Yamagata, "after careful deliberations", chose one of the candidates, Uehara Yūsaku, a general of Satsuma origins.³³

To save the face of the prime minister, Yamagata named Uehara along with two other candidates (Nagaoka and Kigoshi). But the prime minister, cordially, overruled only Nagaoka, and left Yamagata the choice between Uehara and Kigoshi. In response, Yamagata nominated Uehara, as agreed beforehand.³⁴ After being informed about Yamagata's decision, the prime minister formally submitted Uehara's nomination as army minister for the emperor's approval.³⁵ It is important to keep in mind that several generals were involved in the selection of the minister, and no one could unilaterally dictate the nomination to the others. The collective nature of this process is key to understanding the crisis that followed.

³³ Oka to Terauchi, 25.3.1912; Uehara to Terauchi, 31.3.1912; Terauchi to Katsura, 6, 14.4.1912, *KTKB*, 278-9.

³⁴ Saionji to Yamagata, 4.2.1912, *YAKM* 2:147; Oka to Terauchi, 3.4.1912; Lone, *Katsura*, 175-6.

³⁵ Tazaki, *Tanaka*, 295; Takekoshi Yosaburō, *Prince Saionji*, trans. Kozaki Nariyaki (Kyoto: Ritsumeikan University, 1933), 262.

The Taishō Political Crisis – Act One: Saionji against the Army

In early July 1912, Home Minister Hara Kei had good reasons to believe that the resistance of the army to the government's retrenchment policy could well be overcome. The positions, after all, were not so far apart, as the government wanted merely to postpone the formation of the two divisions rather than indefinitely giving them up. It was also possible to deny extra budget to both army and navy, as in previous years.³⁶ To begin with, Hara did not attach much importance to the crisis, and even a cursory examination of his diary shows that other problems, such as his duties in the Home Ministry and at the *Seiyūkai*, overshadowed the question of the two divisions in his mind until early autumn.³⁷ Still, he devoted some attention to the discord with the army. On July 1, Hara had a fruitful conversation with Katsura Tarō, the former prime minister, whose influence in the army was still significant. Katsura openly told his guest that the demands of the army were unrealistic, and the generals were notified accordingly.³⁸ Hara thus had ample reasons to think that with the support of Katsura, a prominent figure in the Chōshū Clique, the army's influence might well be checked.

Six days later, Katsura embarked on a long-planned tour of Europe with some of his closest advisors.³⁹ However, this venture proved to be disastrous. Katsura, who had long maneuvered between Yamagata, his erstwhile patron, and Hara's *Seiyūkai*,

³⁶ *HTN* 3:264-6.

³⁷ The tendency of the government to delay and ignore the problem until the last moment was bemoaned by General Tanaka, see in "Zōshi Mondai Kei", *TGD* 2:514.

³⁸ *HTN* 3:237.

³⁹ *The Times*, 10.6, 15-16.7.2012.

had gradually evoked Yamagata's ire.⁴⁰ On 30 July Emperor Meiji passed away after a long illness, and Katsura was forced to cancel his trip and hurry back to Japan.⁴¹ When he arrived in Tokyo, on August 11, he was shocked to discover that Yamagata "arranged" a retirement from active politics for him, into the positions of chief chamberlain in the palace and lord keeper of the privy seal.⁴² Such roles were customary for retired *genrō* and other high dignitaries, but Katsura was at the height of his political aspirations (the British *Times* crowned him in July as the "future prime minister of Japan"), and he perceived Yamagata's move as a stab in the back.⁴³

The results were unforeseen and far reaching. After his "exile" to the palace, Katsura quickly entered a bitter mood of "if you wanted me to step out of the way then why didn't you say so," and thus became reluctant to mediate between the *Seiyūkai* and the Chōshū Clique. Perhaps, as Hara assumed at the time, it was also a cool, reasoned calculation on Katsura's part, as a severe political crisis could have served as an excuse for his return to active politics. Whether it was true or not, in the autumn of 1912 Katsura had a perfect excuse not to help Hara: he could always say that his new role in the palace tied his hands from active involvement.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Saaler, *Militarismus*, 76; Najita, *Hara*, 93-4; Naitō, Kazunari, "Taishō Seihenki ni okeru Katsura Shintō to Kizokuin", *Shigaku Zasshi* 111:4 (April, 2002), 80; Duus, *Party Rivalry*, 39.

⁴¹ Kato Takaaki, ambassador to the UK, to Katsura, 3.9.1912, Motono Ichirō, ambassador to Russia, to Katsura, 15.9.1912 *KTKB*, 138-9, 345-6.

⁴² *Taishō Demokurashii-ki no Seiji: Matsumoto Gōkichi Seiji Nisshi*, Oka Yoshitake, Hayashi Shigeru, eds. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1959), 3; Katō to Katsura, 3.9.1912, *KTKB*, 138-9; "Yūgo Kōzoku", *Taiyō*, August 1912 (2), pp.18-19.

⁴³ *The Times*, 18.7.1912; Katō to Katsura, 20.7.1912, Motono to Katsura, 15.9.1912, *KTKB*, 126-8; Lone, *Katsura*, 177; Gotō to Katsura, 5.9.1912, *KTKB*, 178-9.

⁴⁴ *HTN* 3:244-5; Katsura's bitterness could be indirectly seen through the letters he received from Yamagata's advisors who promised him repeatedly that there was no attempt to insult or exclude him. See for example: Gotō Shimpei to Katsura, 28.8, 5.9.1912, *KTKB*, 176-8. It was also reflected in

Under such conditions, it was difficult to create functioning channels of communication between the army and the cabinet. One obvious channel could have been formed through Army Minister Uehara, but he was universally seen as a weak figure manipulated by his subordinates, "a horse managed by a skillful circus rider," according to one observer.⁴⁵ Certainly, Uehara was neither competent nor willing to challenge the army consensus, and therefore Prime Minister Saionji chose to effectively ignore and bypass him. Yamagata, elderly but still active, was another obvious choice, but even his influence was not as strong as it used to be.⁴⁶ He could, perhaps, force the army to compromise, had he wished to put his whole weight into the matter. The problem was how to convince him to make such immense efforts for Hara and the *Seiyūkai*, whom he heartily disliked.

Instead, Yamagata preferred to keep a low profile, though his position was initially moderate (he and his advisors did not wish to see Saionji's cabinet overthrown, at least not until the last stage of the crisis).⁴⁷ Accordingly, in his first meeting with the prime minister in August, Yamagata's offer to solve the crisis was to permit the army to use the money saved by the retrenchment to finance the two divisions. This attempt at compromise was, however, rejected by the cabinet.

Katsura' later behavior. When he became prime minister again, on 17 December, he asked Yamagata, rather rudely, to "rest in his villa" and stop meddling in politics. See: Duus, *Party Rivalry*, 39. Still, bitter as he was, in autumn 1912 Katsura did not yet sever the ties with his former friends. Instead, he continued a covert cooperation with Yamagata and the Chōshū Clique, even from inside the palace. See for example: Katsura to Yamagata, 16.10.1912, *KTHS*, 429. In Yamagata's papers (*YAKM* 1:381-2), this letter is dated 16.10, probably by mistake (15.10 is mentioned in the letter as a future date).

⁴⁵ Takekoshi, *Saionji*, 267.

⁴⁶ "Nikko Shidan", *TMKM*, 584.

⁴⁷ See for example the letter sent by Gotō Shimpei, Yamagata's civilian advisor, to Katsura Tarō on 28.8.1912, *KTKB*, 177.

General Terauchi tried, at the last moment, to postpone the crisis by proposing to delay the extra funding for both army and navy, but this plan also failed to elicit a response.⁴⁸ One supporter of the government ensured the prime minister that if he stopped the funding plan for the navy, the two divisions issue would die out by itself. But for Saionji and Hara that was no longer the issue: they could not surrender to the army's demands without "losing face" and endangering their support base in the navy, the *Seiyūkai* and public opinion.⁴⁹ Some *genrō* did try their hand at mediation, but their lack of influence in the army turned it into a mockery. Hara, sick and tired of *genrō* meddling, wrote in his diary that their influence had to be stopped altogether. Above all, he was loath to meet or to negotiate directly with Yamagata, whom he personally detested.⁵⁰

Adding to the difficulty of the entire situation was the fact that the two people who *really* stood at the epicenter of the army's Chōshū Clique, General Tanaka Giichi and his direct subordinate, Colonel Ugaki Kazushige, had no official position of leadership.⁵¹ Both worked in the Military Affairs Bureau at the Army

⁴⁸ *HTN* 3:250; Hirata Tōsuke (?) to Katsura, December 1912, precise day unclear, *KTKB*, 325, as well as similar ideas (voiced after the fall of Saionji's cabinet), in Yamagata to Katsura, 10.12.1912, *ibid*, 447-8. and compare with Yamagata's interview to *Jiji Shinpō*, 11.12.1912, as well as his later version in *Danwa Hikki*, 27-8. This conversation and the interview have to be treated with some caution, as they were apologetic attempts by Yamagata to explain his position post-facto, for source analysis see: Itō Takashi, "Taishō shoki Yamagata Aritomo Danwa Hikki", *Shigaku Zasshi* 75:10 (1966), 63-7.

⁴⁹ Kyofuji to Saionji, 16.11.1912, *JACAR*, Ref. B03030229900, p.2. The counterarguments which moved Saionji to stick to his plans to augment the navy are reflected in the petition itself. For the prevailing opinions in *Seiyūkai*'s executive committee at the height of the crisis see also Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 187.

⁵⁰ *HTN* 3:257, 64; Katsura to Yamagata, 13.10.1912, *KTHS*, 429; Matsukata to Yamagata, *YAKM* 3:244.

⁵¹ *UKN* 1:88; *Zuihitsu Saionji-kō*, ed. Koizumi Sakutarō, (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1939), 269 (hereafter cited as *ZSK*); Kobayashi Michihiko, "Taishō Seihenki no Tairiku Seisaku to Rikukaigun: 1912-1914-nen", *Nihonshi Kenkyū* 363 (November, 1992), 5; Maeda Renzan, *Rekidai Naikaku Monogatari* (Tokyo: Jiji Tsūshinsha, 1961), 1:412.

Ministry, Tanaka heading the entire bureau, and Ugaki its most important section (confusingly also named "Military Affairs Section"). Their formal role was certainly not powerful enough to permit frequent talks with the prime minister or other senior political figures. There was a fatal incongruence between the official, vertical network of the army, the normal hierarchy of ranks, which dictated the official rules of conduct, and the private network, the Chōshū Clique, where real power flowed. The result was that the people who could be approached by the government, Katsura, Uehara and Yamagata, were either unable or unwilling to change the army's consensus, and the people who *could* influence the army, Tanaka and Ugaki, were unapproachable.⁵² The government and the army, unable to communicate and riding on the tigers of public opinion and the internal military consensus, were heading to inevitable collision. Attempts to negotiate compromise, while not impossible, became increasingly difficult.⁵³

The *Genrō* Inoue Kaoru, whom we met in the previous chapter as the Japanese envoy to Korea, was perhaps the only one who understood that in order to solve the crisis, one had to stage direct negotiations between the people who really mattered in each camp: Hara from the *Seiyūkai* and General Tanaka from the army. And indeed, he made immense efforts to arrange such negotiations at the beginning

⁵² See for example *HTN* 3:263-7; Tazaki, *Tanaka*, 330,4; Uehara to Terauchi, 6.12.1912, reproduced in Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 198-9. On the importance of Hara and Matsuda in the party, see also Ozaki, *Autobiography*, 266.

⁵³ Tanaka to Katsura, 17.12.1912, *KTKB*, 250; Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 170; *TGD* 2:489; Ōtsu, *Kenseishi* 6:751; Toshitani, "Meiji Kempō", 81.

of November.⁵⁴ However, these attempts ended in failure because of Hara's refusal to negotiate with mid-ranking officers. General Tanaka, he told Inoue angrily, was not in a position to speak with him. It was unreasonable, scoffed Hara, to be directly approached by a subordinate officer instead of by the army minister.⁵⁵ The two meetings held therefore failed to produce substantial results, and that channel of direct negotiations was never reopened.

Meanwhile, the people who were formally in charge of the army were less and less receptive to compromises. Army Minister Uehara, wrote Hara in his diary, "decided to gamble on a stiff approach."⁵⁶ But his sharp-worded petition to the government, submitted in November, was in fact drafted by Tanaka and Ugaki.⁵⁷ As Katsura told Hara, the minister had become a "prisoner" of his bureau and section heads, who were located at the junction of control over the military establishment.⁵⁸

In early November, there were some failed, last-ditch attempts by Saionji to work out a compromise with Yamagata. Unfortunately, the old field marshal was in no mood for compromise. He insisted on the absolute necessity of forming the additional two divisions, complained about the discrimination toward the army in

⁵⁴ Tazaki (*Tanaka*, 324) argues that Inoue's mediation was prompted by Tanaka's initiative, an attempt to directly convince the leading members of the *Seiyūkai* of the justice of the army's demands.

⁵⁵ *HTN* 3:260, 70.

⁵⁶ *HTN* 3:258; Tazaki, *Tanaka*, 334-5.

⁵⁷ The memorandum is reproduced in *TGD* 2:491-3, and see note in p.493 about authorship. In addition see the analysis in Tazaki, *Tanaka*, 317.

⁵⁸ The quote is from *HTN* 3:266. For the failed attempts of Satsuma Clique officers to win over Uehara against the Chōshū Clique see: Uehara to Terauchi, 6.12.1912 (in this letter, Uehara denied any Satsuma influence upon his decisions), reproduced in Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 160, 98-9; Tazaki, *Tanaka*, 331-3.

favor of the navy, and was not even prepared to delay the formation of the divisions. National defense, he said, must be primary, and the economy secondary. If the government continued to discriminate against the army in favor of the navy, there might be "grave consequences" and a "major incident" could occur. Yamagata, in other words, openly threatened to overthrow the government by use of the military. The fact that his position had hardened so much since August indicates that he might have been influenced by hardliners such as General Tanaka – whose arguments were explicitly mentioned in the conversation.⁵⁹

In the cabinet meeting of November 22, the army minister refused to speak with the government about the problems or to explain the reasons for the army's demands, unless the prime minister accepted them in advance. When pressured, he gave an offhand presentation, which, according to Hara, "was even more careless than the one given by Tanaka." This presentation was possibly based, yet again, on a radical opinion paper drafted by Colonel Ugaki. Uehara, it seemed, believed that a head-on confrontation was coming and felt reluctant to do anything to avert it. Hara was indignant: "this is not the behavior of a cabinet minister", he wrote in disgust in his diary.⁶⁰ Uehara was no longer perceived as part of the government, but rather as the mouthpiece of a hostile power.

⁵⁹ Saionji-Yamagata conversation, 10.11.1912, reproduced in *TGD* 2:495-7, for Yamagata's version see: *Danwa Hikki*, 31-4. Tanaka, as expected, was staunchly against any delay, see "Zōshi Mondai Keii", *TGD* 2:509. For interpretation see Tazaki, *Tanaka*, 329. Compare with: Yamagata to Katsura, 28.11.1912, *KTKB*, 447. Later, Tanaka himself said that Yamagata was "dragged" into the matter, though he strangely blamed Inoue, of all people, for precipitating the cabinet crisis. See: *ZSK*, 269.

⁶⁰ *HTN* 3:264; Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 175-6.

"Public opinion", in addition, had made compromise increasingly difficult. In the face of the army's pressure, the cabinet was encouraged by a strong campaign carried out by financial leaders and strong segments of the liberal press. Shibusawa Eiichi, one of the doyens of the Japanese banking system, expressed "utter resistance" to the army's plan, supporting instead retrenchment and tax cuts.⁶¹ Several influential newspapers and periodicals such as *Tokyo Keizai Zasshi*, *Osaka Mainichi* and *Nihon Oyobi Nihonjin* railed against the "domain cliques" (most predominantly the Chōshū Clique) and the military leaders, attacks which were intensified in late September and throughout October. On October 5th, *Tokyo Keizai Zasshi* suggested that the problem of the division increase was a zero sum game, and Prime Minister Saionji had to decide immediately. The correspondent ridiculed the army's arguments, and warned that any attempt to "keep the military balance" with Russia by expanding the Japanese army might lead to an arms race and eventual state bankruptcy.⁶²

In a particularly blatant article published on October 15, *Nihon oyobi Nihonjin* charged that the two additional divisions were not required on grounds of national security. Instead, the paper argued, the army's ruling "cliques" were asking for new divisions in order to entrench their dominant position, a demand the people must resist, smashing the cliques with an "iron hammer".⁶³ Four days later, the *Osaka Mainichi*, quoting an American observer, declared that the rule of the Chōshū Clique,

⁶¹ Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 153.

⁶² "Chōsen Shidan Mondai no Setsujitsu", *Tokyo Keizai Zasshi*, 5.10.1912.

⁶³ "Tōzai Nanboku", *Nihon Oyobi Nihonjin*, 15.10.1912, pp.2-3.

Yamagata and Katsura had to be swept away, just like Bakufu rule was broken during the Meiji Restoration.⁶⁴ Still, it is important to note that several newspapers, such as *Kokumin Shinbun*, took the opposite view and supported the position of the army.⁶⁵

Hara made it clear to Inoue, who was still trying to negotiate a solution, that the *Seiyūkai* members, like the press, were set against bowing to the army's demands, while Yamagata assured Saionji that the army could not give up on its two divisions. On November 20, Hara realized that the cabinet might fall over this issue.⁶⁶ Six days later, Saionji and the two *Seiyūkai* party leaders, Hara and Matsuda, decided not to give in to the army even if the cabinet collapsed as a result.⁶⁷ In this dire situation, Hara tried to approach Katsura again. A feeler sent by the *Seiyūkai* leader allegedly ensured Katsura's agreement to broker a last minute compromise, delaying the establishment of the two divisions for one year. Katsura, however, declined again to intervene, claiming that Hara's emissary had misheard him. Hara began to suspect that Katsura's behavior was motivated by ulterior designs. "I realized," he wrote, "that Katsura had no intentions of bringing about a settlement to the situation. I felt, in short, that Katsura and his ilk hoped to use this issue to topple the

⁶⁴ "Nihon no Zentō wo nani usuru ka III", *Osaka Mainichi*, 19.10.1912.

⁶⁵ Tazaki, *Tanaka*, 313; Matsukata to Hirata, *YAKM* 3:244.

⁶⁶ *HTN* 3:260-1, 3. As for the importance of the army's feeling of discrimination vis-à-vis the navy, compare with the memorandum submitted to General Terauchi in September, "Niko Shidan", *TMKM*, 533. The resistance in the *Seiyūkai* to the army's demands was also recognized in Yamagata's camp, see: Gotō to Katsura, 5.9.1912, *KTKB*, 182.

⁶⁷ *HTN* 3:264,7.

cabinet. Thus, I warned him that on another day, a struggle beyond expectation might develop between him and me."⁶⁸

A final attempt to apply pressure to Uehara also failed. On November 28, the army minister initially agreed to compromise with the government by delaying the formation of the divisions for one year. However, a day later he returned to his non-compromising position. Uehara probably did so, as the leading Japanese scholar of the crisis assumes, due to pressure by Tanaka and other subordinate officers.⁶⁹ On November 30, Hara conceded to the cabinet that in the absence of a new army minister they would all have to resign.⁷⁰ One day later, Saionji formally notified Uehara that the divisional increase plan had been rejected, and the latter offered his resignation "on grounds of illness" through the secretary of the cabinet.⁷¹

Now, Hara, Saionji and their allies had to find a new army minister, but that proved to be a daunting challenge: a consensus had formed around the two divisions issue in the army, and it was very difficult for one single general, even one who did not belong to the Chōshū Clique, to cross the picket line in violation of this consensus. The problem with the army lay not only with its unconstitutional authority to overthrow governments, but also with its internal weakness. Military power was dispersed inside the establishment, without a clear person in charge, and

⁶⁸ *HTN* 3:267, translation taken from Najita, *Hara*, 98. I have made only one change in Najita's translation, replacing "Katsura and his backers" with "Katsura and his ilk", a somewhat more accurate translation of the Japanese term "Katsura nado" (桂等).

⁶⁹ Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 190.

⁷⁰ *HTN* 3:269; *Terauchi Masatake Nikki, 1900-1918*, ed. Yamamoto Shirō, (Kyoto: Kyoto Joshi Daigaku, 1980), 570-1 (hereafter cited as *TMN*), 568.

⁷¹ *HTN* 3:269-70.

no general was ready to appear as "soft" before his peers. Thus, the consensus was aligned according to the positions of the most radical actors.

Still, the cabinet tried to find a replacement for Uehara. In the crucial three days between 2 and 5 December, the names of two generals (Terauchi and Kamio) were raised as potential replacements, but both were rejected out of hand by Hara.⁷² On December 2, Hara decided to make a final appeal to Yamagata to secure a replacement for Uehara, but to no avail. As a result, the collective resignation of the cabinet was finally submitted to the throne three days later, on the 5th of December.⁷³ "That was nothing more or less than a strike of military men," wrote one of Saionji's supporters in rage, "There had been instances of change of Ministry brought about by steps taken in the dark, but no instance of a case undertaken so nakedly, so boldly and so relentlessly as this. It was as if they had blocked up the front and the rear gates, bound the hands and the feet of the inmates and were going to set fire to the house."⁷⁴ The *tōsui-ken* system, designed by Yamagata in order to stabilize the army and keep it away from rebellious activity, now empowered the generals to overthrow a civilian cabinet. That was a new, dangerous stage in the history of Japanese military disobedience.

On December 17, after considering and dropping several candidates, the *Genrō* Council recommended Katsura to the emperor as the new prime minister of

⁷² *HTN* 3:270-1.

⁷³ *HTN* 3:270-1; Tanaka to Terauchi, 4.12.1912, *TMKM*, 587; Tazaki, *Tanaka*, 342. Compare with Yamagata's version in *Danwa Hikki*, 33-4.

⁷⁴ Takekoshi, *Saionji*, 266.

Japan. His nomination was accordingly approved by the throne.⁷⁵ Immediately upon his appointment as prime minister, however, Katsura found himself facing a severe political crisis, very similar to the one which had toppled his predecessor. This time, however, the government was challenged by the Imperial Navy.

Act Two: Katsura against the Navy

When Katsura Tarō was appointed by the emperor as the successor of Prime Minister Saionji on January 17, 1913, there were many who viewed him as the "army's candidate". Yet, if the leaders of the army hoped that Katsura would give them their long-sought two divisions, they were bitterly wrong. Upon his ascendance to the prime ministry, Katsura took a reasonable decision which could probably have saved Saionji's cabinet from dissolution: he delayed the delivery of the extra funds to navy and army alike, with the sound argument that one year at least was required to devise an integrated navy-army defense strategy.⁷⁶

However the army was not in a position to resist the new prime minister. In a political system based on balance, as was the case in early Taishō Japan, a sweeping victory of one faction over the others could well prove to be a pyrrhic one. Indeed, already in September some army planners expressed the fear that using *bukansei* authority to overthrow a cabinet might lead to negative repercussions in public

⁷⁵ Watanabe to Katsura, December 1912 (precise date unclear), *KTKB*, 492; *TMN*, 570-1; *DKN* 2:237. For more details about the process of selection see Yamagata's testimony in *Danwa Hikki*, 34-42, as well as Tokutomi Ichirō (Sohō), ed, *Kōshaku Katsura Tarō Den* (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1967), 2:613-4 (hereafter cited as *KKTD*). The imperial edict is reproduced in *Danwa Hikki*, 614.

⁷⁶ Terauchi to Yamagata, 24.12.1912, *YAKM* 2:401; Tanaka to Terauchi, 27.12.1912, reproduced in Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 300-1; *DKN* 2:238; *KKTD* 2:614-15; Schencking, *Waves*, 157. For detailed discussion with numerical data see: *Nihon Kaigun shi* 2:220-2.

opinion. In an anonymous memorandum submitted at that time, a high military officer warned that the army "might become the scapegoat for the failure of the administrative reorganization, naval enlargement and tax cuts alike, making the position of the next cabinet difficult." The author of the memorandum made clear that such consequences were a worthy price for two additional divisions, but he and his colleagues may have underestimated the volume of popular rage.⁷⁷ "It is well to smile with pity on the stupidity of Saionji's cabinet," wrote one of Yamagata's confidants to the old field marshal on December 7, "but now the blame is shifted to the army, which draws the entire gamut of the people's wrath."⁷⁸

As a result, the army proved unable to resist its "own candidate", Katsura, when he brushed aside the two divisions' plan.⁷⁹ The navy, though, was another story. The influence of Satsuma officers, especially the fleet's founding father, Admiral Yamamoto Gonnohyōe, was very high – so high that the navy as an institution became associated with the "Satsuma Clique." Just like the army's "Chōshū Clique", it was not really a regional organization, certainly not one that worked for the interests of Kagoshima Prefecture or an organization representing all Satsuma officers in the armed services. As we have seen, Army Minister Uehara, a former Satsuma retainer, was a key member of the Chōshū Clique, and many so called "Satsuma Clique" officers, like Admiral Saitō Makoto, were actually not from Satsuma. It would be better to define the "Satsuma Clique" as a counter-

⁷⁷ "Niko Shidan", *TMKM*, 533; Kigoshi to Katsura, 16.2.1913, *KTKB*, 149.

⁷⁸ Kiyoura Keigo to Yamagata, 7.12.1912, *YAKM* 2:79-80; Compare with Uehara to Katsura, 21.12.1912, reproduced in Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 297-9.

⁷⁹ Tanaka to Katsura, 17.12.1912, *KTKB*, 250-1; Lone, *Katsura*, 182-3.

organization of officers and civilians who opposed the Chōshū Clique, namely, the influence of Yamagata and his cronies in the armed forces. In late 1912, these people were mostly concentrated in the navy, and their hatred for the Chōshū Clique, increasingly associated with the army, was combined with the traditional hostility between the two armed services.⁸⁰

Some of Yamagata's advisors had hoped that by nominating Katsura to the prime ministry they might bridge the gap with the Satsuma-dominated navy, but that was a mistake.⁸¹ The new prime minister, despite the complexity of his relations with the Chōshū Clique, was still strongly associated with it, and the navy was in no mood to compromise with him. The navy minister, Admiral Saitō Makoto, felt as if his cherished plans for naval renewal had slipped from his hands at the last moment.⁸² Unlike the army, which was still licking the wounds from its "victory" in December, the navy was the darling of large segments of public opinion, and in addition, enjoyed the formidable support of Hara and the *Seiyūkai*.⁸³ The leaders of the navy were therefore confident enough to warn the new prime minister that any failure to give them the budget promised by Saionji would be at his own peril. In other words, the navy planned to follow the footsteps of the army in a coup d'état against the government. If Katsura failed to give them the funds for naval expansion,

⁸⁰ Kiyoura to Yamagata, 16.12.1912, *YAKM* 2:81; Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 306.

⁸¹ Kiyoura to Yamagata, 16.12.1912, *YAKM* 2:81-2; Gotō's conversation with the Russian ambassador, H.A.Malevsky-Malevich to S.D. Sazonov, 12.12.1912, in Molodiakov, *Sbornik Doukemtov*, 87-8.

⁸² Even General Tanaka, no friend of the navy, predicted that under such circumstances Admiral Saitō would have to resign – remaining in the cabinet would amount to cowardice. See: Tanaka to Terauchi, 27.12.1912, reproduced in Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 301.

⁸³ *HTN* 3:274; Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 303-4; Kobayashi, "Taishō Seihenki Tairiku", 4.

the navy minister would be withdrawn and no successor would be found among the admirals, naturally leading to the collapse of the cabinet.⁸⁴

The navy's stance towards Katsura was haughty to such a degree that even the behavior of the army seemed moderate in comparison. The army, as explained above, at least tried to negotiate. The navy, by contrast, was not interested in any parley. Judging by the behavior of its leaders, they longed either for unconditional surrender, or for Katsura's head on a platter. As Admiral Yamamoto Gonnohyōe told the vice minister, that was a matter of honor. A successor must not be appointed because "the navy's competency is questioned here."⁸⁵ Immediately after his nomination, the new prime minister frantically searched for Navy Minister Saitō, but the latter, when contacted by telegraph, sent a note to say that he was convalescing from a sickness in Ichinomiya, a town near Nagoya, and was not available for a meeting. In fact, Saitō really had gone to Ichinomiya, but had already returned to Tokyo on the 17th. There he hid, guarded by naval officers with express orders to deny all visitors at the door under the pretext that the minister was not at home.⁸⁶

There are multiple ways to explain Saitō's bizarre behavior, but the most probable is also the most simple: the navy minister did not want to make it completely impossible for Katsura to reach him, but wanted to play "hard to get".

⁸⁴ *Den Kenjirō Nikki*, ed. Hirose Yoshihiro, (Tokyo: Shōyū Kurabu, Seisaku Fuyō Shobō Shuppan, 2008) 2:238 (hereafter cited as *DKN*); *KKTD* 2:614-5.

⁸⁵ *TTN* 2:119.

⁸⁶ One of the most detailed primary sources for these events is the testimony of Egi Yoku, Katsura's secretary of the cabinet. It is reproduced in *KKTD* 2:615-18. This testimony is partially confirmed by Saitō's own diary, see the entries for 17-20.12, op.cit. in Saitō Shishaku Kinenkai, ed., *Shishaku Saitō Makoto Den*, (Tokyo: Saitō Shishaku Kinenkai, 1941-2) 2:204-7 (hereafter cited as *SSMD*); Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 307-8, as well as by the diary of Navy vice minister Takarabe Takeshi, *TTN* 2:118-9.

Finally, one day later, Katsura was able to locate Saitō through the records of the telegraph agency and hastened to meet him. The two men spoke as frankly as possible in the given circumstances. Katsura openly confessed his distress and asked for Saitō's help, but the latter told him that his hands were tied by the collective decision of the other admirals who rejected any compromise. "He was not happy," he explained, "with the way in which things were done in the navy," but he had no choice but to follow the consensus." Yet, Katsura and Saitō were able to forge a temporary agreement, promising the funds to the navy in two installments spread over two years. A day later, however, Saitō apologized, saying that he had to retract the agreement just made. In a meeting convened in the minister's house, the vice minister, the chief of the navy's staff and other key officers staunchly resisted the proposed solution, and Saitō could not violate the consensus, as he told his vice minister, "without becoming socially dead." When Admiral Yamamoto Gonnohyōe, the most influential figure in the navy, personally intervened against the compromise with Katsura, Saitō felt he had no choice. Consequently, using the usual pretext, the navy minister retired "due to ill health".⁸⁷

Katsura, however, reacted speedily with an unprecedented move. As a politician who had spent several months in the palace at the side of the new emperor, he saw himself as His Majesty's teacher and tutor, referring to him in

⁸⁷ Egi's testimony, *KKTD* 2:616-18; Saitō's diary in *SSMD* 2:204-7, and the latter's reply to Katsura in *ibid*, 2:205-6; See also Takarabe's diary, *TTN* 2:119-23, and the discussion in Schencking, *Waves*, 158-9; *Nihon Kaigun shi* 2:222-5. The key naval officers who were present in the meeting were Admirals Ijūin, Chief of Staff of the Navy, Fujii, his deputy, Matsumoto, chief of the fleet section and Takarabe, the vice minister (Saitō's diary, 20.12.1912 reproduced in *SSMD* 2:206). As these names reoccur in the sources, it may be safely concluded that this small group of admirals, along with their mentor Yamamoto Gonbee, held the key for the consensus in the Imperial Navy.

conversations with foreign diplomats as "my young master" or even "my boy".⁸⁸

Therefore, faced by the navy's intransigence, he felt confident enough to draw power from "his boy" on the Imperial Throne.

On October 21, a day after the final break with Admiral Saitō, Katsura convened the *Genrō* Council and was able to convince the elders to play along: a request, jointly signed by Yamagata and Inoue, was duly sent to His Majesty, asking for a rescript forcing Admiral Saitō to resume his duties as navy minister. Taking no chances, the prime minister arranged that the rescript would be handed to Saitō himself in the palace.⁸⁹ Katsura, one of the few politicians who were intimately familiar with the complicated, dispersed structure of power in the armed services, realized that the imperial card had to be played against Saitō personally. Had the minister resigned, it would have been much more difficult to issue orders to the "navy", because there was no clear individual in charge – whom would one order? But Saitō was an individual, and like any other Japanese subject, he could not refuse an imperial order given personally to him, and nor could the other officers urge him to do so.⁹⁰ Katsura, to say it bluntly, had used a non-conventional weapon, his most effective one, in the battlefield of politics.

Saitō, thus, remained in the Navy Ministry, thereby saving the cabinet from dissolution, but the reaction to the non-conventional weapon Katsura had used

⁸⁸ Katsura frequently used the German terms "mein junger Herr" and once in a while even "mein junge" (my boy). The conversation was held with the Russian ambassador, and Katsura, who was fluent in German, used this language as a medium of communication. Malevsky-Malevich to Sazonov, 21.8.1912, Molodiakov, *Sbornik Dokumentov*, 86.

⁸⁹ *KKTD* 2:615; *TTN* 2:123-4; *DDN* 2:239. The Imperial rescript is reproduced in *SSMD* 2:211-12

⁹⁰ *TTN* 2:124-5; *HTN* 3:274-5.

spread far and wide.⁹¹ In order to consolidate his power, the prime minister had established a new party, the *Dōshikai*, a step considered as a casus belli by Hara and the *Seiyūkai*, who loathed losing their dominant position in the political world. From that moment, the *Seiyūkai* became committed to join the fight against Katsura. Still, had the prime minister been confronted merely with Hara, the *Seiyūkai* and the navy, he might have got away with his unusual utilization of the hazy center. That, however, was far from being the case. In 1912, the Japanese press, much of it sympathetic to the political parties and to the ideology of constitutionalism, was already boisterous and highly influential.⁹² Having separation between throne and government as one of their major demands, the liberal papers had been dismayed in August when Katsura was appointed to the dual role of chief chamberlain and lord keeper of the privy seal. Not only had they seen a danger that the Chōshū Clique might take control of the palace through Katsura, his appointment was seen as a dangerous mixture of throne and government.⁹³ When Katsura actually used the hazy imperial center, as prime minister, to force the navy to comply, these fears were realized and the response was furious, much beyond that Katsura had probably ever imagined.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Though the navy did get some of the funds for shipbuilding, see: *Nihon Kaigun shi* 2:225-7.

⁹² For interesting contemporary reflections on the press and its influence on public opinion see the letter sent by the CEO of the *Osaka Mainichi* newspaper, Motoyama Hikoichi, to Communications Minister Gotō Shimpei, 24.12.1912, *KTKB*, 183-4. And compare with: Matsukata to Katsura, 20.1.1913, *ibid*, 340.

⁹³ "Nihon no Zento wo nani usuru ka iii", *Osaka Mainichi*, 19.10.1912; "Yūgo Kōzoku", *Taiyō*, August 1912(2), pp.18-19; Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 102-5; Takekoshi, *Saionji*, 266; Hackett, *Yamagata*, 255. Similar feelings prevailed also in the *Seiyūkai*, see Ozaki, *Autobiography*, 265.

⁹⁴ *Banshoroku: Takahashi Sōan Nikki*, ed. Takahashi Yoshio, (Kyoto: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 1986-1990) 1:179; Schencking, *Waves*, 159-66.

Thus, from late December 1912 through February next year, Japan was swept by a wave of rallies and mass demonstrations. Many were violent, fed by the press and the smooth, well-oiled national organization of the *Seiyūkai* Party.⁹⁵ This impressive outburst of energy, known at the time as the "Movement to Protect Constitutional Government" (*Kensei Yōgo Undo*) was in fact led by a tenuous coalition of businessmen, journalists and party politicians, silently backed by the navy.⁹⁶ Most impressively, it had united the *Seiyūkai* with its bitter political rival, the *Kokumintō* (People's Party).⁹⁷ In fact, the movement originated "at the fireplace" in a club called the *Kōjunsha*, a union of graduates from the prestigious Keiō University with ties in the business world, the press and the *Seiyūkai*.⁹⁸ In organizing a powerful political response in early Taishō Japan, connectivity was everything. Amidst the chaos and mayhem in the streets, the two main leaders of the movement, the *Seiyūkai*'s Ozaki Yukio and *Kokumintō*'s Inukai Tsuyoshi, were crowned by the intoxicated crowds as the "gods of constitutional government".⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Though the cooperation of the *Seiyūkai* helped the movement, it was far from being a necessary condition for throwing violent mass demonstrations. In fact, as Andrew Gordon argues, such rallies were often organized against the *Seiyūkai*, both before and after 1913. See: Andrew D. Gordon, "The Crowds and Politics in Imperial Japan: Tokyo: 1905-1908", *Past and Present* 121 (November, 1988), 168.

⁹⁶ *Banshoroku* 1:235; Hackett, *Yamagata*, 257. For an additional first-hand description by a key participant: Ozaki, *Autobiography*, 267. For analysis see Saaler, *Militarismus*, 84-5.

⁹⁷ *DKN* 2:253; Ozaki, *Autobiography*, 266; *HTN* 3:277-8. For background on the *Kokumintō* see: Duus, *Party Rivalry*, 37.

⁹⁸ For the disapproval in the *Kōjunsha* at the very day of Katsura's nomination see: *Banshoroku* 1:174-5, and for information on the club as the movement's network hub see also *ibid*, pp.231-5, 40. The quote about the fireplace is in p.235. See also Ozaki, *Autobiography*, 266; Takekoshi, *Saionji*, 270; Duus, *Party Rivalry*, 41.

⁹⁹ Katsura to Miura Gorō, *KTHS*, 366-7; *DKN* 2:247,51; Ozaki, *Autobiography*, 267-8; *HTN* 3:281; Najita, *Hara*, 102, 17-18; Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 310; Saaler, *Militarismus*, 82.

The wave of violent criticism omitted few people in the establishment. The press reviled the domain cliques (i.e. the Chōshū Clique), the army and the *genrō*, who were decried as senile, power-hungry backroom schemers. Yamagata drew a large share of the fire, and there were even strong rumors about an imminent attempt to assassinate him (such an attempt was indeed made, but the inept assassin, a young dental student, failed to reach the field marshal and was quickly arrested).¹⁰⁰ Katsura, however, emerged as the worst *bête noir* of the press. Already suspected by many as the mastermind behind Saionji's fall and vulnerable at the top because of his position as prime minister, his person became a convenient target for the public's rage.¹⁰¹

Though the campaign officially began with a joint rally of the *Seiyūkai* and *Kokumintō* on December 19, two days before Katsura issued the imperial rescript to Navy Minister Saitō, the dramatic use of the imperial hazy center was a crucial contribution to the fanning of the flames. Ozaki Yukio, one of the movement's leaders, publically charged in a Diet speech after the rescript was issued that Katsura and his friends intended to "hide behind the throne, lying in wait to ambush their political foes. They have made the throne their breastplate, and the rescript their bullets to destroy their enemy."¹⁰² According to one witness, the prime minister was shocked by these accusations, as they exposed the basic illusion at the heart of the

¹⁰⁰ "Chōsen Shidan Mondai", *Tokyo Keizai Zasshi*, 5.10.1912; "Nihon no Zentō wo nani usuru ka III", *Osaka Mainichi*, 19.10.1912; *Banshoroku* 1:177; *HTN* 3:274,6; Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 288-93; Hackett, *Yamagata*, 255.

¹⁰¹ Katsura to Yamagata, 12.1.1913, *KTHS*, 431; Schencking, *Waves*, 160-6.

¹⁰² Ozaki, *Autobiography*, 271. See also *Banshoroku* 1:235. The original is quoted in Toshitani, "Meiji Kempō", 79.

Meiji system – the "make believe" that the emperor was really ruling the country. "His [Katsura's] face turned deathly pale. I am certain his hands and feet were trembling. His facial expression was like one being sentenced to death. I had never seen such a pitiful figure."¹⁰³ Katsura, confronted by such a challenge to the ideological basis of his political power, reacted with panic. Sensing power slipping from his hands, he increasingly drew credit from the only account he had left - the prestige of the emperor, and issued more and more imperial rescripts, thus reinforcing the public rage as in a vicious circle.¹⁰⁴

Between February 10 and 12, the Movement for the Protection of Constitutional Government was able to foment riots in many of the major cities of Japan, and the government faced a situation which bordered on anarchy.¹⁰⁵ As in the past, the crowds attacked and destroyed police boxes, pro-government newspapers and other symbols of the much-despised bureaucracy.¹⁰⁶ Part of the violence, at least, was attributed to groups of *sōshi* of the same sort that took part in the assassination of Queen Min.¹⁰⁷ As usual, the wave of optimism discharged by the frequent upheavals excited violent activists by making them believe they could truly change the country by acts of mayhem.

¹⁰³ Op. cit. in Najita, *Hara*, 147. Compare with *DKN* 2:261-2, and with Ozaki's version in *Autobiography*, 271. See also Takekoshi, *Saionji*, 274.

¹⁰⁴ *DKN* 2:253; Schencking, *Waves*, 162-3; Toshitani, "Meiji Kempō", 78-9; Funaki Shigeru, *Rikugun Daijin Kigoshi Yasutsuna* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1993), 319-20.

¹⁰⁵ Terauchi to Yamagata, 19.2.1913, *YAKM* 2:401-2.

¹⁰⁶ *DKN* 2:264; Ozaki, *Autobiography*, 273-4; Najita, *Hara*, 160-1; Saaler, *Militarismus*, 87; Hackett, *Yamagata*, 256-7, 62-3.

¹⁰⁷ Siniawer, *Ruffians*, 83-5.

Initially, Prime Minister Katsura was resolute about standing firm before the rising tide, just as he was able to bend the navy. The frequent overthrow of cabinets, he wrote to Yamagata, was endangering the very basis of the Japanese polity.¹⁰⁸ Katsura could not dissolve the parliament, which had almost declared open warfare against him, because he had little chance to beat the well-organized, immensely popular *Seiyūkai* at the polls.¹⁰⁹ In desperation, the prime minister tried to repeat the same trick that had defeated the navy. He convinced the emperor to personally summon Prince Saionji, president of the *Seiyūkai*, and hand him an imperial rescript with an order to rescind the party's non-confidence vote in the Diet. Saionji and Hara, like Admiral Saitō before them, felt they had no choice but to comply with the imperial wish, but this time Katsura went too far.¹¹⁰ The dignity of the imperial rescripts was so impaired by his behavior that the rank-and-file parliamentarians of the *Seiyūkai* decided to disobey their leaders and ignore the rescript. Faced by such a humiliation of the imperial institution, unprecedented since the Meiji Restoration, Katsura finally gave up.¹¹¹ He drew so much credit from the imperial hazy center that even this allegedly omnipotent source of power was on the verge of default, with fateful implications for the imperial regime in its entirety.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Katsura to Yamagata, 12.1.1913, *KTHS*, 431.

¹⁰⁹ Toshitani, "Meiji Kempō", 79.

¹¹⁰ Ozaki, *Autobiography*, 272; *HTN* 3:287; Najita, *Hara*, 156; Saaler, *Militarismus*, 86. The original rescript is quoted in Toshitani, "Meiji Kempō", 79.

¹¹¹ Mochizuki Kotarō to Katsura, 10.2.1913, *KTKB*, 365; *DKN* 2:263-4; *HTN* 3:287; Ozaki, *Autobiography*, 273; Saaler, *Militarismus*, 86-7.

¹¹² Najita, *Hara*, 158.

On February 10, the navy's leader Admiral Yamamoto Gonnohyōe, smelling blood, came uninvited to Katsura's residence and rudely urged him to resign for the sake of the emperor. In response, the hapless prime minister agreed, and recommended Yamamoto as his successor. In response, the admiral said that he was not the right man for the job, but if the situation absolutely required it, he was ready to take the heavy burden for the sake of the nation.¹¹³

The *Seiyūkai* had failed to rule the country, because it was bullied by the army. Katsura, in turn, defeated the navy but was knocked down by the *Seiyūkai*, the press, and the general public. Now, it was the turn of the *Seiyūkai* to try again, this time in close collaboration with the Imperial Navy.¹¹⁴ The results, as we shall see, were dramatic for the country as a whole. The third act of the Taishō political crisis led, against all odds, to the partial undoing of the *tōsui-ken* system.

Act Three: "Like the Morning Dew" – the Armed Services Cornered

As the new year began, frustration with the wild behavior of the armed services, which led to the downfall of Saionji's cabinet and contributed to the undoing of Katsura's, was prevalent in Japanese political and journalistic circles. In popular newspapers and periodicals, liberal correspondents and politicians had railed against the *bukansei* system since at least the beginning of the crisis, calling to

¹¹³ *Banshoroku* 1:233-5. Yamamoto's own version of the events is reproduced in "Hakushaku Yamamoto Gonnohyōe Jikiwa", Yamamoto Kiyoshi et al, eds., *Hakushaku Yamamoto Gonnohyōe Den* (Tokyo: Ōban Insatsu Kabushiki Kaisha, 1938) 2:964-5. For discussion see: Schencking, *Waves*, 163-5; Saaler, *Militarismus*, 87.

¹¹⁴ *DKN* 2:264-5; Schencking, *Waves*, 138.

appoint civilians as army and navy ministers.¹¹⁵ These opinions were also accepted among some leading conservatives. On January 8, Prime Minister Katsura himself confided his doubts to a sympathetic member of the House of Peers, and the two men agreed that the *bukansei* system had to be abolished. From now on, Katsura said, the army and navy ministers should become civilians.¹¹⁶ Even conservative politicians understood that if the malady was not uprooted, the army and the navy could overthrow governments at will, practicing coups d'états as a political routine.

Katsura, however, was too distracted by his other troubles and never really acted against the *bukansei* system. That mission was left to his successor, Admiral Yamamoto, and the leaders of the *Seiyūkai*. On March 6, a short while after Katsura's downfall, Hara met with Yamamoto and strongly pushed for a decisive move against the *bukansei*. He proposed to change the regulations of the army and navy ministries to also allow retired generals and admirals to serve as ministers. Hara assured Yamamoto that this was the position of the *Seiyūkai*, as well as a "necessary condition" to mollify public opinion. Admiral Yamamoto promised Hara to support and promote his plan. There were advantages, he assured, in having active duty ministers, but there was no reason to set it as law. Yamamoto's motives for adopting a resolution undermining the power of his own navy are not completely clear.¹¹⁷ Certainly, dependent as he was on the *Seiyūkai*, he could hardly resist Hara in such an important matter. Probably, as well, now that he had finally acquired power, the

¹¹⁵ "Bukan Seiji Kyōsei", *Osaka Mainichi*, 10.10.1912. See also: Jōzai, "doku", *Taiyō*, August 1912(1), p.142; Ozaki Yukio, "Ryōshō ni Bukan Sen'nin no kahi", *Taiyō*, August 1912(2), pp.143-6.

¹¹⁶ *DKN* 2:247.

¹¹⁷ *HTN* 3:297.

national interest was in his mind. After two attempts by the armed services to overthrow cabinets, the first successful, the second a failure, it was clear to most informed observers that these frequent upheavals were dangerous for the stability of the imperial regime.

The main question was, obviously, how to avoid a replication of the previous months' events. The army and the navy, after all, used *tōsui-ken* to rebel against budget cuts. What would they do if the very basis of their power was at risk? This time, theoretically at least, both services might overcome their differences in protection of the *bukansei*, the root of their own power. The challenge facing Hara, Yamamoto and their allies, was how to block the well-known sequence of events leading to a coup d'état: agitation inside the private networks of the army or the navy, led by a hub such as General Tanaka, formation of an anti-government consensus, pressure on the minister to resign and refusal to appoint a successor, pushing the cabinet to an eventual collapse.

In regard to the navy, the challenge facing the cabinet was relatively easy. Admiral Yamamoto, after all, was *himself* the hub of the navy's private network, the spirit behind the deliberations leading to the attempted coup against Katsura. Even in his position as prime minister, he had preserved his power. Saionji's downfall, as we have seen, was caused in part by the incongruence between the state's formal hierarchy and the army's private network. Because the truly powerful people were officially low-ranking, it was difficult to communicate with them, thus encumbering any attempt at negotiations. In spring 1913, however, at least in relation to the navy, there was finally a full congruence between official and private structures of power.

Admiral Yamamoto, the person who held the reins of the navy, also held a high formal position as prime minister.¹¹⁸ This was owed not only to the admiral's illustrious past as the "father of the Japanese Navy", but also to an unusual amount of personal charisma. Yamamoto, as his bitter political rival, Ozaki Yukio, later recalled, was a "magisterial figure [...]". There was something "quite intimidating" about him "that could strike terror into one's heart. Even a man of such a caliber as Yamagata seemed to treat the count with awe."¹¹⁹ It was not surprising, then, that Yamamoto had an easy time winning over Navy Minister Saitō Makoto, in any case his close ally for many years.¹²⁰

With the army, too, things seemed to go smoothly, at least at first.

Yamamoto began his efforts with the new minister, General Kigoshi Yasutsuna, whose readiness to resign was a necessary condition for any military coup d'etat. Kigoshi, an officer more moderate and reasonable than Uehara, loathed presiding over the undoing of the *bukansei* system, but he was also painfully aware of the isolation of the army and the hostility of public opinion.¹²¹ Therefore, on April 8, he told Yamamoto that given the difficult situation, such a reform was "unavoidable."¹²² Yet, Kigoshi, like Uehara, was not a powerful figure in the officer corps, and it remained to be seen how the Chōshū Clique would react.¹²³ Luckily for the

¹¹⁸ Kobayashi, "Taishō Seihenki no Tairiku", 17.

¹¹⁹ Ozaki, *Autobiography*, 280.

¹²⁰ Kigoshi to Yamagata, 11.3.1913, *YAKM* 2:24; Funaki, *Kigoshi*, 333.

¹²¹ Kigoshi to Yamagata, 11.3.1913, *YAKM* 2:24.

¹²² *HTN* 3:298; Funaki, *Kigoshi*, 334-5.

¹²³ *TTN* 2:171.

government, General Tanaka, the spirit of the coup against Saionji, had been transferred from his powerful position at the ministry to a brigade command post, where he could not influence events.¹²⁴ With Kigoshi ready for a compromise and the Chōshū Clique scattered and fractured, there was hardly a force inside the Army Ministry which could push for a coup d'état.

Yet, power in the army was dispersed between the ministry and two other entities, the General Staff and the General Inspectorate of Military Education. On March 10, the same day that Yamamoto declared in the Diet that he was resolved to abolish the *bukansei*, he cautioned Hara that obtaining the agreement of Kigoshi was not enough: there had to be cooperation with the General Staff and the Inspectorate as well.¹²⁵ Again, the dispersion of power in the army and the absence of a clear person in charge, made it difficult to negotiate with this chaotic organization. Yamamoto, who knew more than anyone else how to navigate in the intricate corridors of the services' private networks, kept Hara informed, but presided himself over the discreet political maneuvers. On April 18, he told Hara that problems were likely. Chief of Staff Hasegawa and his deputy strongly resisted the plans to abolish the *bukansei*. Reserve officers, Hasegawa warned, could leak military secrets to the political parties. The chief of staff began to apply pressure to Army Minister Kigoshi. The cruel wheels of the military consensus were already grinding. The minister, who was crushed between the resistance of his peers and the strong pressure applied by

¹²⁴ *UKN* 1:88.

¹²⁵ *HTN* 3:298; Funaki, *Kigoshi*, 333-4.

the prime minister, asked Yamagata for his opinion.¹²⁶ The old field marshal did not want to see *bukansei* disappear, but decided to adopt a passive posture. The army's last coup d'état had cost him dear, both in influence and public image, and he was loath to undergo the same experience again.¹²⁷

Prime Minister Yamamoto, fully aware that Kigoshi was being bullied by his peers, had legitimate reasons to fear that he may well have to resign, and the old story of the December coup d'état might repeat itself. After the failure of his attempts to convince the military wire-pullers, especially Colonel Ugaki, of the necessity of the reform, the shrewd prime minister decided to draw power from the hazy imperial center. But he did so in a much wiser way than Katsura.¹²⁸ Knowing full well the extent of public rage aroused by the use of imperial rescripts, he decided to maneuver secretly inside the palace. Using Kigoshi's malleability, he persuaded him to "secretly report" to the throne about the *bukansei* reform.¹²⁹ Now, the minister was bound in chains, his loyalty to Yamamoto cemented by his own promise to the emperor, and therefore, the decision to reform the *bukansei* was passed in the cabinet on May 2.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ *HTN* 3:305-7; *TTN* 2:169-71; Utsunomiya to Uehara, 20.4.1913, op. cit. in Yamamoto Shirō, *Yamamoto Naikaku no Kisoteki Kenkyū* (Kyoto: Kyoto Joshi Daigaku, 1982), 187; Funaki, *Kigoshi*, 338-9.

¹²⁷ Najita, *Hara*, 181-2.

¹²⁸ *UKN* 1:87.

¹²⁹ *HTN* 3:305-6.

¹³⁰ *HTN* 3:308. The original document of the cabinet's decision is reproduced in Yamamoto, *Yamamoto Naikaku*, 190-1.

When the puppeteers in the army realized that they could not achieve their goals by pressuring Kigoshi to resign, the possibility of staging a coup d'état by withdrawing the minister was blocked. Consequently, several officers contemplated using the only means they had left, a direct appeal to the emperor. Chief of Staff Hasegawa, who held, under the *tōsui-ken* system, the right to an imperial audience, threatened to use this right to resist the cabinet in mid-April.¹³¹ One month later, in May, he submitted a ferocious petition to the throne, drafted by several mid-ranking officers from the General Staff and the Army Ministry, imploring the emperor to preserve the special relationship with his army, as ensured through the *tōsui-ken* and *bukansei* systems. Colonel Ugaki even threatened not to co-sign the government's orders. Finally, he distributed a strongly-worded anti-government tract to the press, a misdeed that forced the deputy army minister to temporarily transfer him from Tokyo, thus removing the most powerful puppeteer from the scene.¹³²

Because Yamagata refused to intervene on the army's behalf, there was no one with equal access to the throne who could counter the moves of the resourceful prime minister. Encouraged by this, Yamamoto gave the final coup de grace to the army on May 8. He met with Emperor Taishō, ensured that it was "against good order" for the generals to speak with him and strongly advised him to shelve the army's memorandum. The emperor, who had only Yamamoto's opinion to consider, naturally agreed with his prime minister.¹³³ The officers of the General Staff were

¹³¹ HTN 3:306.

¹³² TTN 2:175; UKN 1:87; Yamamoto, *Yamamoto Naikaku*, 191.

¹³³ HTN 3:309; TTN 2:175-6.

powerless to resist, as all channels of influence they formerly possessed, either through the Army Ministry or the throne, were now blocked. The only thing they could do was take personal revenge on Army Minister Kigoshi, which they did, forcing him to resign and practically destroying his military career on June 24.¹³⁴

Now, the army could theoretically still prevent the appointment of a new minister, challenging Yamamoto to appoint a general from the reserves, a dangerous and unprecedented move. However, the prime minister had outsmarted his army rivals once again. Using his position as the hub of the Satsuma Clique, he had formed a secret channel of communication with pro-Satsuma officers in the general staff. These officers, who hated the Chōshū Clique, used the opportunity to appoint one of their own to the position of army minister. Finally, with Yamamoto's agreement, they had chosen General Kususe Yukihiro, a former Tosa retainer.¹³⁵ The appointment of General Kususe (an accomplice in the assassination of Queen Min), finally signaled for whom the bells tolled. Prime Minister Yamamoto had won, and the army's Chōshū Clique was finally defeated.

The lament within the leading circles of the army echoed far and wide, and Field Marshal Yamagata was now seen by many as a declining if not fading power. In a letter sent to Yamagata by General Terauchi on June 20, the governor of Korea lamented the death of the *tōsui-ken* system, the wellspring of the army's

¹³⁴ *HTN* 3:319; *TTN* 2:188-9; Drea, *Imperial Army*, 131.

¹³⁵ Utsunomiya to Uehara, 20.4.1913, reproduced in Funaki, *Kigoshi*, 338-9, see also discussion in p.340, 50. This channel was maintained by Utsunomiya Tarō, chief of the general staff's second bureau (intelligence), a former Saga retainer and member of the Satsuma Clique, and Navy Vice Minister Takarabe, who reported almost immediately to the prime minister. See: *TTN* 2:157, 71, 88-9. For analysis see: Yamamoto, *Yamamoto Naikaku*, 201-2.

vigorousness and power. "In a day," he wrote to Yamagata, "they have destroyed the political structure that you and your colleagues have built for the country over the past decades [...] the army, too, has been under your direction over these years [...] and even this has been destroyed in a single day. Alas, the lifeblood of a hundred years is like the morning dew."¹³⁶

On the Verge of Collapse: Behind the Taishō Political Crisis

Objectively speaking, there was nothing inevitable in the Taishō political crisis. The dispute between the government and the army was quantitative, not qualitative – a squabble over schedule and costs, not essence. The crisis could have been delayed further, as in the past, and there were also numerous proposals for compromise rejected either by the army, the navy or the cabinets of Saionji and Katsura.¹³⁷ The two important questions that have to be asked are why the sides were not able to overcome their differences, and why the confrontation between them, leading to a series of coups d'états, occurred in 1912-1913 and not earlier. Both questions bear direct relevance to the military establishment's increasing tendency to defy and disobey civilian authorities. The answers reveal why the Taishō political crisis had compromised the very essence of the hazy imperial center, bringing the entire Meiji regime to the verge of collapse.

¹³⁶ Terauchi to Yamagata, 20.6.1913, *YAKM* 2:403. The translation is partially based on Najita's, with some corrections for the sake of accuracy. For Najita's translation of this passage see *Hara*, 181-2.

¹³⁷ For details about these proposals see Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 181-2.

The first question is easier to answer. All of the proposed solutions were rejected because the debate ceased to be about national policy and became instead an emotionally-charged confrontation over ideological principles. While for the cabinet and the *Seiyūkai*, compromising with the army signified recognition of "clique rule" and military supremacy, the army viewed itself as the last bastion of imperial loyalty in a world ruled by traitorous politicians and corrupted businessmen, supported by the navy for its own selfish reasons. Both sides, pushed by their "public opinion", had found themselves locked in a vicious circle of hostility and mutual radicalization.¹³⁸

The second question, as to why the crisis erupted in 1912 and not earlier, is much more difficult. The death of Emperor Meiji, the long-living monarch who held the system together as a potent symbol, is one possible explanation. The emperor was the axis connecting the ruling elites, and his demise threw them off balance, a situation which the new emperor lacked the prestige to remedy.¹³⁹

However, the full answer to the question cannot be reduced to the death of one individual, prominent as he might have been. As a careful examination of the facts might show, the debate became so emotionally-charged after the emperor's death because of a basic malfunction in the communication channels between the two sides. Indeed, as Ōtsu Junichirō argued, when two rivals are not communicating,

¹³⁸ *TGD* 2:489-90; Terauchi to Yamagata, 24.12.1912, *YAKM* 2:400-1; Tanaka to Terauchi, 15.5.1913, reproduced in Funaki, *Kigoshi*, 346-7; Ugaki, "Rikugaikun Daijin", *UKN* 1:89-92, 5.

¹³⁹ Toshitani, "Meiji Kempō", 67, 70, 2-3,7; *HTN* 3:245; Frederick R. Dickinson, *Taishō Tennō: Ichiyaku Godaishū wo yūhisu* (Kyoto: Mineruva Shobō, 2009), 88-90; Maeda, *Rekidai* 1:412, 18-19. Maeda argues (p. 218) that had the Meiji Emperor been alive, he could have summoned Saionji and Yamagata to the palace and lent his prestige in favor of a working compromise.

each of them is likely to ascribe the darkest motives to the other ("when the heart is full of doubt, everyone around you is an enemy.") However, Ōtsu, like most other historians, reduced the problem to faulty communication between the three leaders, Katsura, Saionji and Yamagata, without noticing that the miscommunication was not only between individuals, but first and foremost between groups, two rival networks, the army and the Chōshū Clique on one side, and the cabinet, navy and *Seiyūkai* on the other.¹⁴⁰ The reasons for that miscommunication were rooted in the incompatible structure of these two opposing networks. This **network incompatibility** of the early Taishō system, a phenomenon not yet analyzed in full in existing scholarship, is the key to understanding the events, their disastrous results and the unique historical dynamics they engendered.

During the Taishō political crisis, the sociological structure of both government and army was radically different from that existing 34 years before, in 1878, when the *tōsui-ken* system was first established. Back then, the army and the government were controlled by the same group of leaders. With the passing years, the groups had moved apart, and the arteries of communication between them became increasingly calcified.¹⁴¹ In 1912, that calcification indeed, the dispersion of power in both armed services, accompanied by a dramatic increase in the connectivity of subordinates, had forced both ministers to contend with a status of equality with, and sometimes even utter dependence on, their military inferiors.

¹⁴⁰ Ōtsu, *Kenseishi* 6:753-4.

¹⁴¹ Tobe, *Gyakusetsu*, 167-7.6

Seen in this light, the Taishō political crisis was a historical juncture of two distinct historical processes, the increase in the *tōsui-ken*-based confidence of the armed services, and the "democratization of disobedience" inside them. These collided with disastrous results. finally reached the level of a heart attack in the form of a debilitating political crisis. As we have seen, Hara and Tanaka, the most important actors during the first phase of the crisis, could not really speak with each other, because the networks they were operating in were incompatible. The dissimilarity in the formal positions of the two men, a minister on the one side and a bureau chief on the other, precluded serious conversations between them. There was substantial incongruence between image and reality; between the hierarchical, formal network of the state, in which Hara was much superior to Tanaka, and the private networks of power, in which the two were equally strong puppeteers. This fatal incongruence, which prevented meaningful negotiations between the army and the cabinet, is key to the dynamics of the Taishō political crisis.

In fact, this development, allowing mid-ranking generals such as Tanaka to acquire disproportionate power and disrupt the channels of communication with the government, was a result of a long-range historical process of shifting power in Japan's military elite, a process akin to the "democratization" of military disobedience. The crux of this process was a constant expansion in the circle of actors involved in the shaping of the army's defiant, independent policy. This "democratization" involved a slow, gradual shift in power from the center to the periphery: the rank of the people who advocated disobedience became increasingly lower and distant from the command centers of the army.

This phenomenon, in which subordinates had considerable influence over their superiors, was not in itself new. In 1874, Saigō Tsugumichi had disobeyed the government chiefly because of the pressure exercised by low-ranking retainers, and the same could be said of Etō Shimpei and Saigō Takamori. In the 1870s, however, the role of the "subalterns" was confined to pressuring their seniors. The top leaders may have been pushed and shoved, but the helm of disobedience was still in their hands. In 1895, during the Queen Min incident, we can see substantial growth in the power of subordinates and subalterns. Miura Gorō, the planner of the assassination, was indeed the highest Japanese officer in charge, and he disobeyed the government at his own discretion. Still, junior officers and civilian nationalist activists like Adachi Kenzō were heavily involved in decision making. In 1912, the locus of power became even more centrifugal, moving to the hands of bureau and section chiefs such as General Tanaka Giichi and Colonel Ugaki Kazushige.

This process has not gone unmentioned in the historical literature, but few have gone so far as to explain the deep reasons at its basis. It is well enough to say that subordinates exercised power over superiors (Japanese: *gekokujo*), but why was this the case?¹⁴² A possible explanation might lie with the interrelated parameters of **connectivity** and **access to information**. In the second chapter, while analyzing the reasons for the weakness of the imperial center, we maintained that access to independent channels of information is the key for command and control.¹⁴³ The Japanese imperial institution did not grow in power during the 1870s, simply

¹⁴² For one example out of many for the use of *Gekokujō* in this context see Funaki, *Kigoshi*, 339.

¹⁴³ Van Creveld, *Command*, 65-78, 226-32, 268-77.

because it lacked such independent channels. The person on the throne therefore became isolated and dependent on information controlled by his advisers, who could manipulate him through "counsel" he did not have the ability to counter. Scholars of Chinese history argue that the same was true for weaker emperors in Imperial China. As soon as their access to information was monopolized by a small group of advisors, they became virtually powerless.¹⁴⁴

In the Japanese Army, too, we can see a variation of such a process. It is no mere chance that in the 1880s, the golden age of Yamagata's power, he constantly moved between powerful roles in the military establishment, sometimes occupying a post for a few months before moving to the next. The frequent moves helped him to maintain his connectivity to different people in the increasingly convoluted military establishment, holding independent channels of information and thereby ensuring effective control. It is again no mere chance that the most serious case of disobedience in the 1890s, the Queen Min Incident, occurred in a peripheral place, Seoul, where the channels of information feeding political and military leaders could be easily blocked by local commanders such as Miura Gorō.

In 1912, however, the structure had already changed. Yamagata's gradual decrease in power could not be attributed to his advancing age alone, as is often done in studies of the period.¹⁴⁵ Rather, with his rise in status, he had moved, in

¹⁴⁴ Yuri Pines, Gideon Shelach, *Kol asher mi-taḥat la-shamayim: Toldot Ha-Keisarut Ha-Sinit* (Ra'anana: Universiṭah ha-petuḥah, 2011), 1:372.

¹⁴⁵ Yamagata's English language biographer, Roger F. Hackett, has a more generous evaluation of the field marshal's political power of these years. See Hackett, *Yamagata*, 248-9, and also Duus, *Party Rivalry*, 11.

General Uehara's words, to live "beyond the clouds", in various estates in and out of Tokyo.¹⁴⁶ He became less mobile, and thus more dependent on information given to him by guests he trusted, many of whom were subordinate officers. The tendency to refer to the old field marshal by the locations or names of his villas and estates (for example, Mejiro), was yet another sign of his increasing immobility.¹⁴⁷

As it happened, it was bureau and section heads such as General Tanaka who, owing to their comparatively minor status, could move about relatively freely and maintain contact with officers and civilians, thus enjoying increased access to the flow of information that ensured control. It was Tanaka, for example, who distributed the anonymous memorandum about the cabinet's conspiracy against the army to the leadership, which had since become a foundation stone of military policy, and worked relentlessly to convince Yamagata, Inoue and the other notables of the indispensability of the two divisions. It was again Tanaka who served as the contact between Yamagata and other high officers in the crucial days before and after the resignation of the cabinet. In addition, he had also advocated the cause of the two divisions in meetings with journalists, businessmen and even members of the *Seiyūkai*.¹⁴⁸ In 1912, the vague network called the Chōshū Clique was the main hub of information in the army command, and mid-ranking officers who stood at its

¹⁴⁶ Terauchi to Tanaka, 1.11.1912, reproduced in Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 164.

¹⁴⁷ See for example in Uehara to Katsura, 17.11.1912, *KTKB*, 98-9; Hackett, *Yamagata*, 249.

¹⁴⁸ Uehara to Katsura, 17.11.1912, *KTKB*, 98-9 ; Uehara to Terauchi, 6.12.1912, reproduced in Yamamoto, *Seihen*, 198-9; Maeda, *Rekidai*, 413; *TGD* 2:483-4, 8, especially the testimony of Watanabe Yosuke about Tanaka's activity in *ibid*, 520-2.

epicenter had the greatest connectivity, the best access to information, and therefore a crucial influence on the development of events.

A very similar process took place in the navy as well. According to the diary of the navy vice minister, for example, Minister Saitō Makoto could not violate the consensus among the naval officers, the chief of staff and section heads. Indeed, the record of their conversations prior to Saitō's resignation showed that the minister was imploring his subordinates to change their minds and allow him to remain in the cabinet. Such a miserable impression did he make, that at certain moments he was almost close to tears.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, the dispersion of power in both armed services, accompanied by a dramatic increase in the connectivity of subordinates, had forced both ministers to contend with a status of equality with, and sometimes even utter dependence on, their military inferiors.

Seen in this light, the Taishō political crisis was a historical juncture of two distinct historical processes, the increase in the *tōsui-ken*-based confidence of the armed services, and the "democratization of disobedience" inside them. These collided with disastrous results. The problem with the armed services was that they became stronger and weaker at the same time – stronger as institutions, but at the same time more chaotic and difficult to control – hard from the outside, soft and ripe from within. The "democratization" of disobedience brought about a situation whence the most powerful people in the army were too low in rank to be approached by the government, thus giving rise to the network incompatibility and

¹⁴⁹ *TTN* 2:122-3; *SSMD* 2:216.

failure of communication already described above. This process is summarized in the following chart:

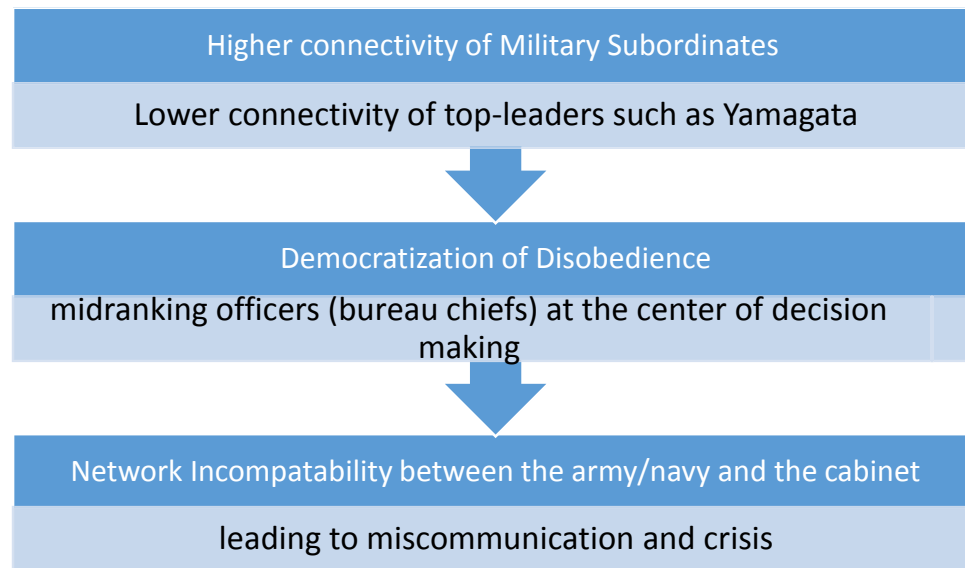


Figure 1: Democratization of Disobedience

Katsura, frustrated by his failure to reach a modus vivendi with an institution like the navy where the real power holders were inaccessible for him, turned to the only resort he had left: the imperial hazy center. But once he had used the first imperial rescript, this easy solution became an addictive drug, and the prime minister acquired the habit of solving his problems by fiat.

The results were disastrous not only for Katsura but for the system as a whole, in a way not yet appreciated by most historians. As a result of Katsura's frequent use, the imperial rescript, as a tool of governance, underwent a process called by the Church historian Richard Southern "spiritual inflation". Originally writing about the indulgence bills distributed by the Catholic Church in the era prior to the Reformation, Southern discerned a process akin to economic inflation. Originally, almost everyone respected the Church's indulgences, which could "win"

heaven even for the most wretched of sinners. However, when the Church used this powerful tool too often, society gradually came to respect it less and less, just like a currency devalued by excessive printing of government bills.¹⁵⁰

Katsura's reckless use of imperial rescripts brought about a very similar result. Once the members of the *Seiyūkai* had noticed, in the words of Ozaki Yukio, that Katsura "made the throne his breastplate" and used imperial rescripts "as bullets", the imperial rescripts were devalued along with Katsura's prestige, a fact recognized even by some of Katsura's allies.¹⁵¹ When such a rescript was first issued, on 21 December, it was powerful enough to force the hands of the navy. In February next year, however, it could not even convince the *Seiyūkai* parliamentarians to withdraw a non-confidence bill in the Diet. Katsura himself also contributed to this devaluation in other ways, apart from his frequent use of rescripts. When confronted, for example, by the possibility that an imperial rescript may thwart his plans to establish a new party, he haughtily declared that in such a case he would ignore the rescript, discard his title of prince and "serve the nation as commoner Katsura Tarō."¹⁵²

However, in the beginning of February 1913, Katsura finally noticed that he had brought the entire Japanese system to the verge of an abyss. The crisis was so serious because the transcendence and absolute power of the throne were the basic

¹⁵⁰ Richard W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 141-2.

¹⁵¹ Ozaki, *Autobiography*, 271; *DKN* 2:263.

¹⁵² Op. cit in Najita, *Hara*, 138.

assumptions underlying the Meiji system. Since the 1870s, the imperial institution was the super-glue tying the various private networks to a certain framework, loose and contested as it might have been. Had imperial rescripts become laughing matters which every politician could ignore, the imperial myth in its entirety could be broken. And then, what would tie the system together? In the next crisis, the entire polity could collapse or at least undergo a radical change. To use one of Slavoj Žižek's metaphors, it was akin to that "classic scene in cartoons. The cart reaches a precipice, but it goes on walking, ignoring the fact that there is nothing beneath. Only when it looks down and notices it", in our case, the basic illusion of the imperial system, "it falls down."¹⁵³ Rather than risking that, Katsura had prudently preferred to resign.

A Time-Bomb Delayed: Ramifications for the Future

The Taishō political crisis, unlike all other events analyzed in this study, ended in the defeat of the military establishment. Not only did the army fail, at least for a while, to receive its coveted two divisions. It also proved itself unable to prevent the rise of party government, to stop Hara's quest for power or to bridge the gap with the navy.¹⁵⁴ Instead, Hara was skillfully able to make use of this gap through his alliance with the Satsuma Clique and Admiral Yamamoto Gonnohyōe. Yamamoto, a rare military figure with national responsibility and far-sighted vision, cooperated

¹⁵³ Slavoj Žižek, "Talk at Occupy Wall St." in "Ecology without Nature", <http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.com/2011/10/zizeks-talk-at-occupy-wall-st.html>, accessed at 8.10.2013.

¹⁵⁴ Tanaka to Uehara, 15.15.1913, reproduced in Yamamoto, *Yamamoto Naikaku*, 196-7.

with Hara to abolish the *bukansei*, thus disarming both army and navy of their ability to overthrow cabinets.

Furthermore, the resistance in the army to this move, despite being noisy, was relatively feeble and ineffective. Crucially, the military establishment accepted its defeat without resorting to violence. The army's leaders, including hardliners such as Tanaka, were too integrated in the establishment to seriously rock the boat, and their control over their more radical juniors was still sufficient in summer 1913. They may have been ready to stage bloodless coups d'états, but political violence was still out of the question.

For the first time since Yamagata's military reforms in 1878, the structural balance of the country had tipped to the army's disadvantage. In the 1880s and the 1890s, the four generals and other adherents of civilian control in the establishment had failed to limit the growing prerogatives of the army. Through his alliance with Yamamoto and the navy, Hara was able to do just that in 1913. The two allies had used their newly won power to nip military disobedience in the bud. When army elements, for example, had attempted to covertly operate in Southern China against government orders, Prime Minister Yamamoto forced the leaders of the army to stop them by cutting their budget.¹⁵⁵ The Taishō political crisis could therefore be seen as a first step in a quest to limit the *tōsui-ken* system and subordinate the army to civilian control.

¹⁵⁵ Kobayashi, "Taishō Seihenki no Tairiku", 15.

And yet, the victory of the civilian politicians, its significance notwithstanding, was neither decisive nor permanent. The scrapping of the *bukansei* system remained theoretical, as none of the successive cabinets dared to appoint retired generals and admirals, let alone civilians or party politicians, into the roles of army and navy ministers. This was not completely impossible, as even Katsura, one of the architects of the original *tōsui-ken* system, conceded in 1912 that the ministers could become civilian administrators. The reason for that failure, as Najita Tetsuo has rightly argued, was political: it was difficult to expect that civilians, even retired generals, would be able to influence the military establishment.¹⁵⁶

In addition, the military leaders quietly transferred much of the power of the Army Ministry to the General Staff, whose *tōsui-ken* authority remained uncompromised.¹⁵⁷ This would empower the General Staff to pursue an independent policy during the Siberian Intervention (1918-22), Japan's failed attempt to interfere in the Russian Civil War, a policy which operated in the grey zone of defiance to government's policy and at times even crossed it.¹⁵⁸ The "gold-eating monster" was therefore defeated, but not pursued into its lair. The basic tenets of the *tōsui-ken* system, releasing the army from civilian control, were curbed but remained essentially uncompromised.

¹⁵⁶ Najita, *Hara*, 181.

¹⁵⁷ Kobayashi, "Taishō Seihenki no Tairiku", 2; Mori, *Nihon Rikugun*, 8-9, 28.

¹⁵⁸ The important affair of the Siberian Intervention, as well as the army's role and behavior, were recently dealt with in Paul E. Dunscomb's excellent monograph, *Japan's Siberian Intervention, 1918-1922: "A Great Disobedience against the People"* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2001).

In addition, no one had tried to reform the military establishment itself in a more hierarchical fashion, replacing the private, horizontal networks of the *tōsui-ken* system with a solid vertical hierarchy. As a result, the fatal network incompatibility in the system continued to hold the potential for military disobedience throughout the next decades. Given the right conditions, it would grow again. And these conditions, as we shall see in the next chapter, were not engendered in mainland Japan.

Similarly to the Queen Min assassination, they appeared instead in the distant fringes of the empire, in Manchuria. The fact that this chain of incidents, destined to throw the entire country into a whirlwind of military disobedience, bloody violence and political assassinations, appeared so late, in 1928, and so far away from the center, may be ascribed to Hara's victory in the Taishō political crisis. The fact that it appeared at all, however, could be ascribed to the limited, temporary nature of his triumph.

Part IV

Entering the Dark Valley

1928-1931

Chapter Eight

The King of Manchuria

Kōmoto Daisaku and the Assassination of Zhang Zuolin, 1928

The true thief is the hole, not the mouse

Babylonian Talmud, *Gitin* 45:1

In 1928 the assassination of Queen Min was more than three decades in the past, and the contingency of events that led a Japanese officer to murder a foreign head of state was hardly on anyone's mind. Yet, in that year, the latent structure that allowed military officers to embark on similar adventures of political assassination forcefully reemerged. A group of young Japanese officers successfully plotted the assassination of Zhang Zuolin (Chang Tso-lin), the powerful warlord of Manchuria, occupier of Beijing and self-declared *generalissimo* of all China.

At one time, Zhang was renowned as one of the most formidable figures of the warlord era and a serious contender to unify the country. A ruthless military leader, he emerged from an obscure background as a petty brigand chief to lead one of the strongest armies in China. For years Zhang was an ally of Imperial Japan, but from the mid-1920s his relations with the empire rapidly soured. Nevertheless, the man who plotted his assassination, Colonel Kōmoto Daisaku, acted in complete

defiance of Japanese government policy. The plot was well designed as a military conspiracy, its wire-pullers doing their best to cover their tracks and hide their misdeeds from their superiors. Kōmoto's plot, its complicated context and its crucial role in the development of Japanese military disobedience are the subjects of the current chapter.

The new *tōsui-ken* ideology

Since the Taishō political crisis, party politicians such as Hara Kei had steadily striven to limit *tōsui-ken* as much as they could, in an open attempt to gradually subject the army to civilian control. Already in 1913, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the *Bukansei* was abolished, and the army could no longer overthrow cabinets at will.

During the Siberian Intervention (1918–1922), Japan's failed and costly attempt to interfere in the Russian Civil War, Hara was not able to fully control the army but was able to make some steps in that direction. As an avowed gradualist, he rejected the proposals of his finance minister to strike a death blow at *tōsui-ken* by abolishing the General Staff. Instead, he and his successors constantly gnawed at the power of the General Staff, tightening their grip over the army through relatively collaborative army ministers.¹ More importantly, Hara enacted some legal reforms designed to weaken the position of the army. In 1919, for example, he abolished the law that gave the army a monopoly over the key colonial posts of governor-general

¹ Paul E. Dunscomb, *Japan's Siberian Intervention, 1918-1922: "A Great Disobedience against the People"* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2001), 126-30, 40; Mori, *Nihon Rikugun*, 49, 72-3.

in Korea, Taiwan and the leased Kwantung area in Manchuria. From then on, civilians could take these posts. Accordingly, the Kwantung governor-generalship was abolished and replaced with an administration headed by a civilian. The assassination of Hara in 1921 by a civilian nationalist failed to forestall these reforms.²

The army's response to these moves was to shift its executive power from organs "infected" by civilian control to institutions still enjoying full *tōsui-ken* rights. From the end of the Taishō political crisis, power shifted from the Army Ministry to the General Staff, whose chief saw himself as a *tōsui-ken* privileged official, not responsible to anyone but the emperor.³ In Manchuria the army's policy was similar. Faced for the first time with a Japanese civilian authority, the military reacted by binding all soldiers and railway guards in the area to the Kwantung Army, the Japanese force stationed in the Manchurian territory controlled by Japan. The commander of this force was directly subordinate to the chief of the General Staff in Tokyo.⁴ Its subordination to civilian authorities therefore became a matter of constant contention. The liberal atmosphere of the early 1920s had engendered popular distrust of the army, which emboldened politicians to publically gnaw at its privileges. Young officers, who were often poor and hungry for prestige and recognition, were shocked by the "disrespect" shown to the army in both

² Yoshihisa Tak Matsusaka, *The Making of Japanese Manchuria, 1904–1932* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Asia Center/Harvard University Press, 2001), 233; Kobayashi, "Taishō Seihenki no Tairiku", 2.

³ Kobayashi, "Taishō Seihenki no Tairiku", 2; Mori, *Nihon Rikugun*, 8-9, 28.

⁴ Ōe Shinobu, *Chō Sakurin Bakusatsu: Shōwa Tennō no Tōsui* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1989), 157.

government and civil society. In this atmosphere, generals who opposed civilian control enjoyed immense popularity in the officer corps.⁵

In 1928 the ultimate representative of this new type of popular officer was General Araki Sadao, chief of the First Department (Operations) at the General Staff. Araki was a representative of a group of younger military leaders who were not bound to the old cliques. Though naturally connected to many people in a way reminiscent of the old cliques, he presented himself, through a boisterous public relations campaign, as their implacable enemy. Araki's tactics, indeed, were a novelty fitting to the new age of mass politics. In 1912, during the Taishō political crisis, ringleaders such as Tanaka Giichi could amass enormous power by networking with a number of key people in different branches of the army. Araki, whose views were widely popularized through internal military publications and even civilian newspapers, was popular among the mass of officers who did not know him personally. Many others had been his students in the prestigious staff college, where he served as an instructor and principal in 1914 and 1928. Essentially, Araki was one of the first mass politicians in the Japanese army who had a truly large constituency of followers.

As is often the way with popular politicians, Araki's views were formulated in the negative. He breathed fire against the Chōshū Clique, communism, Westernization and Japanese party politics, all of which were tied in a single, vicious bundle that was upheld as an anathema to the noble values of true Japanese

⁵ Leonard A. Humphreys, *The Way of the Heavenly Sword: The Japanese Army in the 1920s* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press), 43-50; Benesch, *Inventing the Way*, 170.

officers. The mass of frustrated officers, as well as many elite graduates of the Staff College, appreciated his emphasis upon the “Japanese spirit,” a power of will leading the army to victories against materially superior enemies. To fill this demagoguery with ideological substance, Araki lionized traditional samurai values. His world was dichotomous: soldierly values, offensive spirit and the “Japanese soul” were good, while “cliques,” “politicians” and civilian officials were bad. That implied strong adherence to the *tōsui-ken* independence of the army, without any regard to political calculations or civilian control of any kind. As dangerously, Araki publically disregarded the authority of the Army Ministry, perceived as a tool of the cabinet to control operations.⁶ During the Jinan Incident, a bloody clash between Chinese and Japanese soldiers in Shandong in early May 1928, the Vice Minister of the Army ordered Araki to obey government orders and withdraw. Even if it violated *tōsui-ken*, the vice minister insisted, the army must comply with government policy.⁷ The operations chief bellowed in response:

What kind of nonsense are you giving me? As a soldier you ought to at least know what a matter of command (*tōsui*) is. How can you stand there and let the things we decided the other day at the marshals and military councilors meeting, in the presence of a royal prince and with the navy attending, be trampled in the dirt so easily, simply on the basis of government opposition?

⁶ Kikkawa Manabu, *Arashi to tatakau Tetsushō Araki: Rikugun Uramenshi, Shōgun Araki no shichijū-nen no Gekan* (Tokyo: Araki Sadao Shōgun Denki Hensan Kankōkai, 1955), 80; Ugaki Kazushige, *Shōrai Seidan* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū Shinsha, 1951), 321-2; Humphreys, *Sword*, 157-60; Kitaoka, "Army", 79-80; Drea, *Imperial Army*, 156-8; Mori, *Nihon Rikugun*, 72-4

See also Araki's interview with the League of Nations Commission of Inquiry (Lytton Commission), 5.3.1932, *League of Nations Archives, United Nations Office at Geneva* (hereafter cited as *LNA-UNOG*), S29, No.1 32 Japon, p.21.

⁷ Kikkawa, *Araki*, 80.

Aren't you a soldier? If we do that, we're making light of the constitution, and it's going to wind up as an unmitigated disgrace.⁸

Araki's power was not as a conspirator but as a propagandist. He hardly planned any acts of defiance himself, but he had advocated such acts. And his words, brazen and unabated, strongly appealed to many army officers. In May 1928, for example, Araki threatened the government that if it did not embark on an aggressive policy in Manchuria, "I do not know what would happen, but I, as the operations chief, cannot take responsibility."⁹ These words of passive threat were explosive. Without actually being involved in plotting himself, Araki propagated not only full military independence from civilian control, but also utter disregard for internal military discipline. The ongoing process of "democratization of disobedience" was now open for all to see, as a senior officer openly encouraged his juniors to engage in "direct action" and virtually to lead the course of events.

Araki's preaching of disobedience unfortunately fell on fertile soil, fed by incessant factionalism and dispersion of power within the ranks. In 1928, this dispersion was expressed in widespread opposition to the policy of the Chōshū Clique and its leaders, Generals Tanaka Giichi and Ugaki Kazushige. Ugaki, when he served as army minister from 1925 to 1927, had compromised with the ruling cabinet and agreed to abolish some military units, using the funds saved to embark on a project of military modernization. Many young officers resented Ugaki for

⁸ Translation from Humphreys, *Heavenly Sword*, 151, original in Kikkawa, *Araki*, 80-1. For more details about the background of this dispute see also *TGD* 2:951-2.

⁹ Kikkawa, *Araki*, 87.

compromising with party politicians, and especially for abolishing units and dismissing officers – a disastrous move for the pride and livelihood of many of their peers.¹⁰

Even among the narrow stratum of elite officers, many of whom understood the need for modernization, there was strong resistance to Ugaki's policy. Since the early 1920s, such officers, among them future military leaders, regularly met in Tokyo restaurants, running study groups such as the *Futabakai* (Two Leaves Society), *Mokuyōkai* (Thursday Society) and *Issekikai* (One Evening Society).¹¹ The members of these groups, abetted and aided by General Araki, had their differences as to the exact nature of the military reforms they advocated, but all agreed on four main points. The first was complete rejection of and utter animosity toward the Chōshū Clique, represented by Tanaka and Ugaki. Second, they advocated a reform in appointing military personnel, up to the point of excluding Chōshū Clique officers from the prestigious Staff College. Third, many of them advocated economic planning and "total war" mobilization. Lastly, they called for a strong, decisive policy in Manchuria. One of the leading members in these oppositional study groups was Colonel Kōmoto Daisaku, the future assassin of Zhang Zuolin.¹² His hatred of the ruling circles of the army, common among members of these groups, would be

¹⁰ For analysis of Ugaki's policy and its critics, see: Humphreys, *Sword*, 79-107; Drea, *Imperial Army*, 151-6; Kitaoka, "Army", 76-9.

¹¹ "Heben Dazuo Kou gong", 4.4.1953, "Pingye Lingfu Zheng ci" (Hirano Mineo's testimony) *HBDZ*, 7, 68-9; Ōe, *Chō Sakurin*, 33-9, 41-3.

¹² "Heben Dazuo Kou Gong", 4.4.1953, *Heben Dazuo yu Rijun Shanxi "Can Liu"*, ed. Zhongyang Dang an guan et al., (Beijing: Zhonghua Shu ju, 1995), 18 (hereafter cited as *HBDZ*); Ōe, *Chō Sakurin*, 33-9, 41-3. For general discussion of these study groups see: Humphreys, *Sword*, 110-16; Drea, *Imperial Army*, 154-6; Hirano Mineo (Reiji), *Manshū no Inbōsha: Kōmoto Daisaku no unmeiteki na Ashiato* (Tokyo: Jiyū Kokuminsha, 1961), 39-40.

expressed in his defiant behavior in Manchuria from 1926 to 1928. However, in order to understand Kōmoto's actions, it is important to take a look at the "Manchurian problem" which his plot intended to solve.

The *Manmō* Problem in the late 1920s

Manmō was the Japanese abbreviation for "Manchuria and Inner Mongolia", and the *Manmō* problem pertained to the dilemmas faced by Japanese policy makers in these key regions of north-eastern China. The history of Japan's involvement in Manchuria, going decades into the past, was hardly new in 1928. In the Portsmouth Treaty of 1905, the peace agreement ending the Russo-Japanese War, Japan acquired the Tsarist Empire's concessions in southern Manchuria, most prominently ownership of the South Manchurian Railway and a lease over the Kwantung territory. In the same year, the Qing Government recognized these rights in the Treaty of Beijing and agreed not to infringe upon the Japanese concessions.¹³

The 1911 Revolution in China, replacing the Qing Dynasty with a fledgling republic, did not prevent Japan from procuring ever more privileges and rights in Manchuria. In January 1915, while the Great War raged in Europe, the cabinet of Ōkuma Shigenobu used the wartime chaos to bully Yuan Shikai, president of the Chinese Republic, to grant Japan additional concessions. They included a renewal of the Kwantung lease, further mining and railway privileges and the right of Japanese

¹³ Sir Miles Lampson, British Minister in Beijing, to Lord Cushendun, Acting Secretary of State, 19.3.1928, "A Review of the Past and Present Policy of Japan in South Manchuria", "China-Manchuria Japanese Policy, 1923–1932", part I, pp.152-3, *National Archives of Australia*, Chin 165 (hereafter cited as *CMJP-NAA*).

nationals to live permanently, own land and launch commercial ventures in the Manchurian interior.¹⁴ Throughout the 1920s, Japan already held a plethora of economic rights in the Manchurian hinterland, well beyond the borders of the Kwantung leased territory. There were 200,000 Japanese and one million Koreans residing in Manchuria, operating mines, factories and other ventures. The annual volume of trade between Manchuria and Japan amounted to 400 million yen.¹⁵

Virtually all policy makers saw Manchuria as the “life line” of Japan, a source of vital natural resources and an important outlet for Japanese immigration. From a strategic point of view, Manchuria was seen as a primary defensive line against Soviet Russia, a shield protecting Korea and Mainland Japan. Therefore, the army had to keep a strong presence in that crucial gateway to the heartland of the empire. In addition, as Prime Minister Tanaka Giichi explained to the British ambassador in 1928, the ties of Japan to Manchuria were also “sentimental, as it had been the scene of her struggles in the past,” pertaining to the empire’s vast sacrifices in the Manchurian theater during the Russo-Japanese War.¹⁶

As usual with the prewar Japanese administration, the empire’s different arms in Manchuria were far from operating in accord with one another. From 1919

¹⁴ Lampson, "Review", *CMJP-NAA* 1:155-6.

¹⁵ Sir Cecil Dormer, British Ambassador in Tokyo, to Lord Cushendun, 14.8.1928, *CMJP-NAA* 1:163.

¹⁶ General Honjō Shigeru, General Araki Sadao, interviews with the Lytton Commission, 2.6, 9.10.1932, *LNA-UNOG*, S31 No.1 31-2 R Manchuria, pp.1-5, S29 No.1 32 Japon, pp.3-7; Dormer to Cushendun, 14.8.1928, *CMJP-NAA* 1:163. Compare with Tanaka Ryūkichi's testimony, *International Military Tribunal for the Far East*, Record of proceedings, Tokyo, Japan : The United States of America [et al.] against Araki, Sadao ... Tojo, Hideki [et al.], accused / official court reporters, Jack Greenberg, Chief ... [et al.] (Microfilm Reels, Center for Research Libraries, Chicago) Microfilm Reel 2:1958 (hereafter cited as *IMTFE*).

the leased territory was ruled by a civilian administrator appointed by Tokyo. This governor often stood at odds with the military power on the ground, the Kwantung Army, which answered directly to the Imperial Army's General Staff.¹⁷ The Kwantung Army also ruled over several battalions of railway guards, responsible for securing the tracks of the South Manchurian Railway. According to the rights inherited from Russia, the railway guards could operate in a narrow corridor on either side of the tracks, giving the Kwantung Army access to certain parts of the Manchurian interior.¹⁸ Another key actor, the South Manchurian Railway Company (often known by its Japanese abbreviation, *Mantetsu*, but hereafter SMR), was a semi-governmental authority holding vast powers in the Kwantung leased territory. An economic empire, the SMR held not only railway-related assets, but also hotels, hospitals, schools, universities and other kinds of property in Kwantung and throughout Manchuria, especially in the capital, Mukden.¹⁹

The Japanese inhabitants of Manchuria, many of them poor immigrants who sought a better life at the fringes of their empire, tended to be suspicious towards Tokyo but also fearful of the Chinese population around them. Many of them put their hopes in the Kwantung Army, often demanding increased protection from its commanders.²⁰ Within this population, there operated a group variously known as

¹⁷ Ōe, *Chō Sakurin*, 123.

¹⁸ Matsusaka, *Making of Japanese Manchuria*, 71.

¹⁹ *IMTFE* R2:1759-60; Ramon H. Myers, "Japanese Imperialism in Manchuria: The South Manchurian Railway Company, 1906–1933", in Peter Duus et al., ed., *The Japanese Informal Empire in China, 1895–1937* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 101-33.

²⁰ Lampson, "Review", *CMJP-NAA* 1:156.

the “Manchurian adventurers” (*manshū rōnin*), “China adventurers” (*shina rōnin*) or “mainland adventurers” (*tairiku rōnin*). They were yet another reincarnation of the *sōshi* and the *shishi*, ruffians and opportunists who often employed political violence in and beyond Japan’s borders. In 1895, such people had played a central role in the assassination of Queen Min in Korea.

Just like their predecessors in late nineteenth-century Korea, the *shina rōnin* were bold, violent and dirt-poor. And they cooperated with the Japanese Army and its secret service, the *Tokumu Kikan* (Special Service Organization), as well as with civilian nationalist organizations such as the “Black Dragon Society” (*Kokuryūkai*). Often well versed in Chinese language, customs and culture, they wandered the plains of Manchuria, collecting intelligence and working with local pro-Japanese elements. Many of them were also mired in the lucrative Manchurian opium trade, trafficking, dealing and operating opium dens in cities such as Dalian (Dairen), the capital of the Kwantung Leased Territory. These adventurers enjoyed the cooperation of key Japanese officials in the Kwantung Army, the SMR, the civilian government, the judicial system and above all the *Tokumu Kikan*, who actively helped them or turned a blind eye in return for a share of the drug trafficking revenue.²¹

Despite this extensive Japanese presence, Manchuria beyond the leased territory was still ruled by local strongmen. Since the revolution in 1911, the most prominent of these was the former brigand leader Zhang Zuolin, also known as the

²¹ Arthur Sandusky (US prosecution), *IMTFE M4:4677-8*, 95; Miriam L. Kingsberg, *The Poppy and the Acacia: Opium and Imperialism in Japanese Dairen and the Kwantung Leased Territory, 1905–1945* (PhD thesis, unpublished: University of California, Berkeley, 2009), 174, 92,5,7,220-5,31,7.

“Old Marshal.” During the Russo-Japanese War, Zhang’s gang collected intelligence for the Russian Army. When taken prisoner by Japanese troops he was almost shot, but was saved at the last moment by Lieutenant-Colonel Tanaka Giichi, then an operations officer with the General Staff. Tanaka believed Zhang might prove useful in the future. From then until 1927, when Tanaka became prime minister, Zhang showed some allegiance to Japan, but always kept a semi-independent stance.²²

According to the unwritten agreements reached between Zhang and Japan in the late 1910s, the Old Marshal was supposed to suppress anti-Japanese campaigns among the Chinese population, keep the communists out of Manchuria, uphold the treaties with Japan and expand the empire’s concessions on demand.²³ In return, the Japanese provided him with formidable financial and military support. In 1924, when Zhang waged a war with one of his arch-rivals on the mainland, the Kwantung Army arranged a tremendous bribe for one of the anti-Zhang warlords, who turned coat and secured the Old Marshal’s victory. Crucially, under the pretext of keeping law and order in Manchuria, the Japanese Army blocked Zhang’s rivals from pursuing him into his home territory. That was true for outside warlords as well as for rivals within Manchuria. In 1925, when one of Zhang’s henchmen rebelled against him, the

²² Lampson, "Review", *CMJP-NAA* 1:155; Gavan McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin in Northeast China, 1911–1928: China, Japan and the Manchurian Idea* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1977), 1, 12-18.

²³ Araki, interview with the Lytton Commission, 9.7.1932, *LNA-UNOG*, S29, No.1 32 Japon, p.8,10; Mizuno Akira, *Tōhoku Gunbatsu Seiken no Kenkyū: Chō Sakurin, Chō Gakuryō no Taigai Teikō to Tainai Tōitsu no Kiseki* (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1994), 366.

Kwantung Army blocked his entrance to one of Manchuria's strategic towns, thus nipping the rebellion in the bud.²⁴

However, around 1926 relations between Zhang and Japan began to sour. The Manchurian warlord, well aware of his image as a collaborator, was under pressure from much of the Chinese population to resist Japan's imperialist encroachment. He was also worried by the powerful anti-Japanese movement, expressed through demonstrations, boycotts and other mass campaigns.²⁵ In response to popular pressure, he began to assume an uncompromising attitude in his negotiations on further Japanese concessions in Manchuria. Particularly, Zhang refused to permit the Japanese to lay new strategic railways or to establish a consulate on the Korean border. Using American capital, he also planned to lay new railway lines and take market share away from the SMR. Many in the Japanese authorities also suspected that Zhang was playing a double game by secretly instigating anti-Japanese demonstrations and boycotts in his territory.²⁶

²⁴ Kitaoka Shin'ichi, "China Experts in the Army" in Duus, *Informal Empire*, 361-2; McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin*, 146-88.

²⁵ Lampson, "Review", *CMJP-NAA* 1:157; McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin*, 223-49; Matsusaka, *Making of Japanese Manchuria*, 312-49 For a list of demonstrations and other anti-Japanese activities see: G.S. Karetina, *Chzhan Tszolin' i politicheskaia bor'ba v Kitae v 20-e gody XX v* (Moskva: Iz-vo Nauka, 1984), 167-70.

²⁶ *IMFTE* M2:1752-3; Suzuki Teiichi, *Suzuki Teiichi-shi Danwa Sokkiroku* (Tokyo: Nihon Shiriyō Kenkyūkai, 1971-4), 1:57,287 (hereafter cited as *STDS*); Kōmoto Daisaku, "Watakushi ga Chō sakurin o koroshita", *Bungei Shunjū* 32 (December 1954), pp.194, 7. This article is based on an interview with Kōmoto by his brother-in-law, the China correspondent Hirano Mineo, who was a fellow prisoner with him in a Chinese communist prison camp. The transcript of the interview, probably conducted in the late 1930s, was given to Kōmoto's daughter by his private secretary and published in *Bungei Shunju* after the war. See also: "Annual Report on the Kwantung Leased Territory and on Japanese Activities in Manchuria", 1.1.1928, *CMJP-NAA*, 190(11), 194(15).

Complicating the picture was the volatile military and political situation on the Chinese mainland. In 1927 Zhang Zuolin, who had occupied Beijing and kept it from his rivals, moved to the city and had himself declared *generalissimo* of all China, performing the imperial rituals as if one of the emperors of old. His rule, however, was challenged by the Chinese Nationalist Party (*Kuomintang*), a revolutionary faction that played a key part in the the revolution of 1911. Armed with Soviet equipment and supplied with capable military advisors by Moscow, the *Kuomintang* launched the “Northern Expedition,” a campaign for the unification of the entire country. Riding on the anti-imperialist and anti-warlord feelings of the population, the leader of the *Kuomintang*, General Chiang Kai-shek, promised to do away with both warlords and foreign concessions. Though Chiang hinted to the Japanese that he, too, intended to uphold the current treaties with them, Tokyo was naturally mistrustful. As Zhang Zuolin’s troops were defeated by the Northern Expedition, Japan was confronted with an urgent question. Should it continue to support Zhang Zuolin, or try to reach an accommodation with the *Kuomintang* instead? Most importantly, what should Japan do when the fighting reached the borders of Manchuria?²⁷

Until 1927 the prevailing view in Tokyo, espoused by the ruling *Minseitō* Party and Foreign Minister Shidehara, was to minimize Japan’s intervention in the Chinese civil war and respect China’s sovereignty, as long as Japan’s “special interests” in Manchuria were not compromised by the warring parties. Even liberals

²⁷ British Secretary of State, cable B55, 19.5.1928, *CMJP-NAA* 1:198; Matsusaka, *Making of Japanese Manchuria*, 335-6.

like Shidehara, known by their diplomatic moderation, were adamant that these “special interests” ought to be protected at all costs.²⁸ Until the late 1920s Shidehara, like many others, believed that this should be done through careful cooperation with the Western powers and local Chinese forces, including Zhang Zuolin.

In March 1927, *Kuomintang* and allied communist soldiers raided and looted foreign dwellings and consulates in Nanjing (the so-called Nanjing Incident), wounding and killing Japanese and other foreigners. The Japanese public's outrage, further exacerbated by an economic crisis, forced the *Minseitō* Cabinet to dissolve. As a result the rival party, *Seiyūkai*, came to power under the leadership of General Tanaka Giichi. Tanaka, once the prominent figure in the Chōshū military clique and a staunch enemy of the political parties, had changed course, joined the *Seiyūkai* Party and won the prime minister's office as the party's chairman. Carried to power by a wave of popular nationalism, he was viewed by many as a “strong leader” bound to restore order. Tanaka therefore promised to toughen up Japanese measures on the Chinese mainland through an “active policy”, taking the foreign portfolio into his own hands. In practice, day-to-day Manchurian affairs were managed by Vice Foreign Minister Mori Kaku, the strong man in the *Seiyūkai* and a well-known political hawk. The problem was that no one, least of all Tanaka himself, knew what

²⁸ Sir Frederick White, "The Drama in Manchuria", *The Times*, 22.2.1928. The author was a political advisor to the Chinese Government. For discussion and analysis of this policy, often defined by scholars as Japan's "new imperialism," see: Matsusaka, *Making of Japanese Manchuria*, 267-73. Some scholars, however, believe that the differences between the "new" and the "old" imperialism were not so significant. For example see McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin*, 134-43.

the new “active policy” meant and how Japan should navigate its way in Manchuria and China as a whole.²⁹

The new prime minister, notwithstanding his avowed readiness to wage war to defend Japan’s Manchurian interests, still advocated a policy of cooperation with Zhang Zuolin.³⁰ Intransigent as Zhang might have been, Japan’s rights in Manchuria could still be protected through his rule. Therefore, Tanaka had dispatched several emissaries to Zhang in Beijing, including the president of the SMR, in order to convince the Old Marshal to resume cooperation with Japan. Above all, Tanaka and his emissaries attempted to convince Zhang to leave Beijing, abandon the futile struggle with the *Kuomintang* and entrench himself in his “fortress Manchuria” protected by Japanese bayonets. Tanaka, like many other Japanese policy makers, was worried that Zhang’s war with the *Kuomintang* might undermine the local economy and give rise to chaos by provoking rebellions or bringing the civil war into Manchurian territories.³¹ But the warlord remained unmoved by Tanaka’s attempt to bring him back to Manchuria. In a misjudged attempt to play on the anti-communist fears of his Japanese counterparts, he insisted that the *Kuomintang* were “red,” and

²⁹ Okada Keisuke's affidavit, *IMFTE* M2:1816-7; Denning, British consul in Dalian, in a conversation with Matsuoka Yōsuke, as reported to Sir Cecil Dormer, British Ambassador in Tokyo, 5.6.1928, *CMJP-NAA*, 1:165; Morishima Morito, *Inbō, Ansatsu, Guntō: Ichi Gaikōkan no Kaikō* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1950), 1-8; Matsusaka, *Making of Japanese Manchuria*, 327.

³⁰ Machino, Takema, "Chō Sakurin Bakushi no Zengo", *Chūō Kōron* 64:9 (22.9.1949), 77; Iboshi Ei, "Chō Sakurin Bakusatsu Jiken no Shinsō", *Geirin* (June, 1982) 1:8.

³¹ Okada's affidavit, *IMFTE* M2:1817-8; Denning to Dormer (quoting Matsuoka), 5.6.1928, *CMJP-NAA*, 1:166; *UKN* 2:689; Inaba Masao, "Chō Sakurin Bakusatsu Jiken" in Sanbō Honbu, ed., *Shōwa Sannen Shina Jihen Shuppeishi* (Tokyo: Gannandō Shoten, 1971, appendix), 3. On the economic aspect of the problem see: Yanagisawa, Asobu, "Hōten ni okeru Hōtenhyō Bōraku Mondai to Futō Kazei Mondai no Tenkai Keika – Chō Sakurin Bakusatsu Jiken no Rekishiteki Zentei", Tokyo Daigaku Keizai Kenkyūkai, *Keizaigaku Kenkyū* 24 (October, 1981), 49-50.

he was the only one who could stop the communist tide from swallowing the entire country.³²

Faced by these difficult, seemingly futile negotiations, many people in the Japanese establishment, chief among them Vice Foreign Minister Mori Kaku, advocated a “stronger” policy towards Zhang Zuolin. Sharing the view of many senior diplomats, Kwantung and SMR officials, Mori believed that Zhang’s “ungrateful” attitude to Japan could not be remedied by mere persuasion. The empire, therefore, should force him to cooperate. And if he disagreed, Japan should even get rid of him in one way or another, maybe forcing him to retire in favor of his son or one of his lieutenants. Mori and his associates did not plan, as yet, to rule Manchuria directly, but hoped to put in place another local strongman, more compliant than Zhang.³³

Crucially, in 1927 Mori’s line was supported by many officers in the General Staff and the Kwantung Army. Zhang’s intransigence had outraged senior officers, and many of them, especially in Manchuria, began to advocate tougher measures against him in tandem with Mori Kaku’s proposals.³⁴ But even the leaders of the army could not settle on an alternative policy. Among those who wanted to remove Zhang there was no uniform opinion as to who might replace him, but many officers assumed that his successor, whether his son Xueliang or one his senior officers, was

³² Yoshizawa to Tanaka, 19.5.1928, *NGB Shōwa* 1:1:2, 91; *STDS* 1:57,287. Compare with the testimony of Machino Takema, Zhang's advisor, in Machino, Takema, "Chō Sakurin Bakushi no Zengo", *Chūō Kōron* 64:9 (22.9.1949), 79.

³³ "Pingye Lingfu Zhengci", 21.8.1954, in *HBDZ*, 72; Dening to Dormer (quoting Matsuoka), 5.6.1928, *CMJP-NAA*, 1:166; Inaba, "Chō Sakurin", 2-3; *TGD* 2:952-3.

³⁴ Inaba, "Chō Sakurin", 2-3; *TGD* 2:952-4; Sasaki Tōichi, *Aru Gunjin no Jiden* (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 1967), 191.

likely to be more compliant to Japanese pressure. The various “China hands” in the army, many of whom had worked as advisors for competing warlords, often recommended their own clients as alternatives to Zhang. Some others supported the *Kuomintang*. Zhang Zuolin’s own Japanese advisers naturally backed him, but they were in the minority.³⁵

In June and July 1927, Prime Minister Tanaka attempted to tackle the *Manmō* problem head on by summoning to a conference in Tokyo all Manchuria-related policy-makers from the army, the navy, the Kwantung Government and the Foreign Ministry. But even the results of this so-called “Eastern Conference” (*Tōhō Kaigi*) were inconclusive. After many weeks of debate, Tanaka summed up the conference in a series of statements which did not offer a clear alternative to the current policy. As a compromise between the moderate and radical proposals, the Eastern Conference did not rule out cooperation with Zhang, but considered the option of his removal, too. Crucially, the conference decided that peace and order in Manchuria had to be protected at all costs.³⁶ A year later, in May 1928, the cabinet decided that if Zhang was routed by the *Kuomintang*, as many expected, and his

³⁵ Dormer to Chamberlain, 4.6.1928, Dening to Dormer (quoting Matsuoka), 5.6.1928, *CMJP-NAA* 1:165-6, 74-5; Machino, "Chō Sakurin", 76-80; Kitaoka, "China Experts", in Duus, *Informal Empire*, 360, 4-5, 7; Shibutani Yuri, *Bazoku de miru 'Manshū': Chō Sakurin no ayunda Michi* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2004), 156-8.

³⁶ William F. Morton, *Tanaka Giichi and Japan's China Policy* (Folkestone, Kent: Dawson, 1980), 96-7; For a detailed description of the Eastern Conference see: Matsusaka, *Making of Japanese Manchuria*, 327-40.

army returned to Manchuria as a leaderless mob, all of his soldiers should be disarmed, along with their *Kuomintang* enemies.³⁷

This decision was soon translated into policy. In a warning sent to Chiang Kai-shek and Zhang Zuolin, commanders of the feuding Chinese armies, the Japanese government stated that it would take “appropriate and effective measures” to prevent war and chaos in Manchuria.³⁸ In private conversations, Japanese representatives indeed warned Zhang that if he did not withdraw immediately from Beijing his army might well be disarmed.³⁹ The commander of the Kwantung Army, Muraoka Chōtarō, his chief of staff, Saitō Hisashi and his senior staff officer, Kōmoto Daisaku, interpreted this as an authorization to solve the “Manchurian problem” by getting rid of Zhang, for how could he rule with his troops disarmed? On May 15, troops were summoned from Korea to reinforce the Kwantung Army. In the mind of the Kwantung Army’s commanders, an order to march against Zhang could arrive at any moment.⁴⁰ General Saitō recorded the atmosphere in his diary:

Mukden, 21 May: On the assumption that the imperial order decreed [...] would become effective at 12:00 noon here, I advised my subordinates to that effect and summoned them at 12:00. But the orders did not come through. I am beginning to think that in all likelihood the [army's prerogative]

³⁷ "Heben Dazuo Bigong", 2.8.1953, *HBDZ*, 39; Denning, Consul in Dalian in a conversation with Matsuoka Yōsuke, as reported to Dormer, 5.6.1928, *CMJP-NAA* 1:165; *TGD* 2:952.

³⁸ Yoshizawa to Tanaka, 15.5.1928, Tanaka to Yoshizawa, 16.5.1928, *NGB S:1:1:2*, 74-81. See also Tanaka’s conversation with Sir Cecil Dormer, British Ambassador to Japan, as reported in Dormer’s dispatch to Sir Joseph Austen-Chamberlain (British Foreign Secretary), 4.6.1928, *CMJP-NAA* 1:174.

³⁹ Tatekawa Yoshitsugu, military attaché in Beijing, to Army Vice-Minister Hata Eitarō, 18.5.1928, Yoshizawa to Tanaka, 19.5.1928, *NGB S:1:1:2*, 89-93; Sir Miles Lampson, British Minister to Beijing, conversation with Ou Tching, 23.5.1928, as reported in Lampson to Chamberlain, 23.5.1928, *CMJP-NAA* 1:171.

⁴⁰ *TGD* 2:954-5; Tanaka Ryūkici’s interrogation, *IMTFE* M2:1949-52; Iboshi, "Chō Sakurin" 3:40-1. General Saitō’s diary entries, 21,28,30.5, 1.6, reproduced in Inaba, "Chō Sakurin", 11,14-15; For detailed analysis of the Kwantung Army’s preparation see *ibid*, 8-9.

of command (*tōsui*) was disrupted by the [government's] policy [...] waited all night, but the orders never arrived.⁴¹

The government and the General Staff, indeed, still held the Kwantung Army on a leash. On the 19th, the troops were ordered not to proceed beyond the SMR railway zone. As Shanhaiguan, the gateway to Manchuria, was beyond this zone, it meant that the Japanese troops were not allowed to wait there in order to disarm Zhang's troops. Two days later the General Staff conceded that such a move could not be made in face of the government, partially acknowledging the supremacy of civilian rule.⁴² Indeed, Prime Minister Tanaka decided to go on working with Zhang Zuolin.⁴³ Saitō was furious. Premier Tanaka had wavered, bowing to the pressure of foreign countries. The Kwantung Army, Saitō wrote, "expecting mobilization at any moment, is in a state of animated suspense. A feeling of antagonism toward the indecisive Tokyo government is mounting daily."⁴⁴

The government canceled the plan to disarm Zhang's troops because it believed it was about to achieve, if not a lasting solution to the *Manmō* problem, then at least a temporary respite. On June 1, Zhang Zuolin finally agreed to return to

⁴¹ Original reproduced in Iboshi, "Chō Sakurin" 3:45. I have used the English translation of Leonard A. Humphreys, *Heavenly Sword*, 156-7, with appropriate changes to correct inaccuracies. Compare with Kawagoe Moriji's version in *Chō Sakurin Bakushi Jiken*, pp.30-4, *National Institute for Defense Studies (Bōeishō Bōei Kenkyūjo)*, Military Archives, (hereafter cited as NIDS), itaku no. 251.

⁴² Chief of the General Staff to Kwantung Army Headquarters, 19.5.1928, Vice CGS to KA Headquarters, 21.5.1928, Vice Army Minister to KA Chief of Staff, 2.6.1928, reproduced in Inaba, "Chō Sakurin", 10, 16; Kawagoe, "Chō Sakurin" (NIDS), 31

⁴³ Inaba, "Chō Sakurin", 12.

⁴⁴ Saitō's diary entries, 23,25.5, 1.6., reproduced in Inaba, "Chō Sakurin", 14-15. The translation of the direct quote is taken from Humphreys, *Heavenly Sword*, 156. And compare with Kawagoe's description of the atmosphere in the Kwantung Army's staff in *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 31-4

Mukden in defeat, his dream of uniting China under his rule irrevocably shattered.⁴⁵

Back in Manchuria, he would be completely dependent on Japanese bayonets and was likely to be more compliant.⁴⁶ Just at that moment, a group of junior officers from the Kwantung Army, led by Colonel Kōmoto Daisaku decided on their own initiative to cut the Gordian Knot by killing Zhang, thus shattering their prime minister's policy.

The King of Manchuria: Kōmoto Daisaku as Officer and Conspirator

Like many other young nationalists throughout the generations, Colonel Kōmoto Daisaku was infatuated with Saigō Takamori, that paradigmatic rebel of the 1870s. He often quoted the following excerpt attributed to the great man: "It is difficult to control a man who neither cares about life, status, wealth or honor. Without such unmanageable people, everyone has to suffer and it is impossible to do great things for the country."⁴⁷

This excerpt gives a good glimpse of the personality of Kōmoto and his tendency for disobedience, as well as of the way that memories of earlier uprisings influenced future rebels. Little is known about the colonel's early life, and his biographers are sharply divided in his appraisal. For Sagara Shunsuke, his biographer and admirer, Kōmoto was a brave, creative and patriotic young officer.⁴⁸ Hirano

⁴⁵ Yoshizawa to Tanaka, 1.6.1928, *NGB S:1:1:2*, 123.

⁴⁶ *TGD* 2:954.

⁴⁷ Sagara Shunsuke, *Akai Yūhi no Manshū Nogahara ni: Kisai Kōmoto Daisaku no Shōgai* (Tokyo: Kōjinsha, 1978), 13.

⁴⁸ Sagara, *Akai Yūhi*, 11-42. For another favorable assessment of Kōmoto's character see Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 14

Mineo, a military correspondent and his brother-in-law, however, described him as a corrupt and rude man with a *rōnin* mentality, who had mistresses all over China and Japan, neglected his wife and daughters and fleeced his poor family to finance his dissolute life.⁴⁹

Still, both biographers agree that he was a *shishi* type: bold, daring but disobedient, fond of adventures and quickly bored of day-to-day military routine, a picture substantiated by Kōmoto's own testimonies, letters and interrogation transcripts. The colonel, for example, used to boast that during the Russo-Japanese War he flatly refused an order to wash himself, and refrained from taking baths all throughout the campaign. Other anecdotes, whose credibility is difficult to ascertain, disclose that as a cadet he led a raid on the barracks of bullying *senpai* (senior cadets), and later, as an officer, dared to question orders issued by the chief of the General Staff.⁵⁰

Due to his problematic disciplinary record and his low academic achievements, Kōmoto was initially unable to enter the Staff College (*Rikudai*), the prestigious institution whose graduates staffed the high echelons of the army, and was admitted only after trying twice. His humble origins from a commoner family of distant samurai ancestry, combined with a burning ambition to succeed and prove himself, made him deeply resentful towards the army's reigning Chōshū Clique and

⁴⁹ Hirano, *Manshū*, 53-63; "Pingye Lingfu Zhengci", 5, 21.8.1954, *HBDZ*, 68-9, 72-3. Similar anecdotes are told by Ozaki Yoshiharu, a staff officer under Kōmoto who had also participated in the murder plot. Even if not entirely reliable in its details, Ozaki's description gives some credence to Hirano's portrayal of Kōmoto. See: Ozaki Yoshiharu, *Rikugun o ugokashita Hitobito* (Odawara: Hachishodō Shoten, 1960), 99-102.

⁵⁰ Sagara, *Akai Yūhi*, 18-26, 40; Hirano, *Manshū*, 20, 52; "Pingye Lingfu Zhengci", 5, 21.8.1954, *HBDZ*, 68-9, 72-3. For Kōmoto's own testimonies see discussion below.

the haughty elite of senior officers.⁵¹ Like Miura Gorō, the erstwhile architect of Queen Min's assassination, he was both hyper-nationalist and oppositional, frustrated and resentful both of Japan's enemies and of its civilian and military leadership. In a distant place such as Manchuria, such a combination could not but invite trouble. There, in the wild west of the Japanese Empire, Kōmoto could pursue his aspirations to the utmost. According to Hirano's testimony, Kōmoto used to boast that in the future, his dream was to become "the king of Manchuria."⁵²

In 1914, after graduating from the Staff College, Kōmoto was sent by the General Staff to the continent as an intelligence operative, expert for covert operations and advisor to several warlords under the Intelligence Department of the General Staff.⁵³ Kōmoto's expertise in Chinese affairs, just like his adventurist tendencies, were strengthened significantly during his service in the Siberian Intervention, Japan's failed attempt to meddle in the Russian civil war.⁵⁴ In 1923 he returned to Japan as an officer in the China Section of the Intelligence Department, and thus became acquainted with a group of China experts destined to play an important role in his subsequent plots.⁵⁵ Another important venue for networking was the *Futabakai*, the elite study group of aspiring military reformers. Hirano recalled that Kōmoto, known as a bon-vivant, was well liked by the other members

⁵¹ "Pingye Lingfu Zhengci", 5.8.1954, *HBDZ*, 68-9; Sagara, *Akai Yūhi*, 19-22, 29-31.

⁵² "Pingye Lingfu Zhengci", 11.8.1954, *HBDZ*, 6-7; Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 6.

⁵³ "Heben Dazuo Bigong", 27.5.1952, *HBDZ*, 12-13; Hirano, *Manshū*, 50-2.

⁵⁴ "Heben Dazuo Bigong" (undated), and in 27.5.1952, *HBDZ*, 5, 13; Sagara, *Akai Yūhi*, 40-2.

⁵⁵ "Heben Dazuo Bigong", 19.4.1953, *HBDZ*, 19.

because of his boisterous generosity. He regularly lent money to his friends and lavishly wined and dined them, thus oiling his exclusive network of connections among his peers.⁵⁶ In 1926 he returned to China for his final posting, this time as a senior staff officer with the Kwantung Army. Despite his numerous connections in high places, his stormy character and a series of disagreements with superiors had led to his removal from the General Staff. Under such conditions, exile to Manchuria seemed to be a convenient solution for all.⁵⁷

According to Sagara's account, supported by the retrospective testimony of Kōmoto himself, the decision to kill Zhang gradually crystallized during two consecutive solo trips in Manchuria, the last of which took place around New Year 1928. Kōmoto had travelled in normal trains, dressed as a Chinese, and used his fluent language skills to "test the ground." To his dismay, he discovered that the population hated Zhang and Japan almost to the same degree, and saw both as merciless oppressors and exploiters. As the cause of Japan was, for Kōmoto, inherently righteous, local resistance to the empire had to come from either misunderstanding or maliciousness. The people of Manchuria, he believed, were not inherently anti-Japanese, as they were very friendly to the soldiers of the Imperial Army during and after the Russo-Japanese War. Ergo, they were being misled by someone – and that someone, he believed, was Zhang Zuolin.⁵⁸ Zhang, unlike the common people, resisted the righteous cause of Japan out of wickedness, simply to

⁵⁶ "Pingye Lingfu Zhengci", 11.8.1954, *HBDZ*, 7. Compare with Hirano's description in his book, *Manshū*, 48-9.

⁵⁷ "Heben Dazuo Bigong", 27.5.1952; Hirano, *Inbōsha*, 65.

⁵⁸ Kōmoto, "Watakushi", 194-5, 7, 9.

“spread his individual power and that of his military clique and enrich himself at the public's expense.”⁵⁹

The decision was finally taken, according to Kōmoto's biographer, while the colonel was walking with his daughters in Mt Nirei, a military cemetery near Dalian. While there, he claimed to have undergone something akin to a mystical experience, a spiritual encounter with the souls of the heroes fallen in the Russo-Japanese War. He had to do something, he decided, to save Manchuria, won by their blood.⁶⁰ Given the “spineless” (*honenuki*) policy of the government, the only way was to “escape to the front”, eliminating Zhang by independent, direct action.⁶¹ A short time before the assassination, on April 18, 1928, Kōmoto explained his motives in an unusually blunt letter to a co-conspirator, a China expert in the army.⁶² Due to its paramount importance, this letter deserves to be quoted at some length:⁶³

As for me, I am not highly evaluated at the central quarters. [...] **But as I have ample experience with the criticism of little men and selfish superiors, I do not pay it much attention** [...]. There is no need to cling to our beloved military jobs. It may well be the time to choose another trade, far away [from military life], as to give our superiors (these dull people!) a reason for self-reflection [...] As for the situation in Manchuria, there are many who find it

⁵⁹ Kōmoto, "Watakushi", 197.

⁶⁰ Kōmoto, "Watakushi", 194; Sagara, *Akai Yūhi*, 125-30, 148. Kawagoe Moriji, Kōmoto's right hand man, had also mentioned the spirits of the fallen heroes, along with the "imperial will", as one of his sources of inspiration. See: Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 78.

⁶¹ Kōmoto, "Watakushi", 195.

⁶² This letter was published in 1992 in the journal *Gendai* by a military correspondent named Sannō Masuhiko. The original was entrusted to the Bōeicho Archive in Tokyo, with very limited access. Still, Kobayashi Kazuhiro, Isogai's biographer, was able to examine it, and compare the raw text with the *Gendai* version. He republished it in full, correcting some of the mistakes in the earlier version. All excerpts here are taken from Kobayashi's version. For more details about this document see Kobayashi Kazuhiro, "*Shina-tsū*" *ichi Gunjin no Hikari to Kage: Isogai Rensuke Chūjō Den* (Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 2000), 46-7.

⁶³ In the excerpts below, all emphasis is my own.

difficult to ignore the increasing tyranny of the Chinese side. **The reason underlying it, however, is that they [Zhang's government] are being bolstered by the Japanese military cliques – and that is hateful.** Nobody is able to solve the *Manmō* problem by reasoning. The strategy of exchanging little favors is useless. There is no way but force, and it is essential to choose the right pretext and battle standard while doing so. At this point, in face of even the slightest provocation, we should deal them a devastating blow and force them to change their attitude towards Japan.⁶⁴

Kōmoto elaborated on railway conflicts and on the futility of current Japanese countermeasures in relation to Zhang Zuolin, and then proposed his own solution:

Wouldn't it be advisable if Zhang Zuolin and maybe one or two others die on the road? This time, by all means, I am going to do it. **Even if they try to stop me, I'll do it at all costs.** To take a life in order to solve the *Manmō* problem, that's our greatest hope. That is the honorable thing to do. [...] last year and the year before, the plans to do something great were stopped in the midst. This year I'm going to score a hit by all means. My plan to cleanse Manchuria and Inner Mongolia with torrents of blood may be, I believe, a fundamental solution to the problem.⁶⁵

As we can see in the sentences marked in bold, Kōmoto was not ashamed and was even proud in his military defiance. The culture of military disobedience, gradually taking root in the Japanese army since the early Meiji period, was so ingrained now as to seem self-evident to people like him. Moreover, the colonel associated the military "cliques" and their quintessential representative, Prime Minister Tanaka, with Zhang Zuolin. All enemies, internal and external, were tied together in a single,

⁶⁴ Kōmoto to Isogai, 18.4.1928, reproduced in Kobayashi, *Isogai*, 47-8.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 48-50. Iboshi Ei, however, interprets this letter somewhat differently. According to his reading, which seems to me somewhat strained, Kōmoto still regarded the assassination at that time as "plan B" in case the Kwantung Army failed to disarm Zhang's army. The decision to kill the Old Marshal, according to Iboshi, was made around May 23. See: Iboshi, "Chō Sakurin" 4:42-4.

distasteful bundle.⁶⁶ As Yoshihisa Tak Matsusaka argues, Kōmoto's conspiracy was directed not only against Zhang but also against Prime Minister Tanaka, designed to humiliate and force the hand of a man he hated and distrusted.⁶⁷ Sasaki Tōichi, the *Kuomintang's* military advisor and Kōmoto's co-conspirator, wrote later that "I'm the Prime Minister!" (*Ora ga shushō*), as the arrogant Tanaka was mockingly called by his rivals, was "taught his lesson" by the plot.⁶⁸ Many years later, Kōmoto told his Chinese captors that he and his friends could not procure an imperial rescript, as such a move had to involve the prime minister as well.⁶⁹ Devoid of real access to the imperial hazy center, Kōmoto *imagined* himself as operating according to his will. By doing that, he was working in accord with General Araki's radical interpretation of *tōsui-ken*, positioning the army as completely independent of the government and justifying disregard of internal hierarchies as well.⁷⁰

The atmosphere of panic in the Kwantung Army headquarters had certainly contributed to the sense of urgency Kōmoto felt. Confronted on a daily basis with the anti-Japanese feelings of the local Chinese population, boycotts and other displays of hostility, Kōmoto felt, in his own words, that he and his colleagues "were

⁶⁶ For very similar criticism against the Japanese military cliques see: Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 78.

⁶⁷ Matsusaka, *Making*, 346-7; Mori, Katsumi, interview with Kōmoto Daisaku, Dalian, 1.12.1942, in Mori, *Manshū Jihen no Rimenshi* (Tokyo: Kokushu Kankōkai, 1976), 266-7.

⁶⁸ Sasaki, *Aru Gunjin*, 193.

⁶⁹ Heben Dazuo Gongshu", *HBDZ*, 661.

⁷⁰ "Pingye Lingfu Zhengci", *HBDZ*, 68-71.

hemmed by enemies from all sides.”⁷¹ The scene was dynamic and constantly changing. Chiang Kai-shek was advancing from the south, fighting with the Japanese Army in Shandong. Zhang’s forces were likely to escape to Manchuria as an unruly mob. There, joined by local anti-Japanese forces, they could force the Kwantung Army to engage in house-to-house battles in Mukden, with terrible implications for the local Japanese population. The impasse had to be solved at once.⁷²

As Kōmoto was heir to the long tradition of militant, rebellious optimism, he believed that by getting rid of one person, Zhang Zuolin, he might well solve this impasse for the benefit of Japan. Killing “the brigand leader” was the only way to solve the Manchurian problem. ⁷³“If this one individual, Zhang Zuolin, falls down,” he later recalled his convictions at the time, “the other generals of the Fengtian clique would scatter to the four winds,” as they were tied to him as the boss of their gang. Until a new leader emerged, they would be “at their wits ends,” and meanwhile chaos would prevail. Then, probably, someone friendlier to Japan would take the helm.⁷⁴ Beyond that, Kōmoto did not plan ahead, but concentrated on the limited objective of killing Zhang. The trouble, as he discovered in the early spring of 1928, was that he was not the only one who planned to do so.

⁷¹ Kōmoto, "Watakushi", 197, compare with "Heben Dazuo Kou gong", 6.4.1953, *HBDZ*, 33. These arguments were also shared by General Saitō. See his letter to Vice Minister Hata, 20.5.1928, reproduced in Inaba, "Chō Sakurin", 5.

⁷² Kōmoto, "Watakushi", 196-7; "Heben Dazuo Gongshu", *HBDZ*, 661. According Iboshi Ei ("Chō Sakurin", 4:44) protecting the local Japanese civilians was one of Kōmoto's main motives. It seems to me, however, that that importance he ascribes to this particular motive is somewhat exaggerated.

⁷³ Kōmoto, "Watakushi", 197.

⁷⁴ Kōmoto, "Watakushi", 197. Compare with Kōmoto's Chinese language testimony, "Heben Dazuo Gongshu", *HBDZ*, 661. Also compare with the Ogawa's account in "Manshū Mondai", *Ogawa Heikichi Kankei Monjo*, ed. Oka Yoshitake, (Tokyo: Isuzu Shobō, 1973), 1:626-7 (hereafter cited as *OHKM*).

Two Alternative Plots

While planning his own operation, Kōmoto did his best to foil two alternative plots. Their story is important, because it sheds some light upon the chaotic structure of command of the Kwantung Army, where disobedience was no longer the exception but the rule. The plurality of plans gradually became a security threat, as dark rumors about a military conspiracy against Zhang began to circulate around Beijing. On June 2, the Japanese envoy in Beijing quoted some rumors that Japanese officers planned to arrest Zhang upon his arrival in Mukden. According to another version, Chinese military policemen were supposed to kill him. Such plans, the envoy warned Prime Minister Tanaka, were bound to create an international scandal. Hearing these rumors, General Saitō, chief of staff of the Kwantung Army, wondered whether his subordinates were behind the plot, though he surmised that the military policemen who planned to kill Zhang were Chinese, not Japanese.⁷⁵ Indeed, in spring 1928, the commander of the Kwantung Army, General Muraoka Chōtarō, began to think about the possibility of killing the Old Marshal in Beijing. For that purpose, he made contact with Major Takeshita Yoshiharu, the military attaché in Harbin, and summoned him into his headquarters in Mukden.

Kōmoto, who had seen Takeshita in the building and understood that something was afoot, called him to a private conversation, disclosed his own conspiracy and convinced him to scrap Muraoka's plan. Beijing, he said, was well-

⁷⁵ Yoshizawa to Tanaka, 3.6.1928, *NGB S*:1:1:2, 128. Saitō's diary, 3,6.6.1918, reproduced in Inaba, "Chō Sakurin", 18,25. These rumors were probably related to Hata's conspiracy (discussed below).

guarded, too crowded with Chinese and foreign troops. It was admirable, Kōmoto told Takeshita, that their commander plotted such an assassination without telling Kōmoto, his senior staff officer – but Muraoka, with all due respect, had to be excluded in order “not to bring him into an unfortunate situation.” “I will get rid of Zhang Zuolin,” Kōmoto said, “and take all the responsibility upon myself.”⁷⁶ Later, he recalled his belief that “if the high command had such plans, then we staff officers had to implement them.”⁷⁷ Sometimes it seems that more than being interested in the results, Kōmoto was attracted to the excitement, honor and adventure of action. Defiant, independent plotting became a goal for its own sake. Takeshita travelled to Beijing and became Kōmoto’s agent in the capital.⁷⁸ Muraoka, in turn, was oblivious to the details of Kōmoto's plan, but might have guessed that something was going on. Captain Kawagoe Moriji, Kōmoto's right hand man, wrote that the Kwantung

⁷⁶ Quoted by Sagara, *Akai Yūhi*, 157, and compare with a similar version in Hirano, *Inbōsha*, 79-81; This description is supported by Kōmoto’s version in “Watakushi”, 198, as well as the version he gave the Chinese authorities, “Heben Dazuo Kou gong”, “Heben Dazuo Gongshu”, 6.4.1954, *HBDZ*, 33-4, 660-1 and the interview he gave to Mori Katsumi in 1942 (Katsumi, *Manshū*, 267-8). See also Inaba, “Chō Sakurin”, 33. In an interview with Iboshi Ei (19.11.1973), Takeshita denied Kōmoto’s version. He admitted that Kōmoto instructed him to collect intelligence on Zhang’s movements in Beijing and his imminent departure to Mukden, but denied the story of Muraoka’s plot, the details of the conversation with Kōmoto and any prior knowledge on the latter’s real intentions. See: Iboshi, “Chō Sakurin” 1:11. Still, I am inclined to believe Kōmoto’s version and reject Takeshita’s. First of all, Kōmoto told his story on three different occasions, including to the Chinese investigators. Usually, he tried to take all responsibility upon himself and was proud of his deed. What interest did he have in incriminating Muraoka, who was already dead for almost twenty years? In addition, Kōmoto’s version is indirectly supported by Kawagoe’s, in Hata, “Chō Sakurin Bakusatsu”, 126, and *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 36, though the latter reports only on Muraoka's complicity, not on the details of the conversation.

⁷⁷ “Heben Dazuo Kou gong”, 6.4.1954, *HBDZ*, 33-4. For an alternative, but not completely different, interpretation of Muraoka’s plot see Iboshi, “Chō Sakurin” 4:48-50.

⁷⁸ Kōmoto, “Watakushi”, 198. Compare with Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 36.

Army's commander in chief, "a big boss with a big heart, [...] pretended not to know while knowing, and allowed his subordinates to do their part."⁷⁹

But Muraoka's vague plan, hijacked by Kōmoto, was not the only plot to kill Zhang Zuolin. Kōmoto was greatly dismayed to hear about a second plan, independently hatched by two *Tokumu Kikan* officers.⁸⁰ The intelligence officer Doihara Kenji, now serving as an advisor with Zhang's army in Beijing, and Major General Hata Shinji, the *Tokumu Kikan* chief in Mukden, operated in concert with other *Tokumu Kikan* operatives and *manshū ronin*, all of whom agreed that Zhang Zuolin must go.⁸¹ A key co-conspirator was a shadowy figure, a former Japanese officer named Araki Gorō. Araki had retired from the Imperial Army as a lieutenant, travelled to China and became a notorious *rōnin* and military advisor. Now he served in Zhang's army with the rank of general under a Chinese name, and was responsible for the personal bodyguard of Zhang's son. Doihara and Hata convinced Araki to stage a palace coup, toppling and possibly killing Zhang by means of his own bodyguard, enthroning his son Xueliang instead.⁸²

To achieve this goal, however, they needed weapons. They tried to procure them from the Kwantung Army through Kōmoto Daisaku. As with Muraoka's plot, Kōmoto was quick to counteract it. In his letter to his friend from the China Section,

⁷⁹ Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 77.

⁸⁰ Sagara, *Akai Yūhi*, 151.

⁸¹ Yoshizawa to Tanaka, 16.6.1928, *NGB S:1:1:2*, 158.

⁸² Kōmoto, "Watakushi", 200. After the war, however, Araki Gorō argued that he and Doihara knew nothing of Kōmoto's plans. See: *Hiroku Doihara Kenji: Nitchū Yūkō no Suteishi*, ed. Doihara Kenji Kankōkai, (Tokyo: Fuyō Shobō, 1972), 238-9. In his letter to Isogai (Kobayashi, *Isogai*, 49), Kōmoto wrote that he indeed concealed the plot from them.

already mentioned above, he fulminated against the irresponsibility of Doihara and Hata, who relied on feckless Chinese bodyguards for such a sensitive plan. "I would not dance by Doihara's flute," he wrote, "[...] Therefore, I have canceled the arms shipment to Araki's guard. As they tried to forcefully steal the weapons, I have used military policemen to stop them."⁸³ Kōmoto was doing his best to protect Zhang Zuolin from all assassins but himself.

Kōmoto's Conspiracy

In January, when Kōmoto began plotting, he revealed the secret to a chosen group of officers, including his personal aide, Captain Kawagoe Moriji, and Nakano Yōhei, a *Tokumu Kikan* operative in Tsitsihar, North Manchuria.⁸⁴ Kawagoe took upon himself the day-to-day management of the plot, kept in touch with other confederates and procured the necessary explosives. Later, he told Kōmoto that he would keep following the plan even if discharged from the army as a result. In a typical mentality of "escape to the front", he believed that "solving the *Manmō* problem" was nothing but revering the emperor by following long-standing national policy.⁸⁵ Nakano Yōhei was a very different type of collaborator. He symbolized, in his very person, the deep involution of the Japanese army into the sphere of

⁸³ Kōmoto to Isogai, 18.4.1928, in Kobayshi, *Isogai*, 48-9. For discussion of the background see Sagara, *Akai Yūhi*, 150-1. And compare with "Heben Dazuo Bigong", 2.8.1953, *HBDZ*, 40.

⁸⁴ For a full list of the conspirators see: Hata, "Chō Sakurin Bakusatsu", 124. In Hata's chart, ringleaders are marked with **, and officers who were partly involved with *.

⁸⁵ Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 14-15, 18-19, 39-40, 78-9. According to Kawagoe's memoirs, this conversation took place on June 2, 1928. And still, Kawagoe asked Kōmoto to give him a "formal order" and was given one, see *ibid*, 38-9.

criminals, brigands and adventurers. A former *rōnin*, he was now leading a band of Chinese brigands collecting intelligence for the Kwantung Army. Kōmoto asked Nakano to employ some of his brigands to blow up segments of the railway in areas not controlled by the Japanese, without actually damaging trains, in order to create an image of popular resistance to Zhang's government. Nakano immediately agreed. "I'm Japanese," he said, "and would like to display my genuine feelings of patriotism." During the winter of 1928, there were indeed several such explosions.⁸⁶

On the ground, a dense web of informers and intelligence operatives, orchestrated by Captain Kawagoe, supplied Kōmoto with information on Zhang's movements and whereabouts. In Beijing, Kōmoto could rely on Major Takeshita and General Tatekawa, the military attaché at the Japanese legation.⁸⁷ Two Koreans were hired to watch over the train station in order to report the number of departing troops. Using such raw intelligence, Kōmoto was able to assess the Old Marshal's intentions. If he retained a large number of troops in Beijing, it might signal his intention to hold onto the ancient imperial capital. If he did not, then he might go back to Mukden, right to the snare prepared for him. Other operatives were waiting at various stops along the Beijing–Mukden route. The nature of the plot, however, was kept strictly confidential, and most agents, and even some Japanese officers, were not informed about the final goal.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ "Heben Dazuo Kou gong", 6.4.1954, *HBDZ*, 34; Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 15; Sagara, *Akai Yūhi*, 153; Iboshi, "Chō Sakurin" 4:40.

⁸⁷ Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 36-7; Hata Ikuhiko, "Chō Sakurin Bakusatsu no Zaikōsatsu" *Seikei Kenkyū* 44:1 (May 2007), 126.

⁸⁸ Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 36, 42-8; "Heben Dazuo Kou gong", 6.4.1954, "Heben Dazuo Gongshu", *HBDZ*, 35-6, 662; Sagara, *Akai Yūhi*, 158, 70.

In order to blow up Zhang's train, Kōmoto was in need of professionals. For that purpose, he used his authority as senior staff officer and mobilized the 20th Engineer Regiment from Korea.⁸⁹ Its commander was let into the plot and agreed to give his assistance. He and a member of Kōmoto's staff were responsible for the technical side of the operation.⁹⁰ The conspirators chose a place called Huanggutun, about one hundred miles south-west of Mukden. The Chinese rail tracks, they knew, might be legitimately guarded by Zhang's troops, but according to the treaties, no Chinese soldiers were allowed to go near the tracks of the South Manchurian Railway. In Huanggutun, the Mukden–Beijing train passed beneath a SMR railway bridge, thus providing a weak spot in Zhang's defenses.⁹¹

The 20th Regiment's engineers professionally installed on the Japanese bridge a large quantity of explosives, which could be activated by an electric switch.⁹² At the right moment the explosives could bring down the bridge upon Zhang Zuolin's head. Captain Tōmiya Kaneo, commander of the railway guards in the Huanggutun sector, was also let into the plot. Under his protection, neither Chinese nor Japanese soldiers could disclose the plotters or disturb them in their deadly work. In case the explosion failed to kill Zhang, one of Kōmoto's staff officers waited

⁸⁹ Tanaka Ryūkichi's interrogation, *IMTFE M2:1952*.

⁹⁰ "Heben Dazuo Kou gong", 6.4.1954, "Heben Dazuo Gongshu", *HBDZ*, 34, 661. This officer's last name was Kirihara, later changed to Fujii. See: Hata, "Chō Sakurin Bakusatsu", 126.

⁹¹ Kōmoto, "Watakushi", 198; "Heben Dazuo Kou gong", 6.4.1954, "Heben Dazuo Gongshu", *HBDZ*, 34, 661.

⁹² Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 43-4.

with bayonet-armed railway guards, ready to board the derailed train and finish the job.⁹³

The Cover-up Plan: Kōmoto and the Adventurers

Kōmoto wanted to disguise the fact that Japanese were behind the assassination in order to save embarrassment for both himself and the Kwantung Army.⁹⁴ In order to fabricate a convenient cover story, he cooperated with a Japanese coal merchant named Itō Kenjirō, a shadowy figure connected with the *manshū rōnin*. Itō was obsessed with the “*Manmō* problem,” and not only for patriotic reasons. Along with his friends, he suffered from Zhang’s economic policy as well as from the anti-Japanese boycotts. An extremist representative of a growing anti-Zhang movement among the Japanese merchants in Manchuria, Itō visited Kōmoto twice in his own initiative and implored him to get rid of Zhang, “the cancer of Manchuria.”⁹⁵ Just like Adachi Kenzō during the assassination of Queen Min, Itō was not a mere accomplice but a co-conspirator and major plotter. According to one of Kōmoto’s retrospective testimonies, he was the one who actually suggested Huanggutun as the appropriate place for the assassination.⁹⁶

⁹³ The name of this officer was Major Ozaki Yoshiharu. For his post-war account see: Ozaki, *Rikugun*, 108.

⁹⁴ Kōmoto, “Watakushi”, 198; Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 79.

⁹⁵ “Special Committee meeting 2”, 23.10.1928, *NGB S:1:1:2*, 195-6; Sagara, *Akai Yūhi*, 168; “Heben Dazuo Bigong”, 2.8.1953, *HBDZ*, 42. For background on the anti-Zhang movement of the Japanese merchants in Manchuria see: Yanagisawa, “Hōten”, 48-58.

⁹⁶ “Heben Dazuo Bigong”, 2.8.1953, *HBDZ*, 42. Kōmoto's version is supported by the Japanese Special Committee of Inquiry's findings (second meeting, 23.10.1928), *NGB S:1:1:2*, 196.

Itō, well connected with the Manchurian underworld, contacted a notorious *rōnin* of his acquaintance, and asked him to find “three Manchurians whose lives are worthless.” This man, a professional thug, worked part-time for the Mukden *Tokumu Kikan* and supplied the Japanese secret service with field intelligence.⁹⁷ After a short while, he managed to “hire” three morphine-addicted beggars for 100 yen each through a Chinese pimp, a former rebel who still hated Zhang Zuolin. The *rōnin* and the pimp, who received a commission for their services, convinced the three addicts that they were to be employed in a secret operation for the Japanese Army. That was correct, of course, but the three beggars could not guess to what end.⁹⁸

Subsequently, the three addicts were washed in a local bathhouse, groomed, dressed in mufti, given 50 yen each, and then brought to Itō's hideout. One of them, who suspected foul play, escaped his captors, but the other two were led to Kwantung Army headquarters, to be examined by Captain Kawagoe, and then to the railway guards in Huanggutun. There, Tōmiya and his men bayoneted them to death. Some hand grenades were installed in their pockets along with letters of confession (written in Japanese *kanbun* by the *rōnin*) incriminating the *Kuomintang* in Zhang's assassination. The fact that Kōmoto and his confederates believed that such letters could be mistaken for Chinese documents, as well as that morphine addicts would be confused for *Kuomintang* guerillas, showed the flimsiness of their cover-up attempts. Later, Kōmoto conceded that he did not pay much attention to

⁹⁷ Iboshi, "Chō Sakurin" 4:33; Sagara, *Akai Yūhi*, 169.

⁹⁸ "Special committee meeting 2", 23.10.1928, *NGB S:1:1:2*, 196-7; Ogawa Heikichi, "Manshū Mondai", *OHKM* 1:627. The name of the pimp was Liu Daiming.

the cover-up plan, as he did not believe that the Japanese police would investigate the case seriously.⁹⁹

The Operation

Zhang's private train was ready to depart Beijing around 1:00 am, in the early morning of June 4. At the station, among the crowds who came to see the Old Marshal off, Major Takeshita and General Tatekawa were also waiting. When they witnessed the train departing, the two sped in their car back to the Japanese legation and cabled Kōmoto in Mukden using coded language: "4th, 1:15 am, the special train has left Beijing. It is a cobalt blue train of twenty carriages. That person [Zhang] is in the eighth carriage."¹⁰⁰ At the train's next stop, Tianjin, another conspirator, the commander of the *Tokumu Kikan's* local branch, updated Kōmoto that things were proceeding according to plan. At the same stop Colonel Machino, Zhang's senior Japanese advisor, disembarked the train, leaving onboard his junior colleague, Major Giga.¹⁰¹ The major, oblivious of Kōmoto's plan, sat with Zhang and General Wu Junsheng, governor of Heilongjiang Province, in the Old Marshal's own luxurious carriage while the train traveled towards Mukden.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ "Heben Dazuo Kou gong", 6.4.1954, "Heben Dazuo Bigong", 2.8.1953, *HBDZ*, 36, 42; Yoshizawa to Tanaka, 16.6.1928, *NGB S:1:1:2*, 158; "Special committee meeting 2", 23.10.1928, *NGB S:1:1:2*, 196-7. According to Kawagoe, the Russian hand grenades were bought in Mukden by General Hata Shinji from the *Tokumu Kikan*, who agreed to cooperate with Kōmoto's plot though the latter foiled his [Hata's] own independent operation. See: Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 79-81.

¹⁰⁰ Yoshizawa to Tanaka, 2.6.1928, *NGB S:1:1:2*, 125, and compare with a slightly different version in Kawagoe's memoirs, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 40-1. See also: Sagara, *Akai Yūhi*, 143; Kōmoto, "Watakushi", 198-9.

¹⁰¹ Machino, "Chō Sakurin", 79.

¹⁰² Takamiya Taiheei, *Gunkoku Taiheiki* (Tokyo: Kantōsha, 1951), 46.

At the Huanggutun railway junction, SMR officials had placed multiple sandbags on the railway bridge in order to block the access of Chinese iron thieves who had been raiding the bridge to steal track components. Lieutenant Tōmiya and his men replaced the sand with explosives from a depot placed in Tōmiya's own house.¹⁰³ A wire attached to the sandbags led to a detonation device, hidden in the small cabin of the railways guards. Two engineers sat in the cabin, waiting for Zhang's train to arrive. An electric light pole, placed there in advance, illuminated the darkness of the night, allowing the conspirators to see their target clearly. The bodies of the two bayoneted Chinese were lying on the tracks, "confession" letters attached. Meanwhile, Kōmoto and his right-hand man, Kawagoe, were waiting in their favorite Japanese restaurant, keeping in constant touch with their agents at the different spots along the route. Kōmoto refused to stop the operation even when he learned that Major Giga and Colonel Machino would be on the train. As far as he was concerned, Machino could certainly be blown to pieces. The Japanese officers surrounding Zhang, he told Kawagoe, cared only about money and not about the future of the country. Giga was young and it was a pity, sure, but he and Machino were not really Japanese officers – merely "Zhang's parasitic worms".¹⁰⁴

At 3 o'clock in the morning, while Zhang's train was slowly proceeding towards Mukden, a commander of the Chinese military police came to visit his Japanese counterpart, one of Tōmiya's subordinates, and advised him that the

¹⁰³ Kōmoto's interview in Mori, *Manshū*, 268.

¹⁰⁴ Kōmoto, "watakushi", 194; Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 40-3, 78-9; Sagara, *Akai Yūhi*, 172-3; "Heben Dazuo Gongshu", *HBDZ*, 661-2; Morishima, "Chō Sakurin", 43. Compare with Hirano, *Inbōsha*, 69-70.

generalissimo's train was soon to pass through. Therefore, he asked for permission to allow his troops to patrol the railway. The Japanese officer, who knew exactly what was afoot, replied that the current treaties forbade Chinese soldiers to patrol the area directly adjacent to the SMR tracks. Their presence, he said, might cause a "misunderstanding" leading to an incident. Under this pretext he rejected the Chinese request, and kept the would-be crime scene free for the perpetrators.¹⁰⁵ As Zhang's train was running behind schedule, Kōmoto and Kawagoe had second thoughts whether to carry out the assassination even after dawn (4:42 am). There was a danger, after all, that the team would be spotted by unwelcome eyes. Kawagoe travelled to Huanggutun to consult with Tōmiya. "We have to do it anyway, even after dawn," said the commander of the railway guards, "if we miss this opportunity, another one is unlikely to come." In addition, he and his men had already killed the Chinese scapegoats.¹⁰⁶ The operation was therefore resumed.

Two hours later, around 5:20 am, Zhang's private train finally reached Huanggutun and passed under the SMR railway bridge. The Old Marshal was still sitting with General Wu, and Major Giga had entered the cabin to greet them. As he spotted Zhang's carriage passing by, Tōmiya signaled to the engineers in the hut, and

¹⁰⁵ Consul General Hayashi to Kwantung Army Chief of Staff Saitō/Vice Army Minister Hata, 16.7.1928, "Ressha Bakuha Jiken ni kansuru Hōten Sōryōjikan Chōsa Hōkoku" (author: Consul Uchida Gorō), *JACAR*, Ref. C04021743400, p.92 (hereafter cited as *Mukden Consulate Report*); "Chō Sakurin Ressha Bakuha Jiken ni kansuru Shoken" (Kwantung Army to the Army Ministry, undated), reproduced in Inaba, "Chō Sakurin", 62.

¹⁰⁶ Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 47-8. The time of sunrise near Mukden (Shenyang) on June 28, 1928, was calculated according to the meteorological data in: http://www.world-timedate.com/astronomy/sunrise_sunset/sunrise_sunset_time.php?month=6&year=1928&sun_param=0&city_id=578 (accessed 22.11.2013). Ozaki Yoshiharu (*Rikugun*, 108-9) argued that Kōmoto asked him whether to cancel the operation. Like Tōmiya, he answered in the negative and urged his commander to act as planned.

a second later, one of them pulled the switch.¹⁰⁷ Zhang had neglected his personal security to such a degree as to make his personal carriage evident for all to see. It was a conspicuous, luxurious private car, the others being ordinary first- and third-class compartments.¹⁰⁸ The railway bridge collapsed under the blast, hitting several of the carriages, which promptly began to burn. General Wu died on the spot, and Zhang Zuolin himself was mortally wounded. Giga, helped by Chinese soldiers, carried the Old Marshal out of the train and hurried him to his Mukden home. He died there five hours later, though this fact was concealed until his son, Xueliang, could take over. Giga himself was miraculously able to escape with only minor injuries. At least three other passengers were killed or wounded.¹⁰⁹

Kōmoto hoped that Zhang's demise would lead to a riot of his troops in Mukden, thus supplying the Japanese with an excuse to take over control of Manchuria. Then, a more compliant puppet could be placed on the Mukden throne.¹¹⁰ For this task, Kwantung Army troops had been put on high alert, ready to take immediate action. However, Chief of Staff Saitō, completely oblivious to

¹⁰⁷ *Mukden Consulate Report*, 82, 87-90; Hata, "Chō Sakurin Bakusatsu", 130; Iboshi, "Chō Sakurin" 4:28.

¹⁰⁸ For information about the make-up of the train see Gong Debo (T.P.K'ung), *The Tragic Death of Chang Tso-lin: a Documentary Survey of a Prelude to the Japanese Invasion of Manchuria* (Peiping, 1932), 8.

¹⁰⁹ Sakuma, *Manshū* (NIDS), 4; Hayashi to Tanaka, 4,5.6.1928, *NGB S:1:1:2*, 132-3; Inaba, "Chō Sakurin", 19,21; Takamiya, *Gunkoku*, 46.

¹¹⁰ Morishima, "Chō Sakurin", 43; Kōmoto to Araki Sadao and Matsui Iwane, 27.4.1928, op. cit. in Mitani, *Kindai Nihon*, 111-12. The full original, in handwriting, is kept as part of *Araki Sadao Kankei Monjo* in *Tokyo Daigaku Hōgakubu fuzoku Kindai Nihon Hōsei Shiryōbu* (Tokyo University Law Faculty Modern Japan Materials Reading Room) ; Hata, "Chō Sakurin Bakusatsu", 132; Okada's cross-examination, *IMTFE M2:1865*.

Kōmoto's plan, canceled the high alert immediately after the assassination in order to reduce the risk of a clash with Zhang's army.¹¹¹

Four days later Kōmoto's commander, General Muraoka, attempted to recreate the momentum by approaching the Mukden consul and the Kwantung chief of police. The Japanese, he said, "should abandon their lofty Bushido policy and use the opportunity to solve the *Manmō* problem." This move, however, came too late, and the consul refused to cooperate with a "*rōnin* conspiracy."¹¹² Had Muraoka and Saitō, who shared Kōmoto's goals, coordinated with him, they could have moved swiftly to take advantage of the momentary confusion. But the lack of coordination between them exposed the limitations of Kōmoto's *modus operandi* as a lone wolf. By not incorporating his superiors into the plan, Kōmoto had crippled his own initiative. His optimism and self-confidence were reckless and unjustified. Therefore, the assassination of Zhang Zuolin did not produce any meaningful reaction by the Kwantung Army. That would have to wait three years, for the well planned Manchurian Incident of September 1931.

¹¹¹ Kōmoto's interview in Mori, *Manshū*, 270; "Heben Dazuo Kou gong", 6.4.1954, *HBDZ*, 36-7. According to Ozaki himself (as confided to Tanaka Ryūkichi in 1929), Saitō reprimanded him because there was no necessity "of using the Kwantung Army against such a weak army as that of the Chinese". See: Tanaka Ryūkichi's interrogation, *IMTFE M2:1952,7*.

¹¹² Hayashi to Tanaka, 9.6.1928, *NGB S:1:1:2*, 142. Morishima Morito, then a diplomat at the Mukden Consulate, recalled that the Kwantung Army approached the consulate several times ("Chō Sakurin, Yō Utei no Ansatsu: Nihon Gaikō no Kaisō" (1)", *Sekai* 45, September 30, 1949", 43). However, Muraoka did not broach the subject in his subsequent conversation with Hayashi. See: Hayashi to Tanaka, 13.6.1928, *NGB S:1:1:2*, 143-4. And compare with Sub-consul Morishima Morito's account in Morishima, *Inbō*, 24.

Exposure and Investigation

Shortly after the assassination, Kōmoto's cover-up plan collapsed, and information about the plot began to leak from several quarters.¹¹³ First of all, the beggar who escaped was arrested by the Chinese authorities and disclosed the little he had known about the plot. The owner of the bathhouse in which the beggars washed followed them into the scene, recognized the corpses, understood they were killed by the army and reported this to the Japanese civilian police. The police commissioners, in turn, duly transmitted the information to Tokyo.¹¹⁴

Even worse, that same morning, six opposition Diet members (from the *Minseitō* Party) en route to Changchun, had to disembark their train in Mukden because of the explosion in Huanggutun. One of them, Matsumura Kenzō, hastened to see his old friend, Consul General Hayashi Kyūjirō, and found him confounded and shocked by the news. "This is awful!" the consul said, "the army guys have done it. What a mess!" The ensuing investigation indeed confirmed the initial suspicions. As Matsumura wrote later, such high-quality explosives were used only by the Japanese army, and even the confession letters on the dead bodies – a well-known habit of Japanese assassins – were not written in authentic Chinese but rather in Japanese-style *kanbun*. When Matsumura returned to Tokyo, he reported these findings to the chairman of his party.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ For details on the cover-up attempts of the conspirators after the assassination see Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 65-6.

¹¹⁴ "Special committee meeting 2", 23.10.1928, *NGB S:1:1:2*, 197. Morishima, *Inbō*, 25.

¹¹⁵ Matsumura Kenzō, *Sandai Kaikoroku* (Tokyo: Tokyo Keizai Shinpōsha, 1964), 125-9. Kawagoe believed that mistakes done by Hata when procuring Russian bombs for the Chinese decoys, along

Still, though he knew the truth all too well, Consul Hayashi attempted to whitewash the entire affair. Parroting the official declaration of the Army Ministry, he refrained from accusing the army and insisted that the dead morphine addicts, other Chinese or mysterious *manshū ronin* were the real perpetrators.¹¹⁶ As his conversation with Matsumura reflected, he must have known who was really responsible, but actively concealed it from Prime Minister Tanaka. In fact, the joint Sino-Japanese investigation conducted under Hayashi's auspices was so biased that the Chinese side refused to sign the report.¹¹⁷ Hayashi repeatedly lied to Tanaka, his formal superior, in order not to irritate the people who were really in charge, the officers of the Kwantung Army, of whom he was truly afraid.¹¹⁸ According to Kōmoto, army and police authorities in Manchuria shared Hayashi's sentiment, and believed that as the assassination happened outside of their jurisdiction, inside Chinese territory, there was no real need to open an investigation.¹¹⁹

The false story invented by Hayashi, most probably in cooperation with Kōmoto and other Kwantung Army officers, is highly interesting and instructive not

with the *Minseitō's* selfish wish to grab power from Tanaka, were responsible for the dismal failure of the cover-up attempt. See: Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 79-81.

¹¹⁶ The Army Ministry accused only the addicts. The ministry's release (June 12) is reproduced in Morishima, *Inbō*, 20-1.

¹¹⁷ Hayashi to Tanaka, 4,8,13, 21.6.1928, *NGB S:1:1:2*, 131-2,9,44-6, 61-3; Hayashi Kyūjirō, *Manshū Jihen to Hōten Sōryōji* (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1978), 21.

¹¹⁸ In their conversation, Hayashi said to Matsumura that he was ready to tell him what really happened, but not in the consulate, "as the army guys are watching." He proposed to have their conversation in a hot spring, instead. See: Matsumura, *Sandai*, 125.

¹¹⁹ *Muken Consulate Report*, 62-6; "Heben Dazuo Kou gong", 6.4.1954, *HBDZ*, 34; Ōe, *Chō Sakurin Bakusatsu*, 20-3. The concurrent, equally evasive, investigation report of the Kwantung Army ("Chō Sakurin Ressha Bakuha Jiken ni kansuru Shoken", undated) is reproduced by Inaba, "Chō Sakurin", 60-8.

just for its sensational character. The cover story exposed the implicit basic assumptions shared by Japanese policy makers in Manchuria. According to Hayashi's report, a Chinese man named Ling Yinqing, a former intelligence operative in Zhang Zuolin's army, had decided to get rid of Zhang in collusion with his chief of staff. Their goal was to establish a Manchurian national homeland headed by a former Qing prince. Along with two friends, one Chinese and one Japanese *rōnin*, Ling met with Kōmoto Daisaku to ensure the Kwantung Army's cooperation. Kōmoto agreed, but, mistrustful of Ling, asked that the former prince should lead the plan. Having secured the consent of the Kwantung Army, Ling had employed two Chinese agents to bomb Zhang's train and kill him, but these Chinese, the same morphine addicts found dead on the tracks, were shot by the Japanese guards.¹²⁰ This story is interesting mainly because of the things taken for granted by its fabricators: that Kōmoto colluded in a plan to launch an insurrection in Manchuria without asking anyone's permission. Conspiracy was so habitual among officials in Manchuria that even when they lied to the prime minister they hardly tried to conceal this fact.

Almost simultaneously, Prime Minister Tanaka heard a report from a retired Japanese general, a confidant of the late Zhang Zuolin. The general sniffed around the crime scene, examined the evidence and concluded, beyond doubt, that the perpetrators were Japanese military men.¹²¹ "My work is ruined," Tanaka had reportedly exclaimed, "Damn it! These children don't understand their parent's heart." "If the army takes such measures as that," he told Navy Minister Okada, "we

¹²⁰ Hayashi to Tanaka, 8,18.6.1928, *NGB S*:1:1:2, 140-2, 46-50.

¹²¹ *TGD* 2:1028,30; Ōe, *Chō Sakurin Bakusatsu*, 21-2.

will never be able to develop our plan." The perpetrators, he added, had to be "severely punished to prevent such incidents again on the continent." Military discipline had to be reinforced through a court martial. Besides, that was the only way to restore Japan's international prestige and the army's honor at home and abroad.¹²²

As a first measure, Tanaka angrily turned down the army's request to reinforce the Kwantung Army and deploy it beyond the boundaries of the SMR zone.¹²³ Next, he convened a special, joint committee of inquiry, composed of high-profile representatives from the army, the Foreign Ministry and the Kwantung Government. Concurrently, the commander of the Military Police was dispatched to Mukden to conduct an investigation on the ground. The military police chief, and the committee members, had at their disposal a letter sent by a certain *rōnin*, exposing the illicit connections between Kōmoto, the merchant Itō and the *rōnin* who recruited the Chinese morphine addicts. Subsequently, the entire gang of *rōnin* was interrogated by the Kwantung police. In its findings, the committee implicated Kōmoto in the plot, but declared the merchant Itō and the other *rōnin* as the ringleaders, thereby mitigating the army's guilt. The members of the committee, especially Vice Foreign Minister Mori Kaku, seemed to be interested in hushing up the affair, not in exposing it. Therefore, they decided to stop the investigation right after their second meeting.¹²⁴ The Military Police chief, who discovered the whole

¹²² *TGD* 2:1030; Hata, "Chō Sakurin Bakusatsu", 133; Okada's affidavit, *IMTFE* M2:1828.

¹²³ "Manshū Chian Iji no tame Kantōgun Shirekan ni ataeru Ninmu nado ni Kansuru Kakugi" (cabinet discussion, 7.6.1928), *NGB S*:1:1:2, 135-7.

¹²⁴ "Chō Sakurin Bakusatsu Jiken Chōsa Tokubetsu linkai Daichi Kaigi Shinji Jiroku" (hereafter cited as "special committee conference:1"), 22.9.1928, *NGB S*:1:1:2, 192-3. The committee members were:

truth by interrogating one of the engineers, allegedly released a more candid report, exposing Kōmoto as the chief culprit of the plot.¹²⁵

Tanaka was furious. Prince Saionji, the only surviving *Genrō* and his erstwhile rival during the Taishō political crisis, now implored him to punish the perpetrators severely so as to uproot military disobedience once and for all. As a former soldier and leader of the all-powerful *Seiyūkai*, he said, Tanaka was equipped more than anyone else to discipline the army.¹²⁶ The prime minister agreed. On December 24, in accordance with Saionji's advice, he reported to the new emperor, Hirohito, that the assassination of Zhang Zuolin was planned by Imperial Army officers. A private assassination plot by Japanese officers against a foreign leader could not be left unpunished, Tanaka retorted. Therefore, the prime minister proposed to punish Kōmoto through a court martial, thus demonstrating Japan's sincere regret to the Chinese side. In response, Hirohito ordered his premier to investigate and punish the perpetrators.¹²⁷ After retiring from the imperial presence, Tanaka summoned his

Foreign Ministry: Vice Minister Mori, Head of the Asia Section Arita, Secretary Okazaki. Army: Sugiyama, Military Affairs Bureau Chief at the Army Ministry. Kwantung Government: Secretary Ōba (ibid., p.192) .

¹²⁵ Military Police Chief Mine's report is probably irretrievably lost, but General Tanaka Ryūkichi, a *Tokumu Kikan* officer who was well acquainted with it, testified about its contents at the Tokyo Trials, see *IMFTE* M2:1951-60. For further information on the lost report see Iboshi, "Chō Sakurin" 1:4. This engineering officer, Lieutenant Kirihara, probably spoke about the event in a bar in Seoul, and the rumors reached Mine's ears. See: Hata, "Chō Sakurin Bakusatsu", 138.

¹²⁶ Harada, Kumao, *Saionji-kō to Seikyoku* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1950-6), 1:3-4.

¹²⁷ Had Kōmoto been faced with an effective court martial, he might have suffered the death penalty under the criminal code of the army (Ōe, *Chō Sakurin*, 123). One of the most important sources for the events that followed is Hirohito's famous "monologue", given in 1946 to one of his courtiers, as well as the diaries and memoirs of various high court officials. See: Terasaki Hidenari, *Shōwa Tennō Dokuhakuroku: Terasaki Hidenari Goyōgakari Nikki* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 1991), 22-3 (hereafter cited as *STD*); Nara Takeji, *Jijū Bukanchō Nara Takeji Nikki Kaisōroku* (Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 2000), vol. 4; Harada, *Saionji* 1:4.

army and navy ministers, ordered an investigation and “strong disciplinary measures in respect to the army.”¹²⁸

Resistance on the part of military vested interests was quick to emerge. Immediately after Tanaka’s first interview with the emperor, Army Minister Shirakawa expressed strong opposition to opening proceedings. Though he was Tanaka’s protégée and childhood friend, he refused to cooperate with the premier because “to take steps to punish those responsible to this event would be to expose to the public something which the army wished at the time to conceal.” Shirakawa did promise the emperor he would investigate, but he effectively took measures to whitewash the affair.¹²⁹ This attitude was shared by other key officers, including Suzuki Sōroku, Chief of the General Staff, General Mutō Nobuyoshi, Inspector General of Military Education, and Uehara Yūsaku, the only field marshal who was still active. General Araki and Kōmoto’s friends from the *Futabakai* study group also vigorously resisted any attempt to launch a real investigation, and even rivals of Kōmoto joined the common effort.¹³⁰ The spirit of the Kwantung Army penetrated the entire military establishment – the army minister himself was a former

¹²⁸ Okada Keisuke’s affidavit, *IMFTE* M2:1819-20, 29. For similar remarks by Tanaka in a conversation with his railway minister, Ogawa Heikichi, see: “Manshū Mondai”, *OHKM* 1:628, and in an Imperial audience in March quoted in the diary of Count Makino Nobuaki, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal: *Makino Nobuaki Nikki*, eds. Itō Takashi, Hirose Yoshihiro, (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1990), 350-1 (hereafter cited as *MNN*); Ōe, *Chō Sakurin*, 28,30.

¹²⁹ Okada’s affidavit, *IMTFE* M2:1820; Nara, *Kaisōroku* 4:151; *UKN* 2:704; Harada, *Saionji* 1:5,8; Drea, *Imperial Army*, 163.

¹³⁰ Ogawa, “Manshū Mondai”, *OHKM* 1:630; Though Kōmoto complained later that only Araki understood him, he still had many overt and covert supporters in the army. See: Kōmoto’s interview in Mori, *Manshū*, 271-2; Ōe, *Chō Sakurin*, 31-4, 45-8, 113-14. General Abe Nobuyuki had also participated in the cover-up attempts, though he was an old rival of Kōmoto. About the strained relationship between Abe and Kōmoto see: Hirano, *Inbōsha*, 65.

commander of this force. As the commanders themselves had a vested interest in maintaining the chaotic system which ensured their independence, they resisted any measure bound to instill order and discipline into the ranks.

In 1913, during the Taishō political crisis, the *Seiyūkai* Party had served Prime Minister Yamamoto as a counter-weight to the army. Now, Tanaka found that his own party, too, was on the army's side.¹³¹ Vice Foreign Minister Mori Kaku and Railway Minister Ogawa Heikichi, the real power holders in the *Seiyūkai*, sympathized with Kōmoto. Minister Ogawa, who was tied to the *Manshu rōnin*, recognized that Kōmoto's action was dangerous and contradictory to government policy, yet he could not help but admire his patriotism and bravery. In eastern philosophy, he mused, parents have to protect their children even from the law, and Japanese people have to cover up for each other. In addition, Ogawa was afraid that a military court, open for all to see, might harm Japan's foreign relations and give the Chinese a legitimate reason to demand the expulsion of Japanese troops. It could also provide the opposition with a pretext to demand the resignation of the cabinet. Even worse, such a move might provoke "officers and *shishi*" to denounce the leaders of the government as traitors and embark on a campaign of assassinations. This, Ogawa reasoned, was an excessive sacrifice to make for the cause of restoring military discipline. As a result, Ogawa and Mori effectively blocked all measures of punishment.¹³² And if that was not bad enough, the *Minseitō* politicians gleefully

¹³¹ TGD 2:1036.

¹³² STD, 22; Kawai Yahachi, *Shōwa shoki no Tennō to Kyūchū: Jijū Jichō Kawai Yahachi Nikki* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993-4), 3:99 (hereafter cited as *Kawai Yahachi Nikki*). Ogawa was well informed over the affair through his own sources. See his own account: "Manshū Mondai Hiroku-hi", *OHKM*

attacked Tanaka from the opposition side, taking delight in embarrassing him with questions during several parliamentary hearings on the affair.¹³³

In the face of such resistance, Tanaka's attempts to form his own bloc of supporters were inadequate. As General Ugaki rightly concluded, the prime minister was too confident of his own influence and power.¹³⁴ True, he was able to win the support of his navy minister, Admiral Okada, the venerable elder statesman Prince Saionji as well as Prince Itō Miyoji, president of the Privy Council, but that could not match the resistance in the Army and the *Seiyūkai*.¹³⁵

General Ugaki, Tanaka's longtime partner and ally since the days of the Taishō political crisis, also refused to lend him any support. Ugaki believed that the assassins were dangerous fools, yet he was not ready to punish them. As his diary suggests, he was reluctant to compromise the army's position in the internal power struggle, maybe because he expected to win the army's support in his future political career. Furthermore, Tanaka was guilty of making a mess of things, and it was a "dirty trick" to shift the blame to the army. It might be better, Ugaki surmised, to overhaul the entire leadership including Tanaka, that "Buddhist icon" sitting idly in

1:626-9 (the account is undated, but according to Ogawa's own side note on p.627, it must have been written before 1931).

¹³³ *TGD* 2:1031. For details and partial translation of the parliamentary hearings in both Houses see Morton, *Tanaka Cabinet*, 153-4; Kung, *Tragic Death*, 20-33.

¹³⁴ *UKN* 2:724.

¹³⁵ *TGD* 2:1036; Harada, *Saionji*, 3; Okada's affidavit, *IMTFE* M2:1820. In a difficult conversation with Ogawa, Saionji decried the poor discipline of the army and the deterioration in state authority. He strongly supported a court martial. See: Ogawa, "Manshū Mondai", *OHKM* 1:629. Prince Itō's influence was neutralized by pro-army elements at the Privy Council. See: Ōe, *Chō Sakurin*, 103. Admiral Okada supported harsh punishment, but without disclosing the event to the public. See: Hata, "Chō Sakurin Bakusatsu", 140.

the government headquarters in Tokyo. Based on such assumptions, Ugaki did not lift a finger to support his erstwhile patron.¹³⁶

And if that was not bad enough, Tanaka had made a crucial mistake which was about to undermine his entire enterprise: he had ordered the home minister to suppress news about the assassination in the press. The event, widely discussed in China and the West, was referred to in Japan only as “a certain grave incident in Manchuria” (*Manshū Bōjūtai Jiken*). The press did cover the investigation in implicit language, but the reports were naturally weak and diluted. The prime minister could not punish officers except through the army minister, and without creating some momentum through public pressure it was extremely difficult to force the latter’s hand.¹³⁷ In addition, there are some indications that hostility to the army was still alive among many *Seiyūkai* activists.¹³⁸ Had the affair been published, Tanaka could have bypassed Mori and Ogawa in an attempt to garner support inside the larger circles of his party. Therefore, by keeping the affair secret the prime minister prevented a major crisis with the army, but he was also isolating himself from sources of potential support.

Tragically, the shifts in configuration of the power in the 1920s left Tanaka, formerly a strong hub, without any power. Faced with strong resistance from the army, the cabinet and his own *Seiyūkai* Party, he found himself completely

¹³⁶ UKN 1:689, 704, 12, 24; Ōe, *Chō Sakurin*, 53-6.

¹³⁷ Tanaka's instructions to the Special Committee of Inquiry, 22.9.1928, *NGB S:1:1:2*, 195. Okada’s cross-examination, *IMTFE M2:1862-3*; Harada, *Saionji* 1:7.

¹³⁸ UKN 2:724.

isolated.¹³⁹ His Chōshū Clique, once an all-powerful military network, was now an empty shell, no more than a bogeyman for young officers to rally against. At the very best, it was a system of crony appointments to army posts, and nothing more. As Tanaka moved to the *Seiyūkai* Party, he had lost much of his military influence. But even inside the party, he was not the hub of the real network of power – Mori and Ogawa were.¹⁴⁰ Bereft of any real network, Tanaka found himself exposed to pressure from all quarters.

In spring 1929, influenced by Mori, Ogawa and Shirakawa, the cabinet decided to hush up the Zhang Zuolin affair. Most of the ministers believed that exposure would sully the dignity of the emperor, who was the commander-in-chief of the army.¹⁴¹ The generals, in turn, began to insist that there was “no evidence” for Japanese involvement in the assassination. With such reluctance, was it possible to convict Kōmoto even had a court martial been held? Tanaka, reluctant to make the affair public, felt he had no choice but to comply.¹⁴² As Emperor Hirohito’s frequent inquiries about the investigation were left unanswered, the monarch made it clear that he was not going to let Tanaka off the hook.¹⁴³ On June 27, the prime minister came to report, and admitted that the affair would have to be settled as an administrative manner without resort to a court martial. Emperor Hirohito, in

¹³⁹ Harada, *Saionji* 1:10.

¹⁴⁰ Ōe, *Chō Sakurin*, 115.

¹⁴¹ Harada, *Saionji* 1:4-5.

¹⁴² Ogawa, "Manshū Mondai", *OHKM* 1:629-30.

¹⁴³ Nara, *Kaisōroku* 4:151; *Kawai Yahachi Nikki* 3:37; *MNN*, 333, 6-7, 43; Harada, *Saionji* 1:8,10.

response, blew up in rage. "I spoke to Tanaka in a harsh tone," he recalled later, "saying: 'is it not different than what you have told me before? How about submitting your resignation?'" Tanaka left the audience in tears.¹⁴⁴

One day later, Army minister Shirakawa arrived. He disclosed to the emperor that Kōmoto and Muraoka were guilty, but said it would be inadvisable to open a court martial, as it would undermine the army's honor and Japan's international prestige. Kōmoto might "expose everything" during the proceedings, putting the country in an unfavorable light. Instead, the army would deal with the guilty parties through administrative measures. Hirohito received this presentation with icy silence, but, at the end, he gave Shirakawa permission to discipline Kōmoto and his friends without recourse to a court martial. In an interview with one of Shirakawa's bureau chiefs, he warned the army never to do such a thing again. But without punishment, the warning was hardly effective.¹⁴⁵

Isolated, deserted and bereft of all power, General Tanaka Giichi, the former powerful leader of the Chōshū Clique, resigned. He passed away due to illness, aggravated by depression, three months later, in late September 1929. Kōmoto Daisaku, the chief initiator of the entire affair, was never officially tried. He was, however, strongly encouraged to resign his commission and leave the Imperial Army. His commanders Muraoka and Saitō were quietly retired as well.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ *STD*, 22; Harada, *Saionji* 1:11.

¹⁴⁵ *STD*, 23; Nara, *Kaisōroku* 4:152; *Kawai Yahachi Nikki* 3:111; *MNN*, 376-8; *Okabe Nagakage Nikki – Shōwa Shoki Kazoku Kanryō no Kiroku*, ed. Shōyū Kurabu, (Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 1993), 141-2; *TGD* 2:1043.

¹⁴⁶ Ogawa, "Manshū Mondai", *OHKM* 1:632; *MNN*, 379.

Emperor Hirohito's intervention in the Zhang Zuolin affair remains a matter of sharp controversy. Some of Hirohito's defenders, such as Stephen Large, see it as yet another failed attempt of the liberal, moderate monarch to restrain the army.¹⁴⁷ Peter Wetzler make the more sophisticated argument that Hirohito and his advisors were perturbed by the inconsistency in Tanaka's reports to the throne and by the perils to the image of the imperial house.¹⁴⁸ Herbert Bix, always keen to nail Hirohito to the wall, contend that the emperor was actually supportive of the Kwantung Army and therefore got rid of Tanaka, the only man who sincerely tried to uproot military disobedience.¹⁴⁹

None of these interpretations is sufficient. Large does not really explain the reasons for Hirohito's behavior, while the description offered by Bix is incongruent with the evidence.¹⁵⁰ Wetzler presents a subtler description of Hirohito's complex motives, and his emphasis on the latter's anxiety about the prestige of the Imperial House is certainly well-merited. It is also true that Hirohito and his advisors were afraid of the "inflation" of imperial power – excessive involvement of the throne in

¹⁴⁷ Stephen S. Large, *Emperor Hirohito and Shōwa Japan: a Political Biography* (London/N.Y.: Routledge, 1992), 34-40.

¹⁴⁸ Peter Wetzler, *Hirohito and War: Imperial Tradition and Military Decision Making in Prewar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 164. Wetzler's interpretation is supported by Makino's diary, see *MNN*, 377-8.

¹⁴⁹ Bix, *Hirohito*, 217-18.

¹⁵⁰ Bix's argument is not supported by any source, and is in fact often contradicted by the evidence. See for example Makino's diary entry for 19.1.1929 (*MNN*, 333), where the lord keeper of the privy seal writes explicitly that, in the eyes of the imperial court, the investigation ordered by the emperor was meant to lead to formal and official court martial. When writing about Hirohito's alleged "acceptance" of the army's position after Shirakawa's audience on March 27, Bix refers to p.350 in Makino's diary (*MNN*), but the source does not lend support to his argument, and neither does the corresponding entry in Okabe's diary (*Okaba Nagakage Nikki*, 74) or Suzuki's testimony (*TGD* 2:1041). Such problems are unfortunately prevalent throughout Bix's book. See: Matsumoto Ken'ichi, Shōji Junichirō, "Critiquing Herbert Bix's 'Hirohito'", *Japan Echo* 29:6 (December, 2002), 65-8.

politics which could expose it to the danger of deprecation, censure and finally even elimination.¹⁵¹ This argument, undeniably true, explains why the emperor's involvement had to be limited in scope and nature. It still does not explain, however, why the emperor chose to intervene as he did, by censuring Prime Minister Tanaka and contributing to his downfall.

The real answer may be related to the channels of information, command and control available to the emperor, a recurring theme in our discussion throughout the previous chapters. The emperor, even when ready to risk "inflation" by interfering in politics, had a limited array of tools at his disposal. He could express his wish to other leaders through his palace advisors, and he could summon the premier or the service ministers to the palace. He could demand explanations from them or, though this was unusual, reprimand them in a way that left them no option short of resignation. What Hirohito could not have done, however, was to act independently and to assume the role of the prime minister or the army minister when they failed to act according to his will.

Perhaps, as Ōe Shinobu suggests, Hirohito could have called the chief of the General Staff, who had direct authority over the Kwantung Army, and personally order him to summon a court martial.¹⁵² But historical protagonists are not always as wise and free of real world constraints as historians, and such an option was hardly raised by anyone at the time. Even though he was a more vigorous emperor than his father, Hirohito reacted rather than initiated. The emperor did not summon Tanaka,

¹⁵¹ *Okaba Nagakage Nikki*, 141.

¹⁵² Ōe, *Chō Sakurin*, 153,9,61,5.

for example, on his own initiative. Tanaka came, reported, and only then received an imperial order. Under such conditions, it was difficult to imagine Hirohito summoning the chief of the General Staff and telling him what he should do. And even had he done so, it was impossible for him to follow and monitor effectively the execution of his order. And naturally, it was very easy for the military bureaucracy to sabotage procedures or, at the worst case, to acquit Kōmoto, as had been the case with the murderers of Queen Min thirty years earlier.

The only way Hirohito could have expressed his displeasure was by an angry reaction, “punishing” the individual who seemed to him most responsible for the debacle. And that, of course, would do little to resolve the issue or to curb the Kwantung Army’s insubordination. Even that interference seemed excessive to Hirohito’s advisors, whose prime interest was to protect the throne, and they ensured that such a move would not repeat itself, at least not in the following years.¹⁵³ Hirohito, in other words, had only one bullet in his gun and he aimed it at Tanaka, the most available target and tragically, also the wrong one.¹⁵⁴ Following this fiasco, which the emperor later ascribed to an excess of youthful vigor, he decided to refrain from vetoing government decisions again and to communicate with the prime minister mainly through his courtiers.¹⁵⁵ As the army chiefs could still access the emperor directly through their *tōsui-ken* privileges, this decision significantly

¹⁵³ Wetzler, *Hirohito*, 156-6.

¹⁵⁴ As Ōe Shinobu writes, Hirohito had “pushed the wrong button” (*Chō Sakurin*, 161).

¹⁵⁵ *STD*, 23; Ogawa, “Manshū Mondai”, *OHKM* 1:632; Wetzler, *Hirohito*, 165-6.

empowered the generals at the expense of the politicians. The army had therefore emerged victorious out of the Zhang Zuolin affair.

Conclusion: the Hole and the Mouse

The year 1928 was an important historical watershed in the development of Japanese military disobedience. In that year, a senior army leader, General Araki Sadao, called on the army to defy the government during a military crisis. A few months later, Kōmoto Daisaku and his co-conspirators assassinated Zhang Zuolin, a foreign head of state – an extreme form of defiance not practiced since the assassination of Queen Min. The Zhang Zuolin affair was a marker of a new era of chaos, mayhem and political violence. Two years later, in 1930, senior officers denounced the prime minister as “criminal” because he violated *tōsui-ken* by opting for naval disarmament, indirectly leading to his assassination by a civilian nationalist. In 1931, young officers intensified this wave of political violence with a plan to wipe out the entire cabinet, the opening act for five turbulent years of assassinations and coups unprecedented since the 1870s.

It would be much too easy to summarize the Zhang Zuolin affair by throwing all the blame on Kōmoto himself. But as the Talmudic proverb goes, “The true thief is the hole, not the mouse.” Ill-results do not occur only because there is an individual who wants to perform mischief. Rather, the organizational loopholes and the systemic weaknesses allowing such an individual to operate should be the main focus of examination. Indeed, the assassination of Zhang Zuolin and its historical ramifications could not be understood apart from four ideological, political and organizational conditions which allowed such an incident to occur.

The “hole” was first and foremost framed by the powerful re-emergence of *tōsui-ken* ideology on the Japanese military scene. In 1928, fifteen years after the army’s defeat at the Taishō political crisis, this ideology returned with a vengeance, the aggregate result of military developments unfolding since the undoing of *bukansei* in 1913. During the period of Taisho Democracy (1913-1926), civilian cabinets were able to exercise increasing control over the soldiers through the Army Ministry. Though the army was able to shift some authority from the Ministry to the General Staff, this system of control remained extent until the mid-1920s. But the unpopular reduction of the army under Minister Ugaki, combined with the influence of Araki's demagoguery and the oppositional study groups, eroded the power of the Army Ministry. As a result, civilian control became increasingly frailer in the years leading to 1928, and *tōsui-ken* became equivalent in army circles to total independence from the cabinet.¹⁵⁶

Tanaka himself, though a victim of these tendencies, had a grave responsibility for kindling the fire. Apart from his propagation of *tōsui-ken* throughout his military career, his emphasis on “active policy” naturally empowered the army at the expense of the civilian arms of the government. As the British ambassador in Tokyo noted on the day of Zhang’s assassination, without being aware of it as yet, “it was no doubt natural that once General Tanaka decided on active measures to protect Japanese interests, the center of control should pass from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the General Staff or the War Office [Army

¹⁵⁶ Mori, *Nihon Rikugun*, 72-4. Mori Yasuo argues that the scale tipped in favor of the General Staff and the local army units, to the detriment of the Army Ministry, only after the Manchurian Incident (pp.116-17). However, the evidence in this chapter (and the next one) points otherwise. The process of deterioration was strongly evident already during the Zhang Zuolin affair.

Ministry].”¹⁵⁷ If strong measures were to be taken, it was all but natural that the army should stand at the focal point of policy. That, in turn, empowered Imperial Army elements and increased their boldness to act independently. Officers like Araki, utilizing this situation to their advantage, reinterpreted *tōsui-ken* in a radical way, preaching the virtual independence of the army from any kind of civilian supervision.

In addition to these developments, disobedience was further encouraged by Japanese military doctrine and especially its local variation in Manchuria. The military strategy of the empire was based on short, decisive wars fought in enemy territory. When one wants to move quickly and seize opportunities, it is inadvisable to depend on cumbersome military bureaucracy for each and every decision. The constant need for up-to-date intelligence engendered a tradition of covert intelligence operations empowering low-level agents to take independent decisions in the field.¹⁵⁸

In Manchuria, observers often called such behavior *dokudan senkō*, roughly translated as “arbitrary decision making.” It was in fact similar to the phenomenon of “escape to the front,” discussed in earlier chapters. According to Suzuki Teiichi’s memoirs, many officers agreed that “when an action is beneficial, you must go ahead without asking the opinion of your superiors.”¹⁵⁹ Kawagoe told Kōmoto that

¹⁵⁷ Dormer to Chamberlain, 4.6.1928, *CMJP-NAA*, 174.

¹⁵⁸ For background see James E. Weland, *The Japanese Army in Manchuria: Covert Operations and the Roots of the Kwantung’s Army Insubordination* (PhD thesis, unpublished: University of Arizona, 1977), 23-7, 60-3, 81; Officers from the Kwantung Army staff explained this tactical doctrine to the Lytton Commission, 26,27.4.1932, *LNA-UNOG*, S31 No.1 31-2 R Manchuria, pp.8-9 (first interview), pp.4-6 (second interview).

¹⁵⁹ *STDS* 1:299.

he was ready to be discharged from army for disobedience, if by that he would be able to follow national policy, solve the *Manmō* problem and implement the true will of the emperor.¹⁶⁰ In a time of pressing need, wrote General Ugaki in his diary, an obedient soldier would sacrifice everything, while the practitioners of *dokudan senkō* would ignore everything, even authority, in doing what is right. “That is the highest freedom,” wrote Ugaki, “the basis for the soldier’s spiritual life.” And in any case, a soldier must never hesitate. Whether he obeys or disobeys, that has to be decided in an instant, according to the requirements of the moment.¹⁶¹

The *tōsui-ken* ideology, allowing the military to take strategic decisions independently of the government, combined with the idea of *dokudan senkō* as understood in Manchuria, formed the ideological context for Kōmoto’s assassination plot in 1928. *Tōsui-ken* had been designed to allow the leaders of the army, not every officer, to participate in the making of national strategy. *Dokudan senkō* allowed junior officers, most of all in Manchuria, to take independent tactical decisions in the field. The combination of both gave junior officers like Kōmoto legitimation to take **strategic** decisions, including the assassination of a head of state in complete defiance of government policy. While *tōsui-ken* increased the power of the army as an institution, *dokudan senkō* eroded its internal hierarchy. In other words, it was again that disastrous combination of consolidation and dispersion,

¹⁶⁰ Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 39-40. According to Kawagoe's memoirs, this conversation took place on June 2.

¹⁶¹ *UKN* 1:667.

outer formidability and internal chaos, which made the Japanese Army prone to disobedience.

A third precondition for Kōmoto's plot was the involution of Japanese military elements into the Manchurian underworld. Nakano Yōhei and Itō Kenjirō, two of Kōmoto's accomplices in the plot, operated through an intricate network of *rōnin*, pimps and other Chinese and Japanese criminal elements, all of them associated with the Army through the *Tokumu Kikan*. The close cooperation between military, nationalist-civilian and criminal elements was present already at the assassination of Queen Min in 1895, and it did not end with Itō's involvement in the murder of Zhang Zuolin. In fact, the involution of army elements into the nationalist-civilian-criminal sphere, already explained in chapter six, would intensify in the 1930s, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Finally, the "hole" was also a product of the organizational chaos in the Kwantung Army, a force in which official hierarchies were rarely respected. All three commanders of this army, Muraoka, Saitō and Kōmoto, behaved as if conspiracy, disobedience and operation through private networks were their normal *modus operandi*. Muraoka disclosed his own plan to kill Zhang to Takeshita, a *Tokumu Kikan* operative, and not to Saitō and Kōmoto, his direct subordinates in the military hierarchy. On June 3, Chief of Staff Saitō assumed that some people in the Kwantung Army were plotting Zhang's death, but was not disturbed in the least that such a conspiracy was hatched without him being informed.¹⁶² One of Kawagoe's roles was

¹⁶² Saitō's diary, 3.6.1928, reproduced in Inaba, "Chō Sakurin", 18. The next line in the diary, however, proves that Saitō was not privy to the plot, as he wondered what should be done after Zhang's return. In addition, his diary entry from June 5 shows his lack of acquaintance with the plot (ibid., 25).

to watch over Muraoka's room, to make sure he was not listening to Kōmoto's conversations.¹⁶³ General Hata Shinji, the *Tokumu Kikan* commander in Mukden, strongly reprimanded the local police for reporting rumors about the affair to the Tokyo government as such reports could "increase the doubts inside the army."¹⁶⁴

That conspiratorial atmosphere was enhanced by the peculiar organizational structure of the Kwantung Army. Usually, the commanders of Japanese military units, as in other modern armies, were assisted by a chief of staff. The chief of staff had a certain number of subordinates, each responsible for a particular field, such as operations, intelligence or logistics. The authority of each staff officer was limited, allowing the chief of staff and the commander to assume responsibility for the entire width and breadth of military activity. In the Kwantung Army, by contrast, apart from the posts of commander and chief of staff, there was a peculiar role of "senior staff officer" (*Kōkyū Sanbō*), held in 1928 by Kōmoto. As senior staff officer, Kōmoto was subordinate to Chief of Staff Saitō, but in fact, he had day-to-day responsibility over all segments of staff work.

Such a reality is dangerous in any organization. As the British management theoretician Northcote Parkinson noted, if a superior has only one subordinate down the hierarchy, then this subordinate, who is doing everything that the superior does, is effectively a competitor.¹⁶⁵ In the Kwantung Army, Kōmoto functioned as an

¹⁶³ Kawagoe, *Chō Sakurin* (NIDS), 45-6.

¹⁶⁴ Morishima, *Inbō*, 25.

¹⁶⁵ Northcote Parkinson, *Parkinson's Law and other Studies in Administration* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 5.

informal chief of staff. But because he was not officially recognized as such, he was operating beneath the radar of the higher echelons. Saitō and Muraoka were constantly pressured and watched by the General Staff, but Kōmoto was not, and thus had ample room to hatch conspiracies and plots.¹⁶⁶ After the assassination, the authorities sharply reduced the powers of the Kwantung Army's staff, precisely in order to prevent the events of June 1928 from reoccurring. But as Kōmoto's old position remained, two powerful personalities, Ishiwara Kanji and Itagaki Seishirō, would soon revive it, making the conspiracy of the "Manchurian Incident" possible.¹⁶⁷ As long as the function of senior staff officer remained intact, it was all but expected that someone would fill it with content. Wherever holes exist, mice will always find a way to creep in.

But apart from "the hole" – the ideological and organizational context –, the "mouse" that occupied the post of senior staff officer in 1928, Kōmoto Daisaku, was the worst man in the worst place. Just like Miura Gorō, the officer who assassinated Queen Min more than thirty years earlier, Kōmoto was a contrarian at heart, an officer who despised his commanders as members of tyrannical cliques. On the one hand, as early as 1923, he was in very bad standing with his superiors in Tokyo, and felt rejected and excluded. Because of his estrangement from the "higher echelons" he was not in a position to influence national policy through normal means. Nor, as he bitterly complained, could China experts such as himself expect real avenues of

¹⁶⁶ The daily dispatches, telegrams and letters of the General Staff were burdening Muraoka and Saitō, not Kōmoto. See Inaba, "Chō Sakurin", 9-16.

¹⁶⁷ Mark Peattie, *Ishiwara Kanji and Japan's Confrontation with the West* (Princeton, N.J. Princeton University Press, 1995), 93-4.

promotion in the military.¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, Kōmoto could use his horizontal contacts throughout the army and beyond to plan illicit operations. Manchuria, like Korea before, was a place where the currency of optimism had still high value, where *rōnin* and rogue officers could, in the words of Zhang Zuolin's advisor Machino Takema, "do heroic things impossible in Japan."¹⁶⁹ The assassination of Zhang Zuolin, in that sense, was Kōmoto's way of leaving his mark and doing "great things" in the only way his position allowed him – through a conspiracy.

The failure of Japan's imperial government to punish Kōmoto and his confederates set an ominous precedent for the future. As Ōe Shinobu writes, many officers were now led to believe that they no longer needed to wait for imperial orders. Just like Kōmoto, they could defy both military and civilian authorities unless the emperor ordered otherwise.¹⁷⁰ And if assassination plots against foreign leaders remained unpunished, why not use similar violence against Japanese leaders, too, in the name of the emperor and under the same patriotic pretexts? The Japanese government would soon discover, to its horror, that military disobedience could not be stopped and brushed aside by giving way. The politicians, said Colonel Suzuki Teiichi in retrospect, did not understand the army's way of thinking. When the civilian government is strong, it can force the soldiers to retreat from occupied territories for the sake of foreign policy. When the politicians are weak, the soldiers

¹⁶⁸ Kōmoto to Isogai, 18.4.1928, in Kobayashi, *Isogai*, 47. See also Kitaoka, "China Experts", in Duus, *Informal Empire*, 339-42, 66-7.

¹⁶⁹ Machino, "Chō Sakurin", 76.

¹⁷⁰ Ōe, *Chō Sakurin*, 184.

follow their military inclinations and expand without limit.¹⁷¹ In 1928, the politicians and the emperor were not there to stop the soldiers. They, along with the Japanese Empire, would soon be forced to pay the price.

¹⁷¹ *STDS* 1:292.

Chapter Nine

Cherry Blossom

From Defiance to Rebellion, 1931

Defiance of the superior by the subordinate: a deplorable tendency in the fighting services, which proved to be the curse on this country, inviting the misery of today.

Marquis Kido Kōichi, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, at the Tokyo Trials¹

In February 1961, the Japanese journalist Nakano Masao stumbled upon a surprising discovery. Tracing for months the faded footprints of army rebels, he discovered a safe house formerly used by the *Sakura-kai* (the Cherry Blossom Society), a clandestine organization whose activities precipitated a wave of military violence in the early 1930s. Inside this safe house, the abode of a female dentist and sympathizer of the group, Nakano was able to unearth a carbon copy of a document universally considered to be destroyed: a secret memoir drafted by Colonel Hashimoto Kingorō, one of the cruelest and boldest military rebels in the history of modern Japan. The colonel, sentenced to life as a war criminal by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, wrote a lengthy, unapologetic account of his group's activity and made four additional copies for his former confederates in the

¹ *IMTFE R23:30,723.*

Sakura-kai's inner circle, maintaining one for himself. All copies, except an extra manuscript secretly copied and kept by this sympathizing dentist, were burned and destroyed during the last phases of the war, or immediately thereafter. Their owners, with one important exception, perished as well.² Through Hashimoto's unearthed account, historians were able to reconstruct, almost for the first time, the inner workings of the group whose plotting marked a dramatic, violent change in the history of Japanese military disobedience.

The uniqueness of the *Sakura-kai* was evident in several respects. First of all, it was, perhaps, the first cross-army conspiratorial group, transcending the usual clique rivalries. Unlike previous oppositional organizations, it was not based on feudal ties such as the Chōshū Clique, nor was it set to fight such feudal organizations. Its concerns were all related to problems facing Japan in the 1930s. In addition, it was the first military group of its kind working in equal partnership with nationalist civilian organizations. And finally, its tactics were unprecedentedly violent, especially towards the end of its short existence when it planned to wipe out the entire Japanese cabinet by means of an aerial bombardment.

Such extreme violence against *Japanese* leaders had been truly unheard of for more than half a century. Since the repression of the Satsuma Rebellion in 1878, violent military insurrections had all but disappeared from the Japanese scene. Up

² Nakano Masao comments in Hashimoto Kingorō, *Hashimoto Taisa no Shuki*, ed. Nakano Masao, (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 1963), 8-10 (hereafter cited as *Hashimoto Shuki*). According to Hashimoto's biographer, Tatamiya Eitarō, the dentist, Uchida Masako (Kinu), intended to uphold the secrecy of the manuscript, and was cheated by Nakano who "borrowed" and then published it against her will. She never forgave him. For the story see: Tatamiya, *Hashimoto Kingorō Ichidai* (Tokyo: Fuyō Shobō, 1982), 36.

until 1931, military disobedience had largely taken the form of defiance: assassinations of foreign leaders and other unauthorized military operations of strategic importance. The Japanese government was challenged and embarrassed by such acts, but had not been physically threatened. Though they were few and far between, Japan had experienced some political assassinations. These, however, were the acts of civilian nationalists, not of soldiers. The army had once used its power to overthrow a cabinet, in the Taishō Political Crisis of 1912, but that was a bloodless, non-violent coup. The *Sakura-kai*, established in October 1930, was an organization that, for the first time since 1878, pointed the sword of military violence toward the Japanese government itself. Its activity threw the army into a whirlwind and pushed the government and the different military factions to a violent struggle of all against all.

National Reconstruction: The Rebels Turn to Japan

Scholars of modern Japanese history commonly see the 1930s as a period of rapid deterioration of political order. The military and its ideological allies are often portrayed as constantly marching forward, collaborating with civilian cabinets or pushing them aside in a quest for unbridled national power.³ In autumn 1930,

³ Yale C. Maxon, *Control of Japanese Foreign Policy: A Study of Civil Military Rivalry, 1930-1945* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 72-107; Andrew D. Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 261-9; Elise K. Tipton, *Modern Japan: Social and Political History* (London: Routledge 2008), 123-52; Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*, 282-3. For discussion of this trend in Japanese historiography see: William M. Tsutsui, "The Domestic Impact of War and Occupation on Japan" in Loyd E. Lee, ed., *World War Two in Asia and the Pacific and the War's Aftermath, with General Themes: a Handbook of Literature and Research* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 138-9.

however, mid-ranking officers of the Imperial Japanese Army, colonels, lieutenant-colonels and majors close to the centers of power but not yet in formal positions of leadership, did not see themselves as being in the midst of a triumphant march. As far as they were concerned, their experiences did not constitute an "introduction" to eventual military takeover, but rather were a series of frustrating setbacks, defeats and dashed hopes. The assassination of Zhang Zuolin in 1928 failed to produce any tangible results. In Manchuria, the Kwantung Army was still held in check by senior generals, diplomats and civilian politicians. The anti-Japanese movement in China continued unabated while the Japanese Empire's foreign policy, still managed by relative moderates such as Foreign Minister Shidehara Kijūrō and Prime Minister Hamaguchi Osachi, was ever-cautious not to provoke Britain, the United States or other foreign powers. To add insult to injury, the cabinet refused to increase the budget of the army, cutting officers' salaries and slowing down the military modernization process.⁴

The London Naval Disarmament Treaty was yet another painful blow. The Navy had seen the agreement as a blatant violation of *tōsui-ken* on the part of the prime minister, as only the admirals were authorized to advise the emperor on matters pertaining to naval security.⁵ And yet, the government had its way and the treaty was signed. In November 1930 Prime Minister Hamaguchi, denounced by the Navy as a "*tōsui-ken* criminal" (*tōsui-ken kanpansha*), was seriously wounded by a

⁴ *Kido Kōichi Nikki*, ed. Oka Yoshitake, (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1966), 2:147-8 (hereafter cited as *KKN*); *Tokyo Saiban Shiryō Kido Kōichi Jinmon Chōsho*, eds. Awaya Kentarō et al, (Tokyo: Ōtsuki Shoten, 1987) (hereafter cited as *TSS-KKJC*), 43-4.

⁵ *KKN* 2:147; Koiso Kuniaki, *Katsuzan Kōsō* (Tokyo: Koiso Kuniaki Jijōden Kankōkai, 1963), 498-500.

right-wing civilian assassin, leading to the resignation of his cabinet in April of the next year and to his death. But Hamaguchi's *Minseitō* party still remained in power. The sole surviving *genrō*, Prince Saionji, insisted on retaining the ruling party in order not to encourage future assassinations.⁶ To the military's great chagrin, Hamaguchi's successor, Prime Minister Wakatsuki Reijirō, upheld his predecessor's cautious foreign policy.

In Japan itself, the economic situation progressively deteriorated as a result of the Great Depression of 1929. The cabinet's policy, based on the two pillars of retrenchment and return to the international gold standard, made things even worse. As prices dived, companies were compelled to reduce wages and lay off workers, slowing the economy down and increasing Japan's vulnerability to the global recession. Many peasants whose livelihoods were dependent on silk prices were devastated by the fall of silk demand in the United States.⁷ Mid-ranking and junior officers, many of whom led soldiers from the countryside, were painfully aware of their subalterns' plight. How could a soldier be expected to unconditionally obey his superiors and sacrifice his life for the empire, when his family was starving at home, or his sister sold to prostitution? Testified one lieutenant who later became involved in the rebellious movements of the 1930s, "It happened to me often that during a conversation with one of my soldiers about his home, he would murmur

⁶ Kido Kōichi's affidavit, *IMFTE* R23:30,727-8.

⁷ Richard J. Smethurst, *From Foot Soldier to Finance Minister: Takahashi Korekiyo, Japan's Keynes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 243-4, 7-8.

'my sister...' and then fall silent, lower his eyes, clench his fists and have tears running down his face."⁸

Many officers, like their peers from the civilian right and the patriotic societies, knew well whom to blame in this situation. For them, the government's weak-kneed policy in China and Manchuria and the neglect of Japan's poor were two sides of the same coin. The officers were forced to witness one corruption scandal after another, delineating the illicit ties of Diet members, palace courtiers and senior generals with the *zaibatsu*, Japan's maligned business magnates. At the same time, "dangerous" ideologies such as liberalism, socialism and individualism infested the streets of big cities such as Tokyo, obfuscating "traditional" Japanese values such as frugality, sacrifice and pure-hearted faith in the Imperial Throne. For most officers, the army was the ultimate embodiment of these values, and therefore any resistance to military demands was interpreted as an encroachment on Japanese tradition by dangerous, foreign ideologies.⁹

The prevailing feeling among concerned officers was one of their own incompetence, as nothing they had done to that point had been able to fundamentally alter the situation. The solution, as many of them saw it, was a vague

⁸ Op. cit. in Ben-Ami Shillony, *Revolt in Japan: the Young Officers and the February 26, 1936 Incident* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 9-10. Compare with the testimony of Lieutenant Ōkura Eiichi in his memoirs, *Ninroku Jiken e no Banka: Saigō no Seinen Shōkō* (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shinbunsha, 1971), 60.

⁹ *Hashimoto Shuki*, 15-16; Araki Sadao's interrogation, *IMFTE-CJEJ R11, E187:T*, p.1; Higuchi Kiichirō, *Rikugun Chūjō Higuchi Kiichirō Kaisōroku* (Tokyo: Fuyō Shobō, 1999), 280-2, 7-8. For more information on the army's pessimistic mood, compare with the detailed annual report of the Soviet Embassy in Tokyo. Written in 1932, it captures well the feeling of ideological decay prevailing in military circles since the 1920s. See: "Godovoi Doklad 1932, ob ekonomicheskopoliticheskom polozhenii Yaponii", p.60, *Arhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiskei Federatsii* (Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, Moscow: hereafter mentioned as *AVPRF*), Opis 15, Delo 6, Popka 149.

vision, known at the time as the "Showa Restoration" (*shōwa ishin*) or "national reconstruction" (*kokka kaizō*). These terms were popularized by right-wing ideologues beginning in the late 1920s. They were in fact part of a dream to reenact the Meiji Restoration, which had been led astray over the years by the corrupt alliance of party politicians, *genrō*, capitalists and military cliques.¹⁰ The "national reconstruction" vision was never clearly articulated, but in general, it included the destruction of party politics, military dominance in national policy, a planned economy instead of "selfish capitalism," "traditional values" in place of liberalism, and unilateral expansion into Manchuria, Mongolia, Northern China, and maybe even to the Russian Far East. Many activists, well aware of the fate of the Russian Empire, had deemed such a restoration as the only alternative for an eventual communist revolution.¹¹

The means to achieve this restoration, however, were subject to sharp controversy. Some officers were reluctant to violate the law. Others, who were ready to practice disobedience in order to bring about radical change, did not agree on the best way to break the impasse. Kōmoto Daisaku and his many sympathizers in the officer corps believed that military defiance in Manchuria might be the "game changer," a solid base for the army to gather power and facilitate change in Japan itself.¹² Other officers, however, began to challenge this concept of "Manchuria

¹⁰ Hashimoto Shuki, 29; Tokugawa Yoshichika, *Saigo no Tonosama: Tokugawa Yoshichika Jiden* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1973), 122.

¹¹ Saitō Saburō, "Uyoku Shisō Hanzai Jiken no Sōgōteki Kenkyū: Ketsumeidan Jiken yori Niniroku Jiken Made" in Imai Seiichi et. al, eds., *Kokka Shugi Undō* (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 1963) 4:62 (hereafter cited as "Uyoku Shisō Hanzai"; Tokugawa, *Saigo no Tonosama* ,125.

¹² "Uyoku Shisō Hanzai", 62.

first." Witnessing Kōmoto's daring going to waste due to the generals' and the politicians' hesitance, they concluded that without a bold step to change Japan from within, the dream of territorial expansion was all but futile.¹³ The idea of "Japan First, Manchuria Second" was the ideological tenet underlying the *Sakura-kai's* foundation.¹⁴

The Ringleader: Hashimoto Kingorō

The prosecution at the Tokyo Trials proclaimed Colonel Hashimoto Kingorō, former intelligence officer, conspirator, and in later life, an influential nationalist leader as one of the most dangerous figures in pre-war Japan. "This man was no mere rabble-rouser in the streets," wrote a prosecution official in an internal memo, "no mere fanatical hawker of propaganda in the hedgerows and byways of Japan. By 1940 this man was one of the twenty most influential and powerful men in Japan. [...] With his record of organizing and directing ultra-nationalist societies in mind; with his record of plotting revolutions in mind; [...] , can there be any doubt as to the character of his power and influence on the Japanese people, both before the war and during it?"¹⁵

¹³ "Uyoku Shisō Hanzai", 58; "Minutes of the Third Trial", Ōkawa Shūmei's interrogation in his trial, 1934 (hereafter cited as Ōkawa, 1934 trial protocol), in *Court Papers, Journals, Exhibits and Judgments of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East* (Microfilm Reels, Center for Research Libraries, Chicago), Reel 24, Exhibit 2177A (hereafter cited as *IMTFE-CJEJ*, R..., E...).

¹⁴ See the testimony of General Tanaka Ryūkichi in *IMTFE R2:1962-3*. The phrase "Japan First, Manchuria Second" is my own, but its substance is based on Tanaka's testimony.

¹⁵ Frank S. Tavenner, Hugh B. Helm, Arthur Comyns Carr, "Report on the Case against Col. Kingoro Hashimoto", p.4, *The Tokyo War Crimes Trial: A Digital Exhibition* (hereafter cited as *TWCT-DE*),

Whether Hashimoto truly had such overreaching influence as imagined by this prosecution official, he was undoubtedly a key figure in the Japanese nationalist scene during the 1930s and the early 1940s. Similar to Kōmoto Daisaku, he was highly talented but impulsive, an "unmanageable" *shishi* type who paved his way into the military elite but never felt at ease there. Not a man of narrow military pursuits, Hashimoto was also a poet and bon-vivant, a drinker and a frequent customer of taverns and geisha houses. Professionally he was a military prodigy, excelling in math and in foreign languages, especially Russian and French. Also a graduate of the elite Army Staff College, he specialized in artillery and intelligence and served in several commissions as an operative of the *Tokumu Kikan*, the Japanese secret service. In 1928, he was sent to Turkey as a military attaché.¹⁶ Mission-wise, his main role was to spy on Soviet military movements in the Caucasus and to sow anti-Soviet sentiments among Caucasian minorities.¹⁷ Monitoring Turkish politics, Hashimoto was thoroughly impressed with the leadership of Mustafa Kemal "Atatürk," the founder of modern Turkey who expelled the last Ottoman sultan and established a secular, authoritarian republic. The easy to impress lieutenant-colonel had ardently read Atatürk's speeches and had even met the great man for dinner in the new Turkish capital, Ankara.¹⁸

University of Virginia Law Library. <http://lib.law.virginia.edu/imtfe/content/item-1-report-case-against-col-kingoro-hashimoto-i-j-ret> (accessed 10.6.2014).

¹⁶ Hashimoto Kingorō's interrogation, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R12,E258, pp.1-2; Karita Tetsu, "Jūgatsu Jiken" (1), *Tokyo Tōritsu Daigaku Hōgaku Zasshi* 11:2 (March, 1971) 1:319.

¹⁷ Hashimoto to General Okamoto Ren'ichirō, Vice Chief of the General Staff, 15.11.1929, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R15, E734. For analysis see: Hiraoki Kuromiya, George Mamoulia, "Anti-Russian and Anti-Soviet Subversion: the Caucasian-Japanese Nexus, 1904-1945", *Europe-Asia Studies* 61:8 (2009), 1421.

¹⁸ For discussion on the Turkish influences on Hashimoto see Tatamiya, *Hashimoto*, 18-32.

Following the rise of strong rulers in Europe and in Asia, men such as Atatürk in Turkey, Mussolini in Italy, Stalin in the Soviet Union, Pilsudski in Poland and Reza Shah in Persia, Hashimoto believed he was able to find the thread connecting these "national saviors" with one another. Oblivious to the complicated circumstances and the significant differences between these countries, he drew one main lesson from his studies: divided and collapsing nations could be saved by strong leaders, capable of forging national consensus with the backing of patriotic officers. Being "hot-blooded through and through," Hashimoto found it easy to brush aside the warning in the Imperial Rescript for Soldiers and Sailors, which prohibited military personnel from "meddling in politics." The rescript, he wrote later, banned political activity only when such was at odds with one's duty. But a soldier, just like any other imperial subject, was obliged to interfere in politics for the sake of the country. In fact, from the point of view of national defense, such intervention might even be considered an essential part of a soldier's duty.¹⁹

In 1930, when Hashimoto was finally ordered to return to the General Staff, he spent the lengthy nautical journey contemplating "how to reform Japan." As a result, he wrote, "I succeeded in drawing a definite plan to a certain degree. And on returning to the General Staff Office, my former haunt, I devised several schemes in

¹⁹ Higuchi, *Kaisōroku*, 288; Hashimoto Kingorō, excerpts from "The Road to the Reconstruction of the World," "From the Point of View of National Defense, it is the Duty of the Military to Mix in Politics," *Taiyō Dai Nippon*, 17 Mar. 1937, reproduced in *IMTFE-CJEJ*, R11, E177:1, p.1, R15, E675: A, p.2; Tatamiya, *Hashimoto*, 61. In his interrogation, Hashimoto also mentioned Hitler along with the other role-model leaders, but as the latter didn't rise to power until 1933, he could not have influenced the former's state of mind in 1930. See also Karita, "Jūgatsu Jiken" 1:320, as well as Honjō Shigeru to Uehara Yūsaku, 18.8.1931, *Uehara Yūsaku Kankei Monjo*, ed. Uehara Yūsaku Kankei Monjo Kenkyūkai, (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1976), 452-3.

order to put my ideas into execution."²⁰ These "schemes", as expressed in Hashimoto's later essays, were a blend of unbridled territorial ambitions and a call for "national reconstruction at home." The corrupt "liberal" regime, he believed, should be destroyed and replaced by an authoritarian state backed by the army, in which "politics, economics, culture, national defense and everything else [were] all focused on one – the emperor." That unified nation, in turn, should "grasp the reins to lead the world in a new world order."²¹ With such schemes in mind, Hashimoto returned to Tokyo and was commissioned to lead the Russian desk of the Europe-America section in the Intelligence Department of the General Staff.²²

²⁰ Hashimoto Kingorō, excerpts from "The Road to the Reconstruction of the World", *IMTFE-CJEJ*, R11, E177:1, p.1.

²¹ Hashimoto Kingorō, excerpts from "The Inevitability of Renovation", *IMTFE-CJEJ*, R12, E264, pp.1-2

²² The Russian desk belonged to Section 4 (Europe and America) in the Intelligence Department. For a thorough analysis on the organizational structure and functions of the department see Karita, "Jūgatsu Jiken" 1:316-18.

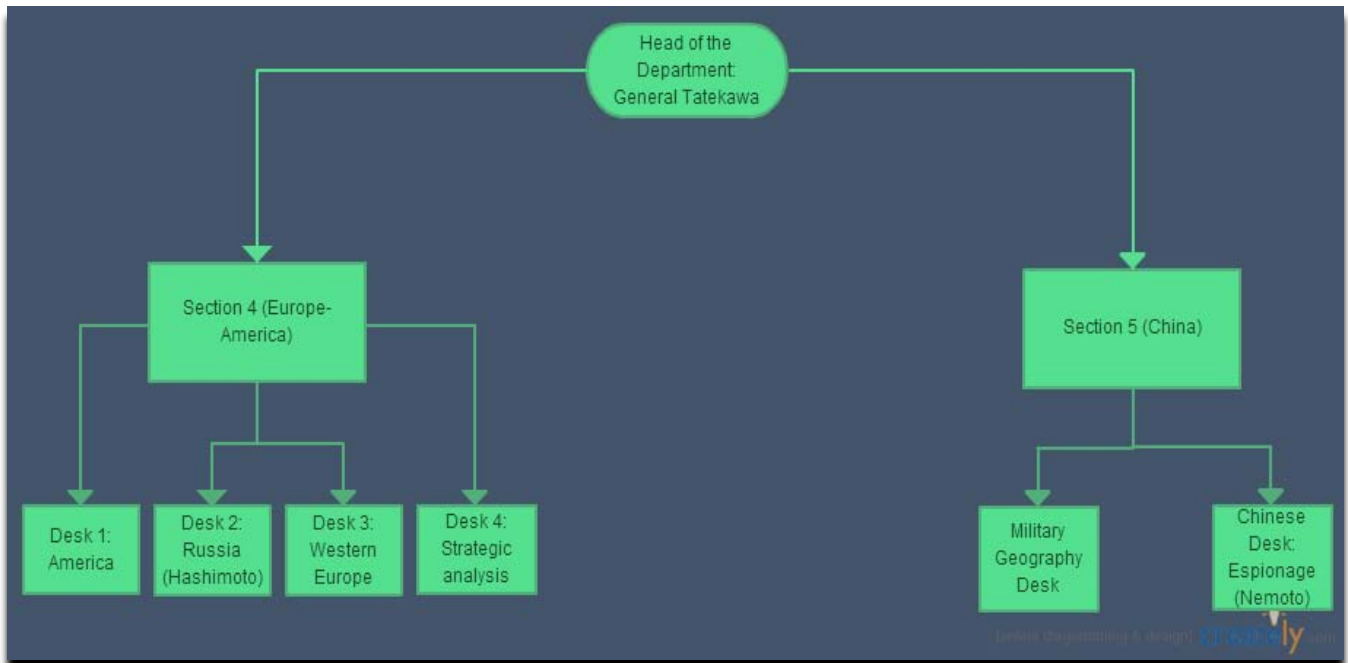


Figure 2: The Intelligence Department (Second Department) of the General Staff²³

Traditionally, the Intelligence Department of the General Staff was entrusted, like similar institutions around the world, with information gathering and special operations in foreign countries. By 1928 the department was already involved in military defiance through cooperation with the assassination plot of Zhang Zuolin. Under the leadership of its new commander, General Tatekawa Yoshitsugu (in office since August 1929), it began to meddle in Japanese politics as well.²⁴ In spring 1930,

²³ Based on the information in Karita, "Jūgatsu Jiken" 1:316.

²⁴ "Uyoku Shisō Hanzai", 58; Tanaka Kiyoshi, "Showa 7-nen 1-gatsu, XX Shōsa Shuki, Iwayuru Jūgatsu Jiken ni kansuru Shuki", Appendix 5 in Muranaka Kōji, Isobe Asaichi, *Shukugun ni kansuru Ikensho: Shōwa 10-nen 7-gatsu 11-nichi* (Tokyo: self-published pamphlet, 1935), 78 (hereafter cited as *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*). The identity of the author, "Major XX," was established by later historians as Tanaka Kiyoshi, captain in 1931. See Tanaka, Azusa, "Iwayuru Sangatsu Jiken nit suite: sono Gaiyō to Bunken no Shōkai", *Sankō Shoshi Kenkyū* 16 (June, 1978), 9-10. The original manuscript of this source was lost, and it reached us only through a copy made by young officers deeply hostile to the author. Still,

General Tatekawa ordered Hashimoto and his colleague from the China Section, Nemoto Hiroshi, to draft a plan for national reconstruction. By the standards of the time, such a plan could easily have been interpreted as a call for a coup d'état.

Hashimoto wrote later that he and his friends felt that they must act like the *shishi* of the Meiji Restoration.²⁵ This was the result of the *mimesis* process mentioned at the end of chapter one: the tendency of rebels with ambiguous goals, such as Hashimoto, to imitate the only rebellious model which was both patriotic and successful – that of the *shishi*. The government, the popular press and numerous authors unwittingly abetted this process for decades by praising *shishi* as patriots, writing about their exploits and enshrining their souls in Yasukuni as national martyrs (*jun'nansha*). In the early Showa period, stories about *shishi* were also incorporated in the military education system.²⁶

The government, naturally, emphasized the *shishi*'s loyalty to the emperor, but others, especially in the radical right and the patriotic societies, fondly remembered also their rebelliousness, unruliness and drunkenness. *Sōshi* and other adventurers adopted this ethos by calling themselves "commoner *shishi*".²⁷ The cooperation between the army and such adventurers, evident since the assassination of Queen Min but much intensified in the late 1920s, instilled the

Tanaka himself upheld by and large the reliability of the published version after the war. For discussion on the reliability of this source see: Tatamiya, *Hashimoto*, 67-8.

²⁵ *Hashimoto Shuki*, 21; *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 78;

²⁶ For discussion on the process of *mimesis* see the last sub-section of the first chapter. See also Benesch, *Inventing the Way*, 179, 194-8.

²⁷ See for example Kobayakawa, *Bingō*, 41, 52, 75, 88, 91-2. For more details see discussion in chapter six.

rebellious interpretation of the *shishi* heritage into the lower echelons of the officer corps. For Hashimoto and his friends, who saw themselves as modern *shishi*, the government of Japan was just as illegitimate as the Tokugawa Bakufu. Violence against it was permitted, at least in principle.

Hashimoto despised not only the government, but also the army's leadership. His mentality was somewhat similar to that of Kōmoto Daisaku in 1928.²⁸ Now, however, the Chōshū Clique, that constant anathema of rebellious officers, was all but non-existent. The question was one of views, and each general was evaluated by his readiness to collaborate with the project of national reconstruction. As most senior officers were reluctant to cooperate, they were denounced by Hashimoto as lazy incompetents. Only a handful, like General Tatekawa, were viewed as allies.²⁹ From the outset, therefore, Hashimoto and his team drew a sharp dichotomy of "us"—the pure-hearted, heroic *shishi* and their sympathizers—versus "them"—corrupt officers who gave their support to the current system. Along with his closest collaborators, Hashimoto swore a solemn oath to brave death for the cause of national reconstruction.³⁰

This state of mind, combined with the feeling of urgency, drove Hashimoto to drop all considerations of caution or gradualism. "The dark clouds of the already ossified political world," he wrote, "have to be cleared without a trace, the evil root of the nation has to be removed. With bravery and determination, such would surely

²⁸ *Hashimoto Shuki*, 21.

²⁹ *Hashimoto Shuki*, 21-2.

³⁰ *Hashimoto Shuki*, 24, 88.

be a trivial thing to do."³¹ Here we see the same kind of *shishi* optimism that led Japanese rebels to murder leaders, from the mixed gangs of the 1860s and the plan to assassinate Iwakura, through to the assassinations of Queen Min and Zhang Zuolin to the *Sakura-kai*: a belief that evil, serious and threatening as it might have been, could be uprooted by one clean sweep, requiring nothing but bravery and determination.

The Cherry Blossom Society and its Civilian Allies

Tanaka Ryūkichi, an officer who attended the first meeting of Hashimoto's society, held on October 1, 1930 in the Tokyo Officers Club (*Kaikōsha*), testified later that the participants "did not touch at all on Manchurian problems," because "at that time domestic questions within Japan were extremely acute." According to Tanaka, that first meeting was attended by fifty to sixty officers, including five or six Navy officers (delegates of a parallel organization, the "Sea and Stars Society"), but in the following months the numbers significantly grew.³² The new group had a unique regulation that limited the membership to relatively junior officers holding ranks of lieutenant-colonel and below, and then only if they were "selflessly

³¹ *Hashimoto Shuki*, 30, and see also Nakano' analysis on p.60. Compare with Hashimoto's reply to Tanaka in *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 89.

³² *IMTF*, Reel 2:1962; *Hashimoto Shuki*, 24-5. Hashimoto's statement is supported by the affidavit of Lieutenant-Colonel Wachi Takaji, *IMTFE* R15:19,666. According to Tanaka Kiyoshi (*Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 76), the society was founded in late September 1930. See: *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 79

interested in national reconstruction."³³ Senior officers were formally excluded, though some of them supported the organization from the outside.

The society was nameless for the first few months of its existence. Only in spring 1931 did Hashimoto convince the assembly to approve the name *Sakura-kai*, Cherry Blossom Society, a known symbol in Japanese military culture that would be used again during the Second World War in reference to the Kamikaze. According to the aesthetic notions of the time, the magnificent but short-lived cherry blossom symbolized the life of the pure and youthful warrior: short, as he was ready to sacrifice it at a moment's notice, and yet resplendent of heroic glamor and unsullied by compromise.³⁴ This name, too, symbolized Hashimoto's intention to link himself and his society, figuratively and culturally, to the romantic *shishi* culture of the late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods.³⁵

The *Sakura-kai*'s similarity to the *shishi* was not in name alone. Just as the late Tokugawa rebels were able to overcome the estrangement between the domains by building an inter-domain alliance, the leaders of the *Sakura-kai* were able to unite officers from various military power centers for common action. That was one of the reasons the *Sakura-kai* was so dangerous. If previous rebellious cliques inherited the loose structure of the *shishi* mixed gangs, the *Sakura-kai* was the first one who, knowingly or unknowingly, imitated the alliance which finally

³³ "Uyoku Shisō Hanzai," 58; *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 77; Karita, "Jūgatsu Jiken" 1:323.

³⁴ *Hashimoto Shuki*, 25; Karita, "Jūgatsu Jiken," 323.

³⁵ *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 98-9. For Tanaka, as the hostile observer he was, the *shishi* fetish of Hashimoto and his friends was at the root of their recklessness and the main reason for their eventual failure.

overthrew the Bakufu. Lieutenant-General Sotoyama Toyozō, commander of the military police at the time, noticed this and wrote that the inter-sectional nature of such rebellious networks was the true impetus for the army's "enduring disaster."³⁶ Had the *Sakura-kai* been limited to one military power center, for example to the General Staff, other power centers such as the Army Ministry could have seen it as a selfish, partisan plot to enhance the power of one military institution at the expense of others. Only by overcoming such sectional, factional and institutional divides was it possible to form a truly effective conspiratorial network.

The three founders of the *Sakura-kai*, all lieutenant-colonels, were Hashimoto from the General Staff, Sakata Yoshirō from the Army Ministry, and Higuchi Kiichirō from the Tokyo Guards Division. Additional co-founders of junior rank, but of no less influence, were Hashimoto's direct subordinates at the Russian Desk: Captain Obara Shigetake, Captain Tanaka Wataru and Lieutenant Amano Isamu, as well as the China Espionage Desk leader Nemoto Hiroshi. Another key figure was Captain Chō Isamu, also from the Chinese Desk.³⁷ Chō, destined to be Hashimoto's closest partner in the *Sakura-kai*'s path of terror, was of a very similar character. A notorious drinker and womanizer, he too was talented, quick-witted but impulsive and cruel, a modern *shishi* "quick to laugh and cry," prone to outbursts of

³⁶ Sotoyama Toyozō, quoted by Nakano Masao in *Hashimoto Shuki*, 79.

³⁷ "Uyoku Shisō Hanzai", 58; *IMTFE*, Reel 2:1962. In his interrogation by the Americans, Hashimoto overemphasized his own role and insisted that the others (most of them already dead at that time) were not founders but merely assistants or secretaries. See: Testimony of Hashimoto Kingorō, 17-18.2.1946, *IMTFE* R12:15,647 (prosecution exhibit no. 2188).

both glee and outrage.³⁸ Most rank-and-file members were graduates of the Staff College, that is, they belonged to the narrow elite stratum of officers. The masses of "unit officers" (*taizuki shōkō*) were hardly represented until late March of the following year.³⁹

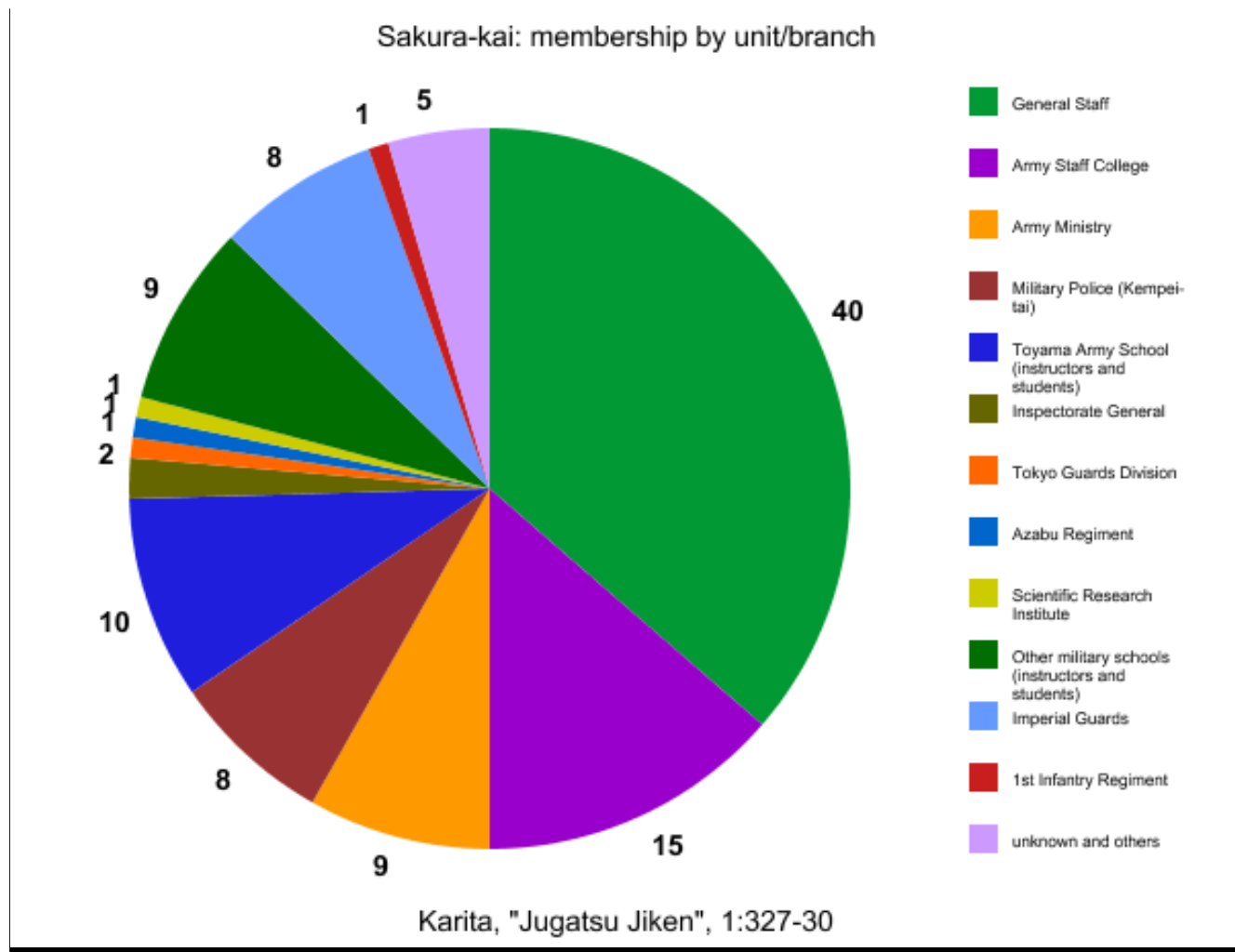


Figure 3: *Sakurai-kai*: membership by unit/branch

³⁸ Karita, "Jūgatsu Jiken", 1:325. The quote is from the recollections of Chō's close friend Ōkawa Shūmei.

³⁹ Hashimoto Shuki, 25, 77-8. The graph represents the membership of the Sakura-kai in around the March Incident, before the influx of name members in April.

The prominence of Hashimoto, Chō and their close confederates from the Intelligence Department can be clearly seen in the graph above. The branch in which they served, the General Staff, was in the lead with 40 members. The Staff College and the Army Ministry were next in line with 15 and 9 members, respectively. Smaller, but still crucial support, came from the Inspectorate General and various regiments and divisions. Ten of the members were students and instructors at the Tōyama Army School, an institution specializing in fencing and an important center for nationalist sedition.

Generally, the preponderance of military schools in the Tokyo area gave rise to a rebellious "student culture," somewhat reminiscent of the fencing schools of the late Tokugawa period. In both instances, young and spirited warriors from all across the country could meet each other, socialize and discuss national reconstruction. This situation made it easy for *Sakura-kai* leaders such as Captain Obara to recruit new members.⁴⁰ Other members of the *Sakura-kai* were placed in the Military Police, the organization whose duty was to suppress their activity. Possibly these "Trojan horses" kept the leaders of the *Kempeitai* in the dark until the last moment.⁴¹ Like Kōmoto Daisaku, the leaders of the *Sakura-kai* were mid-ranking or junior officers mostly unsupervised by decision makers. But unlike Kōmoto, they served in key areas in and around Tokyo and were, therefore, in positions to aim more precise blows at the civilian cabinet and the ruling elite.

⁴⁰ "Uyoku Shisō Hanzai", 62; Suematsu Tahei, *Watakushi no Shōwashi* (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 1963), 31,9.

⁴¹ *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 97-8.

The semi-public section of the *Sakura-kai*, well-known in army circles, was a study group whose members met monthly to discuss current affairs over dinner.⁴² But in fact, this "debate club" was hardly more than a convenient façade. The leaders of the society has also established an inner circle of conspirators, originally known as the "committee of eleven." This group, founded to discuss the means to implement a coup d'etat, was led by Hashimoto and Chō.⁴³

In its plannings, the committee of eleven could count on the solid support of senior generals in the higher echelons. The *Sakura-kai* benefited from the patronage of army potentates such as Generals Ninomiya Harushige (deputy chief of the General Staff), Sugiyama Hajime (vice army minister), Tatekawa Yoshitsugu (head of the General Staff Intelligence Department) and Koiso Kuniaki (chief of the Army Ministry's Military Affairs Bureau). In this small group of senior schemers, the old clique struggles were still somewhat alive. Generals Ninomiya, Sugiyama, Tatekawa and Koiso were not members of feudal domain cliques, but they did form a personal clique around Army Minister General Ugaki Kazushige. These confidants of Ugaki, anxious that their patron was falling in popularity, plotted to make him prime minister in order to revive their power. These political considerations meshed nicely

⁴² *Hashimoto Shuki*, 26-7; "Okamura Memo", op. cit. in *ibid.*, 67; *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 77; Suematsu, *Watakushi no Shōwashi*, 43. Higuchi Kiichirō, however, claimed in his memoirs that most officers supported his own moderate faction. See: *Kaisōroku*, p.288. Corroborated by the testimony of another participant, Matsumura Shūitsu, op. cit. in Karita, "Jūgatsu Jiken" 2:276-7. Karita Tetsu believes that was the case until spring 1931 (*ibid.*, 2:277).

⁴³ *Hashimoto Shuki*, 27; *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 87.

with the ideological goals of the *Sakura-kai*, motivating those high officers to back it up.⁴⁴

The *Sakura-kai*'s military membership was closely allied with civilian nationalistic societies. Unlike Miura's collaboration with Adachi and his *sōshi* during the Queen Min assassination, theirs was not an ad-hoc alliance but rather a strong, equal partnership. The key person in that alliance was Dr. Ōkawa Shūmei, an intellectual for all seasons who wrote extensively on Asian religions, Eastern philosophy, economics, law and pan-Asianism. In addition to serving as the head of the South Manchurian Railway's Research Bureau and being a professor at Takushoku University, he led a long succession of nationalist groupings and organizations. Ōkawa's network of connections extended far and wide, not only in civilian patriotic societies but also in the higher echelons of the armed services. Indeed, he was even invited to lecture at the General Staff and at the Naval Academy.

Similarly to the *Sakura-kai*, Ōkawa was interested in "national reconstruction," the destruction of party politics and a planned economy. Furthermore, he aimed to expand the Japanese Empire into Manchuria and China, an essential step not only in the quest for Japanese economic self-sufficiency, but also a precondition to the expulsion of Western imperialism from East Asia. With this expansion in place, Ōkawa hoped, the entire continent might be united under

⁴⁴ Nakano Masao in *Hashimoto Shuki*, 53, see also Tanaka, "Iwayuru Sangatsu Jiken," 4. For interesting observations on this factional struggle from the point of view of Soviet diplomats see: A. Askov to T. Sokolnikov, 5.5.1934, *AVPRI*, Opis 17, Delo 17, Popka 158, p.175(2).

Japanese tutelage.⁴⁵ With such views, it was no wonder that Ōkawa established a good working relationship with the *Sakura-kai*. In 1931, he held a series of meetings with Hashimoto in a Tokyo tavern to discuss possible actions.⁴⁶

Naturally, in order to finance the coup, Ōkawa had to obtain funds. Initially, 300,000 yen were supposed to come from the Army Ministry, but the flow was soon stopped after a key official got cold feet. Always quick to adapt to shifting circumstances, Ōkawa was able to obtain an even greater sum (500,000 yen) from Marquis Tokugawa Yoshichika, a nationalist peer and the head of the former shogun's household. To keep the matter secret, Tokugawa decided neither to draw money from his bank account nor to sell his stocks. Instead, he sold his private gold bullion reserves and gave the returns to Ōkawa and his partners.⁴⁷

The March Incident

The leaders of the *Sakura-kai*'s radical faction, particularly Hashimoto and Chō, believed that the current system could be changed solely through direct, violent intervention. During the first two months of 1931, they constantly looked for a window of opportunity to catch their opponents unaware. Such an opportunity,

⁴⁵ Okada Keisuke's affidavit, Ōkawa, 1934 trial protocol, *IMTFE-CJEJ*, R11, E157, pp.1,4, R24, E2177A, pp.2-10, 14-15, 30-1; Ōkawa Shūmei, *Nihon oyobi Nihonjin no Michi* (Tokyo: Kōchisha Shuppanbu, 1926), 125-6, 42-3; Tanaka, "Iwayuru Sangatsu Jiken," 3-4.

⁴⁶ Ōkawa, 1934 trial protocol, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R24, E2177A, p.18; Shimizu Gyōnosuke's affidavit, *IMTFE-CJEJ*, R11, E157, p.1.

⁴⁷ *TSS-KKCS*, 51. According to Tokugawa's post-facto testimony, he gave the money on the condition that "no one would be killed." See: *Saigo no Tonosama*, 125-7; "Uyoku Shisō Hanzai", 61. In his secret memoirs, Hashimoto wrote that the money was obtained from a peer but failed to mention his name. See: *Hashimoto Shuki*, 61.

unfortunately, was supplied by none other than the organization's arch enemy, Foreign Minister Shidehara. On February 3, during a heated debate in the budget committee of the Imperial Diet, Shidehara (then acting prime minister) defended the London Disarmament Treaty by claiming that it was ratified by the emperor. The *Seiyūkai* opposition could not miss such a splendid opportunity to rail against the government, accusing Shidehara of evading ministerial responsibility and undermining imperial prestige by dragging the throne into politics.

Imperial authority, as one observer aptly put it, was a "double-edged sword."⁴⁸ Just as with Ōkubo in 1873 and with Katsura in 1913, using it for partisan purposes was likely to draw rage from all quarters. The rioting inside the Diet, fanned by *Seiyūkai* nationalist leaders and led by *sōshi* from both sides, paralyzed the parliament for about a week. The rage aroused by Shidehara's "slip of the tongue" proved to be a rallying cry for all of the government's enemies, and Ōkawa Shūmei soon noticed an opportunity. Hashimoto, too, was incensed. Shidehara's "shameful" remark, he recalled later, cemented his desire to "eradicate the Diet."⁴⁹ In a series of conversations with Hashimoto and his associates, Ōkawa began to develop a plan for action.⁵⁰

This scheme, later known as the March Incident, should be seen as a transitory phase between the bloodless coup d'état of the Taishō political crisis and the new age of violent military rebellions. Indeed, the basic outline was an attempt

⁴⁸ Tokugawa, *Saigo no Tonosama*, 124.

⁴⁹ Hashimoto Shuki, 45-6. Compare with Koiso, *Katsuzan*, 498-9; Tanaka, "Iwayuru Sangatsu Jiken," 3

⁵⁰ Ōkawa, 1934 trial protocol, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R24, E2177A, pp.17-18.

to reenact the mass "movement to protect the constitution" that overthrew the Katsura Cabinet in 1913.⁵¹ Setting the date to March 20, Ōkawa planned to use the nationalists' outrage over Shidehara's "slip" and the *Minseitō's* Labor Union Bill to organize violent, mass demonstrations in Hibiya Park, a traditional site for popular riots, and march the crowds towards the Imperial Diet. These plans were quite ambitious as the number of the demonstrators was supposed to exceed ten thousand. And to add mayhem to havoc, groups of *sōshi* were ordered to start fires in different parts of the capital.⁵²

This time, though, the mass uprising was to culminate in a coup d'état. For this purpose, Ōkawa attached to the demonstrators special assault teams (*Battōtai* – "sword-waving squads" or *Kesshitai* – "death-defying squads"), staffed by fencing martial artists and armed with sabers. The teams were ordered to storm the prime minister's office and the headquarters of both "established parties," *Minseitō* and *Seiyūkai*. A squad of toughs from a nationalistic Society was supposed to toss dummy bombs on the Diet buildings. Other groups of rebels were tasked with the occupation of the Metropolitan Police headquarters.⁵³ The turmoil was designed as an excuse for *Sakura-kai*-led officers to cordon off the Diet and thereby to block all movement to and from the building, allegedly in order to protect it. Individual ringleaders, with

⁵¹ For the importance of the Taisho Political Crisis as a precedent for the actors involved in the March Incident, see the analysis of Kobayashi Michihiko, "Sangatsu Jiken Saikō", *Nihon Rekishi* 10 (2007), 1-19.

⁵² Ōkawa, 1934 trial protocol, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R24, E2177A, p.18; *Hashimoto Shuki*, 60-1; *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 82-3.

⁵³ *KKN* 2:147-8; *Hashimoto Shuki*, 61; *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 82-3; Shimizu Gyōnosuke's affidavit, *IMTFE-CJEJ*, R11, E157, p.1. We know that these were dummy bombs, capable of making noise but with minimal lethal impact, from *Hashimoto Shuki*, 71-2; Koiso, *Katsuzan*, 501.

full knowledge of the plan, were supposed to personally lead these officers on the ground, to overpower the guards and to storm into parliament.⁵⁴

Then, the higher-echelon allies of the movement would enter the stage. A certain lieutenant general whose name was kept in secret, was to enter the building with an entourage of officers and confront the cabinet ministers. The text of his speech was drafted in advance by the ringleaders. "The nation," he was supposed to have said, "no longer has faith in the current cabinet. They will have faith only in a cabinet led by General Ugaki. Currently, the country is facing difficult times. Please be kind enough to do the right thing." After this short speech, the cabinet would be forced to resign en masse. Concurrently, Prince Saionji, the only surviving *genrō*, was to be pressured to "recommend" the army minister, General Ugaki Kazushige, to the emperor as Japan's new premier. The latter, "aided" by Ōkawa Shūmei in the role of king maker, was supposed to form a new cabinet, this time without Foreign Minister Shidehara, the *bête-noir* of the Japanese nationalists. The cabinet would toughen up Japan's Manchurian policy and implement the long-sought-after Showa Restoration.⁵⁵

Just like many other Japanese military conspirators before, Hashimoto and his colleagues were optimistic to the extreme. "Drunk with joy", as their co-conspirator, Captain Tanaka Kiyoshi had put it, they refused to listen to timely warnings. Tanaka, for example, cautioned that their plan was not only hastily drafted but also poorly organized. To begin with, the various units did not have enough

⁵⁴ *Hashimoto Shuki*, 61; *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 82.

⁵⁵ *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 83. Compare with *KKN* 2:147; Tanaka, "Iwayuru Sangatsu Jiken," 5.

coordination, and the plans for the new government were not detailed enough.⁵⁶ But the main drawback of the plan, as Tanaka observed, was that it presumed the cooperation of too many unreliable people who were not part of the original circle of conspirators.⁵⁷ For example, would Ōkawa and his accomplices be able to rally enough demonstrators at the appointed time? The bombs for the assault teams had to be supplied by the army, but would the conspirators be able to procure them? And the most crucial question of all: Would Ugaki cooperate with the scheme? The army minister's cooperation was indispensable as the entire plan hinged on his readiness to utilize the unfolding mayhem as an excuse to form a new cabinet. And even if that would happen, there was no guaranty that Ugaki would actually make anything more than cosmetic changes to the government policies.

Ugaki's close associates, Tatekawa, Koiso, Sugiyama and Ninomiya, in association with the *Sakura-kai*, had "worked" on the army minister at least since January. Indeed, they had a certain basis for optimism. In the past, General Ugaki voiced cautious support for the "Shōwa Restoration" as soon as the majority of the people reached an adequate level of "political awareness." That double game was a mixed bag of opportunism and genuine concerns. Ugaki's own unpublished manuscript shows that he considered using troops to remedy pressing problems

⁵⁶ *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 82-3. In his trial in 1934, Ōkawa admitted that it was "impossible to draft a concrete plan" for national reconstruction. See: Ōkawa, 1934 trial protocol, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R24, E1175:A, p.30. Lieutenant Ōkura Eiichi, certainly not a moderate, shared Tanaka's concerns. In his opinion, Hashimoto and Chō were "rushing to a perilous adventure in an intoxicated state of mind." See Ōkura, *Niniroku*, 66.

⁵⁷ *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 83.

such as corruption, the plight of the poor and the danger of communism, but that he was also afraid of the chaos and disintegration that might ensue.⁵⁸

In early 1931, though still undecided, Ugaki was giving officers around him the feeling that he might support the plot.⁵⁹ On January 13 he summoned Koiso, Ninomiya and other officers, including *Sakura-kai* leaders such as Hashimoto, to discuss "military reforms." Subsequently, General Ninomiya ordered Hashimoto to "draft a plan for national reconstruction" and to submit it to Ugaki.⁶⁰ General Tatekawa, Hashimoto's commanding officer in the Intelligence Department, heartily supported the plot, and agreed to apply stronger pressure on Ugaki. No one really seemed to care about the chief of the General Staff, General Kanaya Hanzō, whose reputation as a useless alcoholic was well-known.⁶¹

The support of senior officers notwithstanding, Ōkawa wanted to be more certain about Ugaki's position. Accordingly a meeting was arranged, presumably after much pleading by General Koiso. Here, the testimonies sharply diverge. According to Ōkawa's recollections, Ugaki was more or less consigned to cooperate.⁶² The army minister, however, strictly denied it. In informal testimony

⁵⁸ Karita Tetsu, *Ōkawa Shūmei to Kokka Kaizō Undo* (Tokyo: Ningen no Kagaku Shinsha, 2001), 310-11, Ugaki Kazushige, "Kokka sore ayashi", reproduced in *ibid.*, 319-22. This anonymous manuscript was found among Ugaki's papers. Based on its style and content, Karita and other scholars had determined that the general himself was its author (*ibid.*, pp.307-8, 24). It is dated April 1931, that is, after the March Incident but before the Manchurian and October Incidents. Compare with Ugaki's diary, *UKN* 1:795-6, where he documented his intense dissatisfaction with the party rule and the deteriorating economic conditions in the country.

⁵⁹ Karita, *Ōkawa Shūmei*, 310-11; *Hashimoto Shuki*, 56; Koiso, *Katsuzan*, 500-1.

⁶⁰ *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 80.

⁶¹ *Hashimoto Shuki*, 47-51; Tatamiya, *Hashimoto*, 59-62. Compare with *KKN* 2:93.

⁶² In his memoir (*Katsuzan*, 502-3), Koiso admits he mediated a meeting between Ōkawa and Ugaki, but dates this much later, to late February. He writes that he first met Ōkawa after February 20,

given several months later, he described the meeting with Ōkawa in detail and emphasized that he rejected each and every one of the latter's requests. Ōkawa, according to Ugaki, asked him not to use troops to suppress the demonstrators, to supply them with bombs, and to assume the position of prime minister afterwards. In response, the army minister assured Ōkawa that it was the army's duty to keep public order and that he would never assume the prime ministry as his fortunes were strictly tied to the current cabinet.⁶³ In addition, no bombs could be given to civilians. From these two versions, Ugaki's seems to be more reliable, as Ōkawa's testimony, though not wrong in its entirety, is confused and riddled with outright prevarications.⁶⁴

One thing, however, is clear from both versions. As early as February 11, Ugaki knew about the plot and did nothing to subvert it. Nor did he order an arrest of Ōkawa. At this point, the basic assumptions underlying Japanese discourse at the time should not go overlooked. The fact that the Japanese Empire's army minister

refused to cooperate with his plans but still pleaded a meeting between him and Ugaki, which took place a few days later. But according to another source, we know that the meeting between Ōkawa and Ugaki took place on February 11. See: Ōkawa, 1934 trial protocol, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R24, E2177A, pp.18-19, Interview to Nakano Masao, *Hashimoto Shuki*, 59. That, along with Ugaki's testimony to Harada in the latter's memoirs makes Koiso's version about his refusal to cooperate with Ōkawa a little difficult to accredit. For if he refused, why did he arrange the meeting between Ōkawa and his minister in the first place, and earlier than he would like us to believe? See: Harada Kumao, *The Saionji-Harada Memoirs, 1931-1940 [microform]: complete translation into English* (Washington, D.C.: University Publications of America, 1978), 1:156-7 (hereafter cited as *SHM*).

⁶³ *SHM* 1:157-9; Ugaki Kazushige's affidavit, *IMTFE-CJEJ*, R11, E163, p.1.

⁶⁴ Ōkawa, 1934 trial protocol, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R24, E2177A, pp.19-20. For example, (p.15, 583) Ōkawa maintained that he did not intend to destroy parliamentarianism completely, which was an outright lie. Nagata's testimony to Kido Kōichi on his own (Nagata's) conversation with Ōkawa is rather ambiguous about this question. See: *KKJ* 2:147. Ugaki's version is supported by *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 85 Koiso, *Katsuzan*, 503-4, and Shimizu Gyōnosuke's affidavit, *IMTFE-CJEJ*, R11, E157, p.1.

met with a notorious conspirator and listened to his plots without having him arrested on the spot, was so self-evident in 1931 that Ugaki could hardly deny it.

However, in an alarming development for the conspirators, an anti-coup faction spontaneously formed in the Army Ministry. It was led by close confidants of Ugaki, and even some *Sakura-kai* members agreed that Hashimoto and Ōkawa must be stopped. Meanwhile, the supporters of the plot in the Army Ministry began to reconsider. General Koiso, for example, was alarmed by the crudeness of Ōkawa's plan. When he heard the details in late February, he denounced it as "childish" and "advised" Ōkawa to retract it. Ōkawa, fearful of the army's fickleness, started to fulminate against the generals.⁶⁵ Panicked and close to despair, he sent a highly emotional letter to Ugaki on March 6, cajoling him into spearheading the Shōwa Restoration, to "overcome disorder and vindicate righteousness" as "a great man of ability." But the minister did not react.⁶⁶

General Koiso, who was already feeling that the chances to win Ugaki over were slim, started to snub Ōkawa, advising him that the minister was too busy and could not meet him again.⁶⁷ Accordingly, he dilly-dallied with the conspirators and refused to give them the bombs he promised. Hashimoto, in response, bypassed

⁶⁵ Okamura memo, op cit. in *Hashimoto Shuki*, 67-8. Corroborated by *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 84. Ugaki, "Kokka sore ayashi", reproduced in Karita, *Ōkawa Shūmei*, 321. In his memoirs (*Katsuzan*, 501-7), Koiso described his comments to Ōkawa's plan with the words "illegal and childish" (*Higōhō na, katsu Kodomo-rashi koto*), but the "illegal" part of the phrase seems like a later insertion, as the general had been involved in illegal endeavors at least since January. Perhaps his doubts began to grow after hearing the precise details of Ōkawa's amateurish plan.

⁶⁶ Ōkawa, 1934 trial protocol, *IMFTE* R12:15,582; Ōkawa to Ugaki, 6.3.1931, *IMTFE-CJEJ*, R11, E163:2, pp.1-2, for the Japanese original see Tatamiya, *Hashimoto*, 74-5. And compare with Koiso, *Katsuzan*, 509; Tanaka, "Iwayuru Sangatsu Jiken", 7.

⁶⁷ Koiso, *Katsuzan*, 503-4, 9.

Koiso and turned to none other than Kōmoto Daisaku, the former assassin of Zhang Zuolin. However, he could not get any bombs either. General Tatekawa, who still supported the coup, attempted to procure them through his connections in the infantry school, but that attempt, as well, ended in failure. Finally, a junior officer from the same school secretly got hold of some dummy bombs that were designed to create noise and havoc but nothing more. On March 12 and 13, Hashimoto and another officer carried a large number of these bombs in paper bags to Shimbashi train station, central Tokyo, and handed them over to one of the leaders of Ōkawa's *sōshi*.⁶⁸

But the plan's complete dependence on Ugaki's cooperation was and remained its most dangerous Achilles heel. The wily military politician, who had changed sides and betrayed his patrons several times in the past, was no person to rely on in an emergency, as Hashimoto and Ōkawa learned several days before launching their plan. Ugaki suddenly ceased his double game and ordered General Koiso in unequivocal language to cancel all plans for a coup d'état without delay. In fact, an ulterior political consideration might have been involved. In the beginning of March, as Hashimoto wrote later, rumors began to circulate in the capital that the government might soon resign, and it was likely that Ugaki would be appointed by the throne as Prime Minister Hamaguchi's successor. In such a situation, the army minister would have little reason to join the coup. Why should he risk illegalities

⁶⁸ "Uyoku Shisō Hanzai", 61; *Hashimoto Shuki*, 71-2; Shimizu Gyōnosuke's affidavit, *IMTFE-CJEJ*, R11, E157, p.1; Koiso, *Katsuzan*, 502-3.

when he could get the government on a silver platter? In any case, Koiso ordered Ōkawa to forgo the plan as no military help would be forthcoming.

Initially Ōkawa vowed to continue against all odds, but the prospects of his doing so seemed dimmer by the day. When the demonstrations organized by his allies were finally launched on March 18, they seemed to be disappointingly small.⁶⁹ Even Kōmoto Daisaku, the former assassin of Zhang Zuolin, began to plead for caution. He convinced Tokugawa Yoshichika, Ōkawa's financial patron, to tie the latter's hands. The plan, Tokugawa realized, was hopeless and would destroy the army. The marquis, therefore, called on Ōkawa and the other conspirators and "tearfully" implored them to withdraw the plan. Ōkawa insisted for a short while, but finally had to give in.⁷⁰ As a result, according to Hashimoto, Minister Ugaki's reputation among the conspirators of the *Sakura-kai* was crushed in one day.⁷¹ Relying on senior generals was, Hashimoto surmised, a mistake in judgment, not to be repeated again.

The failure of the March Incident, mainly due to *Sakura-kai*'s higher echelon backers' change of heart, infuriated Hashimoto, Ōkawa and their friends to no end, which resulted in motivating them to radicalize their goals and means of action. That

⁶⁹ Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki, 85; Ōkawa, 1934 trial protocol, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R24, E2177A, pp.18-19; Koiso, *Katsuzan*, 511; Tanaka, "Iwayuru Sangatsu Jiken", 8; Tokugawa, *Saigo no Tonosama*, 130; Hata Ikuhiko, *Gun Fashizumu Undōshi* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsa, 1972), 30.

⁷⁰ Tokugawa, *Saigo no Tonosama*, 130-4. See also Nakano's analysis in *Hashimoto Shuki*, 70; Shimizu Gyōnosuke's affidavit, Tokugawa Yoshichika's affidavit, Ōkawa, 1934 Trial Protocol, *IMTFE-CJEJ*, R11, E157, p.1, E158, p.1, R24, E2177A, p.20; Koiso, *Katsuzan*, 511-12; Tanaka, "Iwayuru Sangatsu Jiken," 7.

⁷¹ *Hashimoto Shuki*, 62. Compare with Okamura memo, op. cit. in *ibid.* 68.

state of mind, combined with the emboldening effect of the system's failure to punish them, made the next incident almost inevitable.

Ōkawa himself promised Marquis Tokugawa to "regroup for a renewed assault".⁷² Accordingly, Hashimoto used the spring and summer months to launch a propaganda campaign for the *Sakura-kai*, in which he fulminated against the political parties and the government's weak-kneed diplomacy. Lecturing in army venues, including the prestigious Staff College, Hashimoto was "singing the praises" of Mussolini and Atatürk as role models for a military-led restoration of the country.⁷³ In educational institutions such as the Tōyama Army School, the group's coup d'état plans were often discussed by students in quiet corners, and political meetings were held also in the various divisions. The fact that the *Sakura-kai*'s membership significantly grew from fifty to several hundred was surprising, especially after its failure in March. Moreover, the newcomers, mostly young officers, tended to support Hashimoto's radical views, overpowering the remaining moderates. That was certainly not good news for the government.⁷⁴

Skirmishes in Tokyo: the Government's Reaction

⁷² Tokugawa, *Saigo no Tonosama*, 134.

⁷³ Honjō to Uehara, 18 Aug. 1931, *Uehara Yūsaku Kankei Monjo*, 452.

⁷⁴ "Uyoku Shishō Hanzai", 63; *Hashimoto Shuki*, 77-8; *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 85-6; Karita, "Jūgatsu Jiken", 2:283; Honjō to Uehara, 18 Aug. 1931, *Uehara Yūsaku Kankei Monjo*, 452. About the *Sakura-kai*'s activity in Tōyama School see the testimonies of Ōkura Eiichi, *Niniroku*, 61; Suematsu, *Watakushi no Shōwashi*, 39, 42,4. According to Tatamiya (*Hashimoto*, 52) by September 1931 there were 300 members in Tokyo alone.

Ugaki's departure for his new assignment as the governor general of Korea did not stop the double-game at the top of the Army Ministry. In fact, the new minister, General Minami Jirō (in office since April 14), was viewed by many as a weaker, duller version of Ugaki. Even more than his predecessor, Minami was reluctant to restrain the young officers in the ranks. During his meeting with Prime Minister Wakatsuki in early September, Minami assured him that enhancing discipline in the army was the utmost need, but as in previous occasions, he emphasized that the provocations of party politicians and their press cronies were driving young officers over the edge. Therefore, Minami cautioned Wakatsuki that in order to uphold discipline, the cabinet had to adjust its policy in tandem with the army's requests. Upon his return to the Army Ministry, Minami was even more brazen. In a conversation with his key subordinates, he said, "[T]he other day, the Premier questioned me concerning the matter of the coup d'état and I threatened him by admitting that such things happen due to the faults of the political parties of today, and that perhaps such incidents may occur again."⁷⁵

The most interesting thing here was that Minami, who used the intransigence of young officers as a tool of political blackmail, did not even pretend to be able to rein them in. And this was not a mere sham. As Prince Saionji's secretary Harada Kumao wrote, the leading generals were truly not in a position to restrain the younger officers. But, too, this was a situation they did not wish to alter. In the

⁷⁵ *SHM* 1:43-44, 9 (the quotes are from p.49). And compare with Tanaka Ryūkichi's testimony, *IMTFE* R2:2019-20.

absurd situation of 1931, for those in the higher echelons of the army, to relinquish control over juniors was the way to gain greater power.⁷⁶

How normal and blatant the officers' disobedience became in 1931 was evident from a bizarre case, a tempest in a tea cup stirring the Japanese elites in the early days of September. For some time, in fact since the debates on the London Disarmament Treaty, young officers had been openly propagating against the government in public, a campaign orchestrated by the *Sakura-kai*, by the nationwide organization of reserve soldiers, and by Ōkawa's patriotic societies.⁷⁷ Several Diet members, headed by Ozaki Yukio, a veteran critic of the army, sent a bold letter to Minister Minami warning him that such brazen interference in politics was a direct violation of Article 103 in the army's penal code. Minami, of course, ignored the letter, but Prime Minister Wakatsuki did not, and even asked his home minister, Adachi Kenzō, to do something about it.⁷⁸ Adachi, greatly perturbed, ordered the police to stop such conventions wherever they were. However, he was far from having an impeccable record of lawfulness himself. Thirty five years before, in 1895, he had been the leader of the *sōshi*, thugs who helped Miura Gorō to assassinate Queen Min. But now, having climbed to a position of authority, he found himself trying to curb the disobedience of officers who openly attacked his government's policy.

⁷⁶ *SHM* 1:26,37.

⁷⁷ *Hashimoto Shuki*, 146.

⁷⁸ Citizen's Disarmament League (Ozaki Yukio and six others) to Army Minister Minami, 6 Aug. 1931, *IMFTE* R2:2193-4 (prosecution exhibit 184).

Immediately as the matter became known, Prince Saionji's military contacts bitterly complained to the *genrō*'s secretary about the insult to the army. General Koiso and other army leaders, in fury, demanded explanations from their civilian counterparts. In response, Saionji's secretary, along with Prime Minister Wakatsuki and Foreign Minister Shidehara, denied the entire affair, professing their innocence to the generals. No, it never crossed their minds to propose such an outrageous thing. Pathetically enough, Adachi himself said that he "had no memory" of issuing such orders. Finally, all involved agreed that only the Military Police could discipline officers. And as the Military Police, as usual, did nothing, the *Sakura-kai*'s propaganda campaign continued unabated. Wakatsuki and his ministers were afraid to challenge the army openly, let alone do anything to stop it.⁷⁹

In this tense situation, Saionji wondered whether he should use his prestige as the only surviving elder statesman to "remonstrate with the Army". That was a rather watered-down idea, no more than a timid warning to Army Minister Minami to "pay extra attention towards maintaining military discipline." Even this idea, however, was soon dropped. Navy Minister Okada assured Saionji and the government that the navy was standing behind them and would even confront the army if necessary. But meanwhile, they should not needlessly provoke the generals. Saionji should keep his interventions for an emergency. The prince finally agreed to wait for a better occasion. "It should be best for me," he told his secretary, Harada, "not to censure the laxity of Army discipline in detail."⁸⁰ Saionji could not have

⁷⁹ *SMH* 1:40-1, 5, 50-2.

⁸⁰ *SMH* 1:59-61, see also p.66.

known that the situation was grimmer than his worst fears. Hashimoto and Chō, unpunished and undeterred, were constantly plotting, and in Manchuria, the greatest act of military defiance since the Meiji Restoration was about to take place.

The Manchurian Incident

Between March and October 1931, the rebellious movement in the Army was constantly swinging between the poles of "Japan first" and "Manchuria first."⁸¹ These factions, though in certain disagreement on tactics, acted in close cooperation with one another. Ōkawa Shūmei, always happy to give his support to any nationalistic venture, was backing and guiding both.⁸² After the failure of the March Incident, young officers at the staff of the Kwantung Army decided to put the "Manchuria first" scheme in motion. The ringleaders of the plot were two colonels: Itagaki Seishirō, Kōmoto Daisaku's successor as the Kwantung Army's senior staff officer, and his operation staffer, Ishihara Kanji. Several incidents of Japanese deaths in Manchuria, publicized by propaganda of right-wing societies (including the *Sakurakai*) incensed Japanese public opinion, pushing it towards support of military solutions.⁸³

⁸¹ Shimizu Gyōnosuke's testimony in *Hashimoto Shuki*, 76-7, and also Hashimoto's text in 80-1; Honjō to Uehara, 18.8.1931, *Uehara Yūsaku Kankei Monjo*, 453.

⁸² *IMFTE* R2:1975, 2158-9.

⁸³ Tanaka Ryūkichi's interrogation, *IMFTE* R2:2060-1,8, 87-96; Morishima Morito's affidavit, Ōkawa, 1934 trial protocol, Hirata Yukihiko's deposition, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R12, E245, p.4, R24, E1175:A, pp.14-15, 17, R25, E2404, pp.3-7; *Hashimoto Shuki*, 103-5; Ōkura, *Niniroku*, 64.

This time, the "lone wolf" adventurous mentality of Kōmoto Daisaku was gone without a trace. In its place came a plot, later called the "Manchurian Incident," that was meticulously planned by Itagaki and Ishihara as a team-managed military operation. Hashimoto and Chō, the advocates of the "Japan first" policy, did not try to hinder their colleagues in Mukden, but instead did their best to help and abet them.⁸⁴ The plan was, as usual, an initiative from below. As Ōkawa Shūmei testified later, "[I]t wasn't [planned] by high officers. [...] In the Japanese army, high ranking officers do not readily express such opinion. It was decided by the young chief-of-staff conference." The new commander of the Kwantung Army, General Honjō Shigeru, who entered his post in August, was oblivious to the plot.⁸⁵

Unlike the situation in 1928, the military operations within and without Mukden were meticulously planned in advance. This time, it was agreed, all contrary orders from Tokyo would simply be ignored.⁸⁶ Ishihara darkly warned that in case of persistent, express orders to stop the operation, he and his friends would temporarily give up their Japanese citizenship and occupy Manchuria as stateless adventurers. Chō Isamu, Hashimoto's partner in the *Sakura-kai*, gleefully disseminated these rumors in the General Staff, deterring the senior generals from

⁸⁴ Tanaka Ryūkichi's interrogation, *IMTFE R2:1966-70*, 2015-16; *Hashimoto Shuki*, 84-5.

⁸⁵ Ōkawa, 1934 trial protocol, Honjō Shigeru, "The True Nature of the Manchurian Incident," written in early October, 1945, *IMTFE-CJEJ R24*, E2177A, p.17,22, R25, E2403, p.1; *Hashimoto Shuki*, 127-8.

⁸⁶ Hayashi to Shidehira, 19 Sept. 1931, *IMTFE R2:2179-80* (prosecution exhibit 181:1); Mark Peattie, *Ishihara Kanji and Japan's Confrontation with the West* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 121.

any interference with the plot.⁸⁷ Ishihara's threat had shown the extent of state involution plaguing the army since the Meiji Period. Soldiers and *rōnin* had collaborated in Manchuria for so long that officers could threaten to become *rōnin* without raising too many eyebrows. The army minister indeed warned Ishihara "to cease immediately all talk of becoming independent from the Imperial Army or of controlling Manchuria," but no disciplinary steps were ever taken against him.⁸⁸

Foreign Minister Shidehara, who was informed by a mole about the impending plot of the Kwantung Army, decided to stop it before it unfolded.⁸⁹ Therefore, he asked Army Minister Minami to send an order to the Kwantung Army to forgo such plans. Minami's emissary was General Tatekawa, former plotter of the March Incident and now the commander of the First Department (Operations) at the General Staff.⁹⁰ But dispatching Tatekawa to stop the conspirators in Mukden was yet another maneuver characteristic of Army Minister Minami's double game. Tatekawa, later described as "a most enthusiastic advocate of Manchurian independence," was himself privy to the Kwantung Army's conspiracy.

Even worse, under the nose of the army leaders, Hashimoto and his *Sakura-kai* colleagues established a clandestine network of communication with Mukden. That secret line of communication between Hashimoto and Itagaki, the senior staff

⁸⁷ Hashimoto Shuki, 163; Sadako Ogata, *Defiance in Manchuria: the Making of Japanese Foreign Policy, 1931-2* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 80, 94; Tanaka Ryūkichi's interrogation, *IMTFE R2:2017*.

⁸⁸ Peattie, *Ishiwara*, 129.

⁸⁹ Hashimoto Shuki, 119-21.

⁹⁰ Tanaka Ryūkichi's interrogation, *IMTFE R2:2006-7*.

officer of the Kwantung Army, effectively functioned as the army's channel of command and control, while the official channel (the army minister/chief-of-staff to General Honjō) was completely dysfunctional. Immediately as Tatekawa was ordered to Mukden, Hashimoto and Nemoto dispatched an urgent, coded message to Itagaki: "The plot is uncovered. Act at once." And then again: "Move before Tatekawa arrives at Mukden."⁹¹

The rest of the story is well known. Instead of boarding a military airplane, General Tatekawa travelled slowly by ferry and by train. Upon his arrival, on the night of September 18, Ishihara and his associates arranged for him the merry company of a geisha for the evening. When Tatekawa woke up in the morning, the operation he was ordered to forestall had already launched.⁹²

In the dead of night on September 18, a bomb installed by Ishihara's agents on the SMR railway exploded, causing so slight a damage as to allow a Mukden-bound express to pass over without hindrance.⁹³ Hashimoto Kingorō, red-faced and drunk from joy and sake, stumbled from his favorite pub to the General Staff, phoned the Kwantung Army and encouraged them to practice "*dokudan senkō*," to charge on, regardless of orders.⁹⁴ In fact, Itagaki and Ishihara did not even wait for Hashimoto's phone call. The Chinese were promptly blamed for the incident, and in retaliation, Kwantung Army detachments opened fire on the Mukden garrison. The

⁹¹ *Hashimoto Shuki*, 120,22.

⁹² Tanaka Ryūkichi's interrogation, *IMTFE R2:1974*, 2004-6.

⁹³ Lytton V.G.R.B. et al, *Appeal by the Chinese Government. Report of the Commission of Enquiry* (also known as the Lytton Report, Geneva: League of Nations Publications, 1932), 67-8

⁹⁴ *Hashimoto Shuki*, 123.

commander of the Kwantung Army, who was also surprised by the incident, authorized their illegal operations in retrospect.⁹⁵ A Japanese diplomat who dared to urge restraint was threatened with a naked blade, and openly assured that the officers "would kill anyone who endeavored to so interfere."⁹⁶

The main Chinese barracks and Mukden's airfield were both bombarded by heavy field guns, placed by Itagaki in advance with the full knowledge and cooperation of officials in the Army Ministry.⁹⁷ The Chinese soldiers, surprised and ill-prepared, retreated from the city. In a few months' time, Japanese forces swept all over Manchuria, overcoming the haphazard resistance of local Chinese commanders, though guerilla fighting persisted for a longer while. The leader of China, Chiang Kai-shek, surmised that China was still not prepared to resist Japan, and ordered his subordinates to oppose the occupation of Manchuria by diplomatic means alone. The warlord of Manchuria Zhang Xueliang, hospitalized in Beijing at the time, obeyed the national government's orders and declared a non-resistance policy to the Japanese invaders.⁹⁸

At the same time in Tokyo, Prime Minister Wakatsuki and Foreign Minister Shidehara were horrified by the events, which, as they knew, were a result of well-planned defiance on the part of the Kwantung Army.⁹⁹ As they found it impossible to

⁹⁵ Deposition of Takeda Hisashi, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R25, E2405, p.7.

⁹⁶ Morishima Morito's affidavit, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R12, E245, p.6.

⁹⁷ Tanaka Ryūkichi's interrogation, *IMTFE* R2:1989-90.

⁹⁸ Shigemitsu to Shidehara, 24.9.1931, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R12,E:246.

⁹⁹ Hayashi to Shidehara, 19.9.1931, *IMTFE* R:2178-9 (prosecution exhibit no.2194).

force Itagaki, Ishihara and their associates to relinquish Mukden, they tried at least to lead a policy of "non-escalation"¹⁰⁰. Consequently, Wakatsuki and Shidehara pressed Army Minister Minami and Chief of General Staff Kanaya to forbid the Korean garrison from reinforcing the Kwantung Army. Without such reinforcements, they knew, it would be impossible to extend operations to the rest of Manchuria. Minami and Kanaya resisted at first but finally succumbed to Wakatsuki's pressure. Consequently, General Hayashi, commander-in-chief in Korea, was ordered not to reinforce the Kwantung Army.¹⁰¹ But the chief of the General Staff's orders were not merely ignored by the officers on the ground, they were subverted from within. For Hashimoto had sent yet another coded message to Itagaki in Mukden: "The General Staff's orders to stop the army's movements are merely designed to save face in front of the cabinet. There is no real intention to stop."¹⁰² A similar letter was secretly sent to General Hayashi. The Korean Army, Hashimoto assured, could safely cross the Yalu River, though in violation of the General Staff's formal orders.¹⁰³

What was astounding about the situation in Manchuria was the lack of any effort on the part of Ishihara, Itagaki and their friends to conceal their disobedience. Hashimoto recalled later with pride how the General Staff "daily" ordered the Kwantung Army to stop, only to receive mocking replies from Mukden: "When the army deploys forces to fulfill a certain mission, it cannot accept haphazard orders

¹⁰⁰ Shidehara to Shigemitsu Mamoru, Minister to China, 21.9.1931, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R12,E:246.

¹⁰¹ Minami Jirō's deposition, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R25, E2435, pp.4-6; Ōkura, *Niniroku*, 65.

¹⁰² *Hashimoto Shuki*, 127.

¹⁰³ *Hashimoto Shuki*, 3-5; See also Tanaka's testimony, *IMTFE* R2:1966-7.

from the General Staff."¹⁰⁴ We have seen before how the senior officers had openly relinquished control over their juniors. Since September 1931, Ishihara and his group of officers came into the open, hardly trying to conceal their pretensions to extend the empire and lead Japanese foreign policy on the ground. In this sense, the true government of the Japanese Empire did not sit in Tokyo but in Mukden, just as the General Staff was managed not from the chief's bureau but from Hashimoto's office.¹⁰⁵ According to Hashimoto, "The fall of prestige of the higher echelons was completely unprecedented in the Imperial Army."¹⁰⁶ Ishihara and his friends, for example, were the ones who debated the future form of government in Manchuria and who finally decided to reestablish the Manchu monarchy.¹⁰⁷

Prime Minister Wakatsuki, Foreign Minister Shidehara, Prince Saionji and even the emperor himself were powerless to stop the tide. Refusal to fund the army's expenses, the only measure that could effectively stop its operations, was not taken by the government, probably due to fear of the army and reluctance to bring the civil-military confrontation into the open.¹⁰⁸ With all of its decisions and threats

¹⁰⁴ Hashimoto Shuki, 128.

¹⁰⁵ SMH 1:123-4; Forbes to Secretary of State, 7.11.1931, US State Department, Records related to the Internal Affairs of Japan, Reel 1:321, p.2 (hereafter cited as *US IAJ*). And compare with Ōkawa, 1934 trial protocol, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R24, E2177A, pp.21-2; Kido Kōichi's affidavit, *IMFTE* R23:30,738-9,46. Hashimoto bragged in 1935 that he and his friends were the "real General Staff." (*Hashimoto Shuki*, 133). In certain respects, he was right.

¹⁰⁶ Hashimoto Shuki, 128.

¹⁰⁷ Katō Yōko, *Manshū Jihen kara Nitchū Sensō e* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten 2007), 17-18.

¹⁰⁸ Interrogation of General Araki Sadao, *IMTFE* R2:2220-2. According to Araki, the decision to appropriate the funds to the Kwantung Army was made by the cabinet on December 17, 1931. At that time he had already succeeded Minami as the army minister. See also Araki's interrogation and Minami's deposition, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R11, E187:S, p.1, R25, E2435, pp.6-7.

ignored, the Wakatsuki cabinet was even helpless to prevent the movement of troops from Korea to Manchuria, a measure taken illegally without imperial sanction.

The General Staff even gave a formal notification to foreign military attachés that troops were moving to Manchuria, contradicting and shaming the Foreign Ministry, which had promised otherwise. "The situation," testified General Minami, "was always ahead of the government's statement[s], putting me in a very awkward position. This was because [according to the] principle on which the army was established the War Minister could not interfere with military operations. The Kwantung Army, on the other hand, appealed to us that the situation on the spot was such that [...] it was unavoidable for them to take necessary measures of self-defense."¹⁰⁹ The defiance of the Kwantung Army staff, in other words, was made possible by a fateful amalgamation of *tōsui-ken*, giving the General Staff the prerogative to act independently of the government, and *dokudan senkō*, endowing junior officers with the right to act independently of the General Staff. As a result, the entire Manchurian territory passed into Japanese hands, and was soon to be followed by the foundation of Manchukuo, a puppet state controlled by the Kwantung Army.

¹⁰⁹ Minami Jirō's deposition, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R25, E2435, pp.8-9; Forbes to Secretary of State, 7 Nov.1931, *US IAJ*, Reel 1:321, p.2 (hereafter cited as *US-IAF*), *HULL*.

The October Incident

Moving the troops to Manchuria, according to Harada, was already a "sort of a coup d'état."¹¹⁰ Soon, Saionji's secretary had learned that this "sort" of coup could quickly escalate into a real one. In early October, Harada heard rumors that Ishihara and his group were openly discussing such a possibility. The government in Tokyo, powerless as it was, was still perceived as a nuisance.¹¹¹ "Whenever they drank," wrote Harada, "they always boasted that 'this plot was planned long ago. [...]' Furthermore, we have succeeded in this plan, therefore when we return to the homeland this time, we will carry out a coup d'état, and do away with the political party system of government. Then we will promulgate a nation of National Socialism with the Emperor as the center. We will do away with capitalists, Mitsui and Mitsubishi, and will carry out the even distribution of wealth."¹¹²

The true danger, however, came not from Ishihara but from Chō and Hashimoto. The leaders of the *Sakura-kai*, who, contrary to Ishihara, believed that internal revolution had precedence over outwards expansion, were determined to cement the achievements of the Kwantung Army in Manchuria by doing away with the reluctant Wakatsuki cabinet. As Chō disclosed later to a friend, the plan was to "set up a new government, and with the power of the new government to rally the support of the entire population towards the settlement of the Manchurian Incident." Ōkawa Shūmei, the civilian partner of the conspirators, had even more far

¹¹⁰ *SHM* 1:80.

¹¹¹ Ōkawa, 1934 trial protocol, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R24, E1175:A p.21.

¹¹² *SHM* 1:97.

reaching plans: to use Manchuria as a springboard for a pan-Asian alliance, driving the Western powers out of the continent.¹¹³ The conspirators kept their more cautious seniors more or less out of the picture. Accordingly, they scheduled a plan for October that was much bolder and bloodier than the abortive March Incident.

In early October, based on tips from his contacts, Harada began to suspect that an "action" by the army was expected in December, during the next session of the Diet.¹¹⁴ Probably, like a general preparing for the previous war, he predicted a replay of the March Incident. Other civilian leaders sensed the danger of military violence and began to change their colors. Home Minister Adachi, who merely two months earlier had proposed using the civilian police to forcefully disperse military propaganda meetings, openly defended the army's position in the cabinet. "Since then," Harada wrote wryly, "Adachi has been extremely popular with the Army."¹¹⁵ Adachi, who had some precious first-hand experience in nocturnal assassinations, probably did not want to appear on one of the black lists and end his life as his former victim, Queen Min of Korea, had.

Little did Adachi know that Hashimoto, Chō and the other ringleaders had no intentions of sparing his life. In fact, as Hashimoto recalled later, a bloodbath was prepared, along with simultaneous liquidation of the entire ruling elite. The list of would-be victims included all cabinet ministers, party leaders, business magnates,

¹¹³ Tanaka Ryūkichi's interrogation, *IMTFE* R2:1977-80, 2158-9. Compare with *Hashimoto Shuki*, 145-6; Ōkawa, 1934 trial protocol, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R24, E1175:A, p.21.

¹¹⁴ *SHM* 1:105, 116-17. Compare with Kido Kōichi's affidavit, *IMTFE* R23:30,734,7.

¹¹⁵ *SHM* 1:108. The US Embassy reported that at the time, Adachi was "said to have the largest political following of any one in office." See: Forbes to Secretary of State, 24.11.1931, *US IAJ*, Reel 1:323.

genrō, courtiers and imperial advisors. Even other officers who did not support the *Sakura-kai* were marked for arrest or elimination. According to Tanaka Kiyoshi, Hashimoto, Chō and their friends intended to use the execution squads to settle scores with personal rivals in the army.¹¹⁶

The *Sakura-kai*'s leaders drew one major lesson from the March debacle. As Ōkawa testified, the set-up was supposed to be purely military, without reliance on civilian demonstrators. Ōkawa himself had a significantly lesser role than in March: to occupy the newspapers' editorial offices with some soldiers in order to ensure positive media coverage, and to fly a flag with the inscription, "The Imperial Flag Restoration Headquarters" ("*Kinki Ishin Honbu*") on the roof of the Land Survey Department of the General Staff. Most of all, he was expected to use his considerable charisma to mobilize popular support for the revolution. Other patriotic societies, including the adherents of the nationalistic new religion *Omotokyō*, would help him by mobilizing their forces throughout Japan, taking over potential bastions of resistance to reduce the possibility for a civil war.¹¹⁷ The army, however, was in charge of the lethal part of the plan. According to the recollections of Hashimoto and Tanaka Kiyoshi, the ruling elite was to be massacred using a combined assault force of soldiers from the 23th Infantry Regiment (Imperial Guards Division), with machine guns, shells and poisonous gas. The cabinet, as it was planned, would be wiped out

¹¹⁶ Hashimoto Shuki, 151; Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki, 91, 103.

¹¹⁷ Ōkawa, 1934 trial protocol, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R24, E2177A, pp.21-2. Hashimoto possibly told some of his comrades that no civilians were involved and that Ōkawa had no role, see Wachi Takaji's interrogation, *IMTFE* R15:19,680; Hashimoto Shuki, 151,8.

during their session by naval bombers. If such a hit became impossible, the ministers were to be killed individually, preferably at the same time.¹¹⁸

In such a case, Chō Isamu, perhaps the most bloodthirsty of the rebels, was tasked with the assassination of Prime Minister Wakatsuki. Colonel Sasaki Tōichi, a former accomplice in the plan to kill Zhang Zuolin, was given the honor of liquidating Army Minister Minami. Foreign Minister Shidehara, the symbol of Japan's "weak-kneed" foreign policy and his ministry officials, including the lower ones, were also high on the kill list. Their massacre was entrusted to the squad of Major Noda Kengō. Allies of the *Sakura-kai* from the navy agreed to assassinate Count Makino, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, in his Kamakura mansion. The conspirators naturally knew that they had to overrun the Imperial Palace, as no authority could be imagined without possession of the imperial hazy center. That role was given to the infantry unit of Major Tanaka Nobuo. He and his men were ordered to overpower the Imperial Guard, isolate Hirohito from the outside world and surround him with "loyal advisors" from the *Sakura-kai*. In essence, this was an attempt to reenact the Kyoto coup d'état that launched the Meiji Restoration more than sixty years earlier. Additional teams were tasked with occupying key police stations in the capital.¹¹⁹

Intelligence was collected on the main targets by reconnaissance teams who duly noted the locations and whereabouts of their formal residences, private mansions and even the domiciles of their mistresses in Tokyo and Kamakura. The plan was scheduled for the wee hours of 24 October. The code words were "*tennō*

¹¹⁸ Hashimoto Shuki, 151; Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki, 76,89.

¹¹⁹ Hashimoto Shuki, 151-7, 60.

chūshin" (emperor at the center). Flags with symbols and slogans of the Shōwa Restoration were prepared in advance, entrusted to the hands of Dr. Uchida Kinu (Masako), a female dentist sympathetic to the rebels, mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. Following an honored tradition of Chinese and Japanese secret societies (including the *shishi* gangs), Chō led some of the ringleaders to a tavern in Shibuya, where they sealed their loyalty to the plot by signing a pledge with their blood.¹²⁰

This time the conspirators decided not to rely on feckless senior officers, but they did hope that some of them would jump on the revolution's wagon once action was taken.¹²¹ Like their role models, the leaders of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Hashimoto and his friends knew they were too young to lead the new government formally. Consequently, the plan was to use a figurehead of immense prestige, Admiral Tōgō Heihachirō, the elderly hero of the Russo-Japanese War. The admiral was supposed to "advise" the emperor to form a new cabinet, headed by General Araki Sadao with General Tatekawa as foreign minister and Ōkawa Shūmei as finance minister. The leaders of the *Sakura-kai* reserved for themselves the key roles of home minister (Hashimoto Kingorō) and Metropolitan Police commander (Chō Isamu). By holding the formidable internal security apparatus in their hands, they probably intended to control the country from behind the scenes.¹²²

¹²⁰ *Hashimoto Shuki*, 151-60; *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 93.

¹²¹ Ōkawa, 1934 trial protocol, *IMTFE* R12:15,586-7. Compare with Wachi Takaji's affidavit, *IMTFE* R15:19,668; *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 90.

¹²² *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 94; Nakano Masao in *Hashimoto Shuki*, 155-7; Araki Sadao's interrogation, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R11, E187:S, pp.1-2.

Apart from taking power, the conspirators did not have specific plans of how to rule Japan. Similarly to previous rebels, their *shishi* mentality precluded meticulous planning. They naturally thought to "crush" the corrupt politicians and business magnates, change the course of foreign policy and support the occupation of Manchuria, but these vague phrases were never translated into precise policy planning. General Araki was the designated prime minister, and yet he was never consulted nor informed about the plan. In reply to the queries of Captain Tanaka Kiyoshi, who had always been skeptical, Hashimoto, Chō and Tanaka Wataru admitted that they were mostly interested in destruction. The construction of the restoration regime, they said, would be left to civilian nationalists such as Ōkawa Shūmei.¹²³

But the planning did not go smoothly as the discord and internal feuds, developing in the *Sakura-kai* since the failure of the March Incident, had now reached a breaking point.¹²⁴ Already in the weeks prior to the March Incident, some moderate officers in the organization had been reluctant to launch a violent coup d'état. Tanaka Kiyoshi, for example, had become convinced that the plan was not merely futile but might also wreck the army, without whom national reconstruction was hardly imaginable. In October, this discord spread from the margins to the center, plaguing with doubts even members of the inner circle of the *Sakura-kai*. Higuchi Kiichirō, one of the founding fathers of the society, tried to convince Hashimoto to abandon the plan, though this had been a futile attempt leading to a

¹²³ Nakano Masao in *Hashimoto Shuki*, 155-7; *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 89.

¹²⁴ *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 86,91-2. Ōkura, *Niniroku*, 64-5; *TSS-KKCS*, 52.

"violent debate." Some of the younger officers, though ardent supporters of revolutionary violence, were still disgusted by Hashimoto's and his friends' drunkenness and lewd behavior, by their idolization of foreign role models such as Mussolini and Atatürk, and by their refusal to listen to any opinions but their own.¹²⁵ A few months later, Chō Isamu bitterly complained to a friend that "members of the *Sakura-kai* began to hesitate, and, therefore, he tried forcibly to drag them along towards execution of the plan." Even Ishihara Kanji, the architect of the Manchurian Incident, began to oppose the idea of a coup d'état in Tokyo.¹²⁶

Finally, an unknown person gave up the details of the plan to the authorities.¹²⁷ Ōkawa Shūmei and Chō Isamu believed that the traitor was Lieutenant-Colonel Nemoto, who had gotten cold feet at the last moment. Some young officers preferred to blame Ōkawa himself. According to another opinion, Hashimoto went too far in his attempts to win over senior officers. He and his friends were extremely negligent about secrecy and openly disclosed their plans in numerous drunken parties. According to two different testimonies, Chō had even bragged about the plan in the middle of Shinjuku station. Completely unaware of the crowds around him, he cried out loud that they would "win the streets of Tokyo with

¹²⁵ Tanaka Kiyoshi *Shuki*, 91-2,6; Higuchi, *Kaisōroku*, 288-9; Ōkura, *Niniroku*, 64-7; *KKN* 2:94; "Chō Isamu Shuki", op.cit. in Ōtani Keijirō, *Rakujitsu no Joshō: Shōwa Rikugunshi* (Tokyo: Yagumo Shoten, 1959), 46; Suematsu Tahei complained in his memoirs that the meetings were filled with the "odors" of Mussolini and Atatürk (*Watakushi no Shōwashi*, 43).

¹²⁶ Tanaka Ryūkichi's interrogation, *IMFTE* R2:2016. Corroborated by "Chō Isamu Shuki", op.cit. in Ōtani, *Rakujitsu*, 46; Ogata, *Defiance*, 98.

¹²⁷ For some of the theories, according to different testimonies, see Nakano Masao in *Hashimoto Shuki*, 167-8.

blood and gore," gesturing wildly as if he were sword-fighting.¹²⁸ Therefore, it would not be unreasonable to assume that information about the conspiracy simultaneously leaked from several quarters.

In any case, the rumors reached General Araki Sadao, the designated prime minister of the rebels, who informed Army Minister Minami. The two consulted about the matter, and Araki, still highly popular among conspirators in the army, decided to use his authority to crush the plan on Minami's behalf. Subsequent events were quick to unfold. Araki later told Saionji's secretary, Baron Harada, that on October 16 he had surprised the leaders of the conspiracy, Hashimoto, Chō and the others, in a tavern at Kyōbashi, one of their favorite drinking haunts. At that time, Hashimoto, Chō and their friends were virtually living in taverns, plotting, drinking and carousing with geisha. Chō later bragged that by doing this, they imitated their cherished role models, the *shishi* of the Meiji Restoration. Hashimoto neglected his home life so badly that his wife was seeking a divorce.¹²⁹ General Araki, always a champion of austere military morals, was thoroughly disgusted. "Nothing can be effectuated by airing your opinions here while drinking sake and becoming drunk," Araki remonstrated with his juniors. "You must refrain from doing anything violent or thoughtless. The army officers of Japan are the so-called Kusanagi [Kusunoki] sword; the Kusanagi sword should always be polished, but it

¹²⁸ Ōtani, *Rakujitsu*, 46, "Chō Isamu Shuki", op. cit. in *ibid.* About Chō's drunken bragging and the Sakura-kai's leaders indiscreet behavior, see Ōkura, *Niniroku*, 65. Corroborated by Suematsu, *Watakushi no Shōwashi*, 52. See also: Tanaka Ryūkichi's interrogation, *IMTFE R2:1981*; Araki's testimony, reproduced in *Hashimoto Shuki*, 169; Hashimoto's testimony in *ibid.*, 166; *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 92, 9; Shillony, *Revolt in Japan*, 28.

¹²⁹ "Chō Isamu Shuki", op. cit. in Ōtani, *Rakujitu*, 45; *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 92; Karita, "Jūgatsu Jiken" 1:319.

should not be indiscriminately drawn from its scabbard. It is almost inconceivable that I should have to come here in military uniform where you are drinking sake in order to [... admonish] you on this sort of matter. You must be more discreet."¹³⁰

It is clear from several sources that the conversation in Kyōbashi did take place, but it is difficult to know whether these were the exact words that Araki said, as they appear only in his own testimony to Harada.¹³¹ This dramatic dialogue, indeed, smacks of typical Arakian hyperbole. But whatever Araki's precise words were, his report to Harada exposed important patterns of the army's ideology—the silent basic assumptions that are present even in *post-facto* apologetic accounts. Araki did not treat Hashimoto and his friends as traitors and conspirators but as children who erred in their enthusiasm. He reprimanded them for immoral behavior (drinking sake) and for "thoughtlessly" using violence. Violence in itself was not condemned, as shown by Araki's next two sentences: The sword of the army, associated with the medieval legendary loyalist Kusunoki Masashige, should be "polished" but not "indiscriminately drawn." In other words, Araki had, rather brazenly, suggested to Harada, Saionji and the other leaders of the government that the sword was there—and that it could be drawn again at will.

¹³⁰ *SHM* 1:137-8. Compare with *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 97.

¹³¹ See for example Wachi Takaji's affidavit, *IMTFE* R15:19,667. According to Wachi, it was Hashimoto who confided the plan to Araki, who told Minami in turn. Hashimoto himself confirmed that Araki acted against the coup and met Chō (not Hashimoto) in the tavern. See: *Hashimoto Shuki*, 166. There is also another testimony of Araki, different in details from his confession to Harada, reproduced in *ibid.*, 169. Compare to the description of this scene in Chō's memoirs, *op. cit.* in Ōtani, *Rakujitsu*, 46, as well as *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 87. Araki himself stated that he forgot the name of the informer, telling his American interrogators that he was notified by the army minister. See Araki's interrogation, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R11, E187:S, p.2.

The next day, following a decision taken in a nocturnal meeting at Minami's residence, the conspirators were arrested by military policemen at their tavern. The *Kempeitai* troops, equipped with police cars and accompanied by reporters, surrounded the entire establishment. The commander of Tokyo's Military Police promised to treat the prisoners "according to the spirit of Bushido." The practical meaning of this lofty declaration was to accommodate them in comfortable conditions, with alcohol and Geisha on demand.¹³² Hashimoto remained in confinement for 25 days, and along with his comrades, was later transferred to a unit far away from Tokyo.

Wakatsuki, Shidehara, Saionji and Harada were, yet again, afraid to confront the army, and therefore allowed the General Staff to whitewash the rebellious plans of its own officers. The perpetrators were anyway out of bounds for the civilian justice system, as a law from 1921 gave the army exclusive jurisdiction over soldiers even when they committed civil crimes.¹³³ How the Imperial Japanese Army dealt with such political infractions was crystal clear to everyone involved: It did nothing. Certainly, the Military Penal Code, which invoked the death penalty for such cases, was never used against Hashimoto and his friends. As General Nagata told a high court official, "though they had to be punished according to the Military Penal Code, the fact that most of them repented and reflected on the error of their ways, and in

¹³² Wachi Takaji's interrogation, *IMFTE* R15:19,679; Suematsu, *Watakushi no Shōwashi*, 53; *KKN* 2:107; *Hashimoto Shuki*, 167. See also the testimony of Dr. Uchida Masako, reproduced in *ibid.* 172-3; *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 97.

¹³³ "Rikugun Gunpō Kaigihō", 26.4.1921, *Kanpō* 63, 26.4.1921. For analysis see: David A. Sneider, "Action and Oratory: The Trials of the of the May 15th Incident of 1932", *Law in Japan* 23:67 (1990), 14.

consideration of their motives, their patriotic spirit and the prestige of the army, they were dealt with in an administrative manner."¹³⁴ When one member of the Privy Council tried to gently remind Army Minister Minami about the need to punish the rebels, he was rudely brushed aside and told to "leave it to the army." As a result, the counselor backed off without further ado. Inquiries from the Justice Ministry were ignored as well.¹³⁵ The commanding generals were afraid of the young officers, and the civilian government feared the army as a whole, shaking from the mere thought of further assassinations and coups d'état.

There was yet another important reason for inaction, a concern that had been plaguing the political system since the assassination of Queen Min in 1895: If the affair became public, the honor of the emperor's army might be sullied. Therefore, everyone cooperated in the cover-up attempts. Senior officers such as Koiso and Tatekawa were naturally unwilling to allow a public trial, in which their own involvement in the March Incident might be exposed.¹³⁶ Likewise, Generals Minami and Kanaya were reluctant to expose to the world what the government already knew: that they were powerless to control their own army. The leaders of the government had an interest to rein the army in, but (as in 1895 and 1928) not at the price of internationally shaming Japan.

¹³⁴ *KKN* 2:148. See also Ogata, *Defiance*, 100.

¹³⁵ "Minutes of the Conference on the China Incident Report dated December 9th 1931", *IMTFE-CJEJ*, R24, E2205:A, p.2; Sneider, "Action and Oratory", 14.

¹³⁶ *KKN* 2:93; *TSS-KKCS*, 49.

Consequently, even Foreign Minister Shidehara, the moderate politician so detested by the army and the man whose name appeared in every list of "traitors for elimination," publicly cooperated with the whitewashing. In a conversation with an American diplomat, he said that "the affair was minor and that there had been no danger and insufficient evidence to implicate or justify the prosecution of any civilians. The army he said had its own discipline, which he could not discuss."¹³⁷ Based on such information, the American ambassador, W. Cameron Forbes, reported in the beginning of November that "those officers who were put under restraint have now been released, possibly because they could not be punished without the matter becoming public, or possibly because the temper of the army at the present time would render unwise such a procedure."¹³⁸ The government had missed yet another chance to discipline the army, opening with its own hands the door to the violent chaos of the early 1930s.

Hashimoto Kingorō and the other leaders of the *Sakura-kai* resumed their military careers shortly after the affair, some of them later gaining notoriety as war criminals. Hashimoto was involved in the sinking of the US ship Panay in 1937, one of the crimes that earned him a life sentence at the postwar Tokyo Trials. Chō Isamu, perhaps the most bloodthirsty member of the *Sakura-kai*, was one of the masterminds of the Nanjing Massacre in 1937. He ended up committing suicide along with his commanding officer at the close of the Okinawan Campaign. His close colleague Amano Isamu, who had been serving as a colonel in Manchuria in 1945,

¹³⁷ Edwin N. Neville, Charge d'Affairs (Tokyo) to the secretary of state, 21.10.1931, *US IAJ* Reel 1:314, *HULL*.

¹³⁸ Forbes to Secretary of State, 7.11.1931, *US IAJ* Reel 1:320, *HULL*.

cold bloodedly massacred Soviet citizens in response to the Russian declaration of war and then ended his life in a Siberian prison camp. Lieutenant Tanaka Wataru resumed the path of rebellion and was finally driven to suicide after the abortive coup d'état of February 26, 1936.¹³⁹

But Higuchi Kiichirō, the most moderate member of the *Sakura-kai*'s inner circle, was remembered for remarkably different feats. In 1938, as the Harbin *Tokumu Kikan* director, without securing permission from his superiors, he saved an unknown number of freezing Jewish refugees by admitting them to Manchurian territory. That act of *dokudan senkō* was performed in defiance of protests from the Nazi government and the Japanese Foreign Ministry alike. Higuchi, as in the "good old days" of the Manchurian Incident, ensured his superiors that they had no right to interfere with his *dokudan senkō*. Manchukuo, he wrote rather brazenly, was an independent country, neither a dependent of Germany nor of Japan (!) As such, it had a full right to make a "sovereign" decision. The commanders of the Kwantung Army, General Ueda Kenkichi and his chief of staff Tōjō Hideki (future prime minister of Japan), refused to punish their defiant subordinate, following a pattern remarkably similar to the whitewashing of military disobedience numerous times before. Instead, they had Higuchi transferred away from Manchuria. In this case, it

¹³⁹ Wachi Takaji's affidavit, *IMTFE* R15:19,667; Araki Sadao's interrogation, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R11, E187:S, pp.1-2; Hashimoto Kingorō's interrogation, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R12,E258, p.2; Nakano Masao in *Hashimoto Shuki*, 8-10; Cameron M. Craig, "Race and Identity: The Culture of Combat in the Pacific War," *The International History Review*, 27:3 (September, 2005), 560. Hashimoto was retired from the army in October 1936, probably as a result of the February Incident. In the following years, apart from a brief return to active service in China between 1937 and 1939, he had a second career as a leading nationalist agitator. See also: Amano Isamu's interrogation, *IMTFE-CJEJ* R24, E2164, pp.1-2.

seems, the Imperial Army's culture of disobedience had taken a uniquely humane form.¹⁴⁰

Conclusion: from Defiance to Rebellion

The two conspiracies of the *Sakura-kai*, in March and October 1931, opened a new phase in the history of Japanese military disobedience. After half a century, the powerful lesson of the Satsuma Rebellion was finally forgotten in Japanese military circles. Fifty three years after Saigō Takamori's death, Japanese officers were again raising the banner of violent rebellion against their own government, and this time with cutting-edge tools such as bombs and airplanes.

This return to violence had multiple reasons. As we have seen in previous chapters, the motor of violence among Japanese assassins was optimism: a belief that by removing a small number of people, they could truly make a change. All previous assassins were optimistic, but only in certain respects. Miura Gorō and Kōmoto Daisaku hoped to change Japanese policy, but they could not hope to do so by striking a direct blow at the government. Rather, they attempted to strike at the margins, taking down victims in Seoul and in Mukden, hoping that the indirect effect of their actions would change national policy in the right direction. The optimism of Hashimoto and his friends, however, reached entirely new heights. They had good reasons to believe in their power to take over the government through a

¹⁴⁰ Ben-Ami Shillony, *The Jews and the Japanese: the Successful Outsiders* (Rutland, Vt.: C.E. Tuttle, 1992), 182-3; Hayasaka Takashi, *Shikikan no Ketsudan: Manshū to Atsu no Shōgun Higuchi Kiichirō* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 2010), 125-49.

concentrated blow at the center. After all, they led the first cross-army conspiratorial organization in the history of modern Japan, and they enjoyed support by senior officers, generous backing of financial patrons and strong cooperation with a dense web of violent civilian organizations. The decision to turn to violence was also a culminating effect of past precedents, acts of defiance that remained unpunished. If the assassination of a Chinese leader under "patriotic" pretexts was forgiven so easily, then killing Japanese leaders to pursue similar goals was arguably just a small step further.

Historically speaking, the fiasco of the *Sakura-kai* had several important ramifications. On the one hand, the failure of the army to punish Hashimoto and his friends encouraged further plotting by subsequent groups. But on the other hand, the events surrounding the defeat of the *Sakura-kai*'s conspiracies shattered the unity of oppositional Japanese officers. Along with the bloodbath of the abortive May Incident, several months later, the October failure sharpened the lines between officers endorsing the new waves of violence and those opposing it.¹⁴¹ The action Araki took against the October Incident, the subversion exercised by officers in the Army Ministry, Ugaki's double game, and the rumors that Ōkawa betrayed the coup to the authorities radicalized the animosity between officers, reshuffling them into new factions that were bitterly hostile to one another.¹⁴²

Ever radicalizing, the army was increasingly defiant of the government as an institution, producing both rebellions and unauthorized operations in Manchuria and

¹⁴¹ *Ogata*, 99.

¹⁴² Shillony, *Revolt in Japan*, 28-9; Hata, *Gun Fashizumu*, 31, 41-4.

in North China. But at the same time, its internal structure had weakened almost to the breaking point. Discipline was extremely tenuous, and control by senior officers over their juniors grew ever weaker.

For years, generals such as Araki, Ugaki and Minami used the intransigence of their subordinates as a tool of political blackmail against the government. Soldiers could be used against the government in an emergency, wrote Ugaki, but not thoughtlessly or without preparation. "We must control the rash and blind acts of the young officers," he added—lest they be manipulated by right-wing civilian figures such as Ōkawa Shūmei.¹⁴³ But neither Ugaki nor his fellow generals could force the genie back into the bottle, nor could they resume the control they had lost. Yet again, the combination of strength and weakness, of outer formidability and internal chaos, was the key to understanding both the dynamics of 1931 and the violent rebellions in the years ahead.¹⁴⁴ More than anything else, it was this combination that rendered the Japanese government completely incompetent in coping with unfolding events. The army, strong in its weakness, was virtually unapproachable. The prime minister had institutional channels to deal with the army minister and the chief of the General Staff, but how could he parley with junior officers in Tokyo or in Manchuria—the people who held actual power? The democratization of disobedience, a process that was moving the focal point of rebellion to increasingly junior officers, calcified the arteries of communication between the civilian and the military elites.

¹⁴³ "Kokka sore ayashi," reproduced in Karita, *Ōkawa Shūmei*, 322.

¹⁴⁴ Mori, *Nihon Rikugun*, 117.

By 1931, the situation had become far worse than it had been during the time of the Taishō political crisis. If Army Minister Uehara, the only person who could be approached by the government in 1912, was a weak leader, his successor in 1931, Minami Jirō, was almost irrelevant. In a cabinet meeting on October 10, Prime Minister Wakatsuki lamented, saying "When I admonish the War Minister, he always says that he'll immediately warn army officials at the site of the incident; however, army officials in Manchuria are acting arbitrarily in complete disregard of the warnings of the War Minister."¹⁴⁵ Some civilian leaders, such as Harada Kumao, placed the blame on General Minami's incompetence. "He is useless," said Harada in frustration, "like beating the air." Chief of the General Staff Kanaya Hanzō, a notorious alcoholic, was also a "misfit," as General Matsui Iwane openly told Harada. Hashimoto, the leader of the *Sakura-kai*, actually agreed, writing in his secret memoirs that the chief of the General Staff reminded him of a "scarecrow."¹⁴⁶ Nor could the commanders of individual units control their officers any better. Hashimoto wrote that Ishihara, Itagaki and their friends "naturally" ignored General Honjō, the commander of the Kwantung Army, as if such disobedience was an ordinary law of nature. "Never mind Honjō," Itagaki told a colleague. "It's Ishihara's war."¹⁴⁷ Disobedience in the Japanese Army had ceased to be an exception, having become a cultural norm.

¹⁴⁵ *SHM* 1:116-17.

¹⁴⁶ *SHM* 1:67, 131; *Hashimoto Shuki*, 128. Compare with Wakatsuki Rejirō's affidavit and Araki's interrogation, *IMTFE-CJEJ*, R11, E162, pp.1-2, E187:T, p.2.

¹⁴⁷ *Hashimoto Shuki*, 127-8; Peattie, *Ishiwara*, 122-3.

The situation only became more aggravated after the dissolution of the *Sakura-kai*. The failure of mid-ranking officers, elite Staff College graduates such as Hashimoto Kingorō, to overthrow the government deepened the "democratization of disobedience" in the Japanese Army by clearing the stage for younger officers. These people, completely out of touch with senior generals, were far more resolute and difficult to control. Never again would a coup be abolished only because Ugaki had changed his mind, or because Araki had remonstrated the organizers. The deluxe "arrest conditions" of the *Sakura-kai* leaders, with luxurious inn rooms, sake and geisha, disgusted many of their younger followers and convinced them that they were merely used by their superior officers.

In the future, said Lieutenant Suematsu Tahei, he would not follow Hashimoto nor anyone else, "only His Majesty the Emperor."¹⁴⁸ Suematsu, a notorious rebel, did not disavow revolutionary violence, which he continued to plot and practice. He was just refusing to accept the leadership of senior officers, leaning instead on the emperor. However, he was not referring to the living individual Hirohito, who was well beyond his reach, but to the imperial hazy center as an idea. By submitting himself to imagined authority, his declaration amounted to a refusal to follow anyone but himself. In the guise of total submission to the emperor, the young officers defied *all* of their superiors, even radicals such as Hashimoto.

From that point on, organized coup plans such as the *Sakura-kai*'s would be denounced by many young officers as "fascism," a term that became code for

¹⁴⁸ Suematsu, *Watakushi no Shōwashi*, 59.

haughtiness and blind imitation of foreign ideas, just like Hashimoto's endless blather about Mussolini and Atatürk.¹⁴⁹ And as rebellious officers had few effective ways, in the absence of agreed authority, to solve disagreements and conflicts between themselves, the Imperial Japanese Army quickly sunk into its own civil war.¹⁵⁰

Another alarming development in 1931 was the increasing extent of state involution. During the assassination of Queen Min, as we have seen, the cooperation of the army in Korea with civilian *sōshi* had blurred the distinction between military activists and civilian adventurers. In 1931, this "rotten but unbreakable connection", to use the words of Tanaka Kiyoshi, grew ever stronger. Officers such as Hashimoto were much more influenced by civilian, nationalist gurus such as Ōkawa Shūmei than by their own military superiors.¹⁵¹

Hashimoto's recollections of the days subsequent to the Manchurian incidents are quite astounding in this sense. He describes how right-wing political activists, some of them responsible for fomenting and planning terror and rebellion against the Japanese government, were frequent guests in General Staff headquarters, regularly feted, dined and wined by senior officers. Funds from the General Staff regularly flowed to such activists, never to be seen again. Civilian patriots had even treated military armaments as their private property. General

¹⁴⁹ Ibid; Suematsu, *Watakushi no Shōwashi*, 43, 53-4, 61.

¹⁵⁰ General Ugaki feared such an outcome already after the March Incident. See: "Kokka sore ayashi", reproduced in Karita, *Ōkawa Shūmei*, 321.

¹⁵¹ *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 85; Araki Sadao's interrogation, *IMFTE-CJEJ* R11, E187:T, p.1; Higuchi, *Kaisōroku*, 288. Compare with Ugaki, "Kokka sore o ayashi", reproduced in Karita, *Ōkawa Shūmei*, 321.

Koiso had to implore Ōkawa's *sōshi* to return the bombs borrowed for the March Incident. Being turned away for months, he was even ready to pay for them. Only through the intervention of Marquis Tokugawa Yoshichika, the financial patron of the *sōshi*, was Koiso able to rescue the bombs from their clutches.¹⁵² The high command of the army was enmeshed with these activists politically, socially and financially alike. Even the dissolute *shishi* culture of the "patriotic societies" had spread to their army allies, as demonstrated by the life-style of debauchery and drinking adopted by Chō, Hashimoto and the inner circle of the *Sakura-kai*.¹⁵³

Like a contagious disease, the defiant attitude of the army and its allies from the nationalist societies spread to other parts of the government apparatus until, in the words of one rear-admiral, "the whole works went crazy."¹⁵⁴ The nationalist organization *Kokuhonsha*, headed by Count Hiranuma Kiichirō from the Privy Council, counted prosecutors and Justice Ministry officials among its members. Being intimately connected with nationalist activists, the agents of the *Kokuhonsha* took care that even assassins would be treated leniently by the courts. Bribes were distributed lavishly by such societies, as well as by the Kwantung Army, further corrupting the civilian apparatus.¹⁵⁵ Senior officials such as Home Minister Adachi increasingly drifted to the side of the rebellious officers. In mid-October, after

¹⁵² Tokugawa, *Saigo no Tonosama*, 135-6. See also Tokugawa's affidavit, *IMTFE-CJEJ*, R11, E158, p.1; Koiso, *Katsuzan*, 512-4; Tanaka, "Iwayuru Sangatsu Jiken", 6. For related correspondence see Karita, *Ōkawa Shūmei*, 331-48.

¹⁵³ *SMH* 1:138; *KKN* 2:147-8; *Hashimoto Shuki*, 134-7; *Tanaka Kiyoshi Shuki*, 86; Ōkura, *Niniroku*, 64-5; Tokugawa, *Saigo no Tonosama*, 140.

¹⁵⁴ Taken from a personal letter of this unnamed rear admiral to the American historian Yale Maxon, op. cit. in Maxon, *Control*, 104-5.

¹⁵⁵ Maxon, *Control*, 106-7; Ogata, *Defiance*, 94.

Hashimoto and his friends had been arrested by the Military Police, even young officials from the Foreign Ministry "seemed to have become more sympathetic with the army and they talked as though they felt that there was nothing dangerous in the present situation."¹⁵⁶

Even Harada Kumao, Saionji's right hand man and certainly not an admirer of the army, was inadvertently influenced by this process of state involution. As part of his duties to gather intelligence for his boss, he regularly converged with officers in order to become acquainted with the situation inside the army. However, the information conveyed by these sources was neither neutral nor innocent. Harada's eyes inside the army certainly gave him important knowledge, but they also distorted his view. It was Colonel Inoue in March and General Araki in October, who convinced Harada by giving him manipulated intelligence, that the situation was not as grave as he believed.¹⁵⁷ They cajoled him, and through him also Prince Saionji, not to press for serious action against the military offenders. At the Tokyo trials, Marquis Kido, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, lamented that military disobedience was a "curse" that brought upon Japan the misfortunes of war, defeat and occupation. If that was so, then Kido, Harada, Saionji and their government colleagues, by their failure to act, had contributed their own part to its perpetuation.

¹⁵⁶ *SHM* 1:123-4, 128-9. For similar sentiments among Japanese diplomats, see also: Ohashi, Consul General in Harbin, to Shidehara, 7 Nov. 1931, *IMFTE-CJEJ*, R15, E700, p.1.

¹⁵⁷ *SHM* 1:31-2, 138.

Conclusion

The Dreadful and the Trivial

The author has often observed that in the genesis of great events, men generally possess no inkling of what their actions portend. This problem is not, as one might suppose, a result of men's blindness to the consequences of their actions. Rather it is a result of the mad way the dreadful turns on the trivial when the ends of one man cross the ends of another. [...] In the prosecution of competing human interests, the result is always unknown, and all too often terrifying.

Scott Baker, *The Prince of Nothing*

This study has established that a culture of disobedience, an ideological pattern of defiance and rebellion, was a constant feature of Japanese military life since the Meiji Restoration. Having its roots in the *shishi* culture of the late Tokugawa period, it migrated into the Meiji Era, bloomed in the 1870s and exploded during the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877. The cures applied by the founders of the Imperial Army, most of all Yamagata Aritomo, solved the problem in the short run, but eventually allowed it to perpetuate in different forms. The culture of disobedience was not extinguished. Rather, when smashed with Yamagata's hammer, it broke into two independent components, which kept on living underground.

The first was a new form of elite disobedience gradually developed through the *tōsui-ken* ideology. The second, preserved among civilian groups such as the *sōshi* and *rōnin* in Korea and Manchuria, as well as patriotic societies in mainland

Japan, was the *shishi* tradition of the mixed gangs. The *sōshi* espoused an anarchic life style, direct action and reckless violence in loose, chaotic organizations. For a long time, they were not able to gather enough power to pose a significant risk to the government in Japan, but Korea was another story. In 1895, during the assassination of Queen Min, elite disobedience from above and *shishi*-style disobedience from below converged through the cooperation between General Miura and the Seoul *sōshi*. From that year, through the process of involution, *shishi* culture slowly crept back from civilian nationalist groupings into the officer corps. While the Taishō political crisis of 1912 was still a pure manifestation of elite *tōsui-ken* disobedience, the assassination of Zhang Zuolin had a larger *shishi* component to it, exemplified through Kōmoto's chaotic behavior. Ironically, the organizational code of the mixed gangs, imitated again and again by nationalist civilians and officers, was a certain safety valve for the government. As long as disobedient officers and civilians were not able to overcome the loose organizational tradition of the *shishi*, the chance for methodically organized coups d'état was relatively slim.

And yet, in 1931, the *Sakura-kai* had tried to do just that. Hashimoto, Chō and their colleagues, steeped as they were in dissolute, drunken and violent *shishi* habits, attempted to organize conspiratorial groups in a structure akin to the inter-domainal alliance of the late 1860s. They failed, but the increasing tendency of rebellious officers to organize themselves in competing army-wide alliances heralded the worst for the future. In that respect, the two conspiracies of the *Sakura-kai*, the March and October Incidents, were a turning point for the worse.

Shortly afterwards, a nationalistic society called *Ketsumeidan* (Blood Pledge Society) assassinated a business magnate and a former finance minister.¹ A few months later, in May 1932, a well-organized insurrection of navy and army officers, in cooperation with civilian nationalists, led to the assassination of Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi. These rebels, like so many of their predecessors, took the *shishi* as their role model. Their attempt to take control of the capital failed, but in their trial, they were able to propagate their views far and wide.² Just as in previous instances, large segments of the army, the press and the general public adored the conspirators' patriotic motives. When faced with such noble sentiments, said one of the defense attorneys, the court had to refrain from applying the law, recognizing instead that the assassination of the prime minister was driven by fate and the momentum of history. He elaborated on the precedent of the *shishi*, concluding that pure-hearted loyalty to the emperor was the spirit of the law, a mysterious sentiment that only Japanese subjects could understand. Judging the defendants severely would undermine that lofty spirit, destroying the very basis of the Japanese national polity.³

In response, prosecutor Yamamoto Kōji attacked not only the defendants, but the entire culture of disobedience which generated their motives. In a presentation which provoked blind rage in the navy and large segments of the

¹ Stephen S. Large, "Nationalist Extremism in Early Shōwa Japan: Inoue Nisshō and the 'Blood-Pledge Corps Incident', 1932", *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 35:3 (2001), pp.533-64.

² For historical surveys of the May, 1932 Incident see Sneider, "Action and Oratory", 3-9; Wagatsuma Sakae et. al, eds, *Nihon Seiji Saiban Shiroku: Shōwa* (Tokyo: Daiichi Hōki Shuppan, 1968-70) 1:462-551 (hereafter cited as *NSSS-S*).

³ Sneider, "Action and Oratory", 32-7.

public, the prosecutor emphasized that political violence should be punished mercilessly without any regard for the perpetrators motives, patriotism or alleged loyalty to the emperor. In addition, he quoted in length from the Imperial Rescript for Soldiers and Sailors and the Navy Penal Code, both of which forbade soldiers to meddle in politics. Finally, Yamamoto urged the court to treat the defendants in the same manner that rebels were punished in the 1870s. In effect, the prosecutor attempted to rewind the clock, undo the process unfolding since 1878 and reprogram civil-military relations according to the avowed intention of the Imperial Army and Navy's founders: total separation between the armed forces and politics. Prosecutor Yamamoto paid dearly for his bravery. The public censure forced him to resign from the navy, practically destroying his legal career.⁴

The navy judges, too, rejected Yamamoto's view, and elaborated instead on the pure-hearted patriotism of the defendants. Accordingly, the punishments for the main offenders were relatively light: fifteen years in jail, instead of execution and life imprisonment, as demanded by the prosecution. "Although their [the defendants'] criminal culpability is truly significant," ruled the chief judge, "the depth of their patriotism must be acknowledged." The army court was even more lenient, and its emphasis on the defendants' purity of motives was significantly more pronounced.⁵ The patterns set in the late Tokugawa period, emphasizing purity of motives over the consequences of one's act, became almost mainstream in the army, navy and large

⁴ Ibid, 28-32, 40-1.

⁵ Ibid, 24-5, 37-42.

segments of the public and the press. Accordingly, the example set by the May 1932 conspirators encouraged copycats to try again.

In the next four years, the focus of rebellious violence shifted yet again to the army, where two hostile groups, the Control Faction (*Tōsei-ha*) and the Imperial Way faction (*Kōdō-ha*) fought for control over the higher echelons. Young officers, educated into the culture of disobedience, joined the fray, forming violent underground groups, usually in support of *Kōdō-ha*. In 1935, after several conspiracies were uncovered and nipped in the bud, this civil war inside the army reached a breaking point, when a young officer assassinated General Nagata Tetsuzan, one of the leaders of *Tōsei-ha*.⁶

This assassination was one of the catalysts to the greatest rebellion in modern Japanese history, the so-called “February Incident” of 1936. In “four days of snow and blood,” to use the name of one popular movie made about this incident, a group of young officers marshalled more than one thousand soldiers and started a killing spree in central Tokyo. Leading their troops in a snow storm, they took over key parts of the capital and assassinated several prominent victims, both civilian and military. Japan’s Finance Minister, Baron Takahashi Korekiyō, was murdered in his bed because of his resistance to the expansion of the army’s budget. Other victims were Admiral Saitō Makoto, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal and General Watanabe Jūtarō, Inspector General of Military Education. Prime Minister Okada Keisuke and Grand Chamberlain Suzuki Kentarō barely escaped with their lives. The coup d’état

⁶ For a thorough discussion of the factional rivalry inside the army, see: James B. Crowley, “Japanese Army Factionalism in the Early 1930s”, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 21:3 (May, 1962), 309-26. On the assassination of Nagata, see also: *NSSS-S* 2:148-57.

was crushed after four days, primarily due to assertive, personal intervention by Emperor Hirohito. This time the perpetrators were severely punished, and most of them, including their civilian mentors, ended their lives on the gallows. Mobilizing rank-and-file troops to kill the emperor's closest advisors had apparently crossed an invisible red line. The *Kōdō-ha* faction was duly dispersed and its leader, General Mazaki, was shown the way out of the army.⁷

But the General Staff, now under uncontested *Tōsei-ha* control, was able to use the events to the army's advantage.⁸ The *bukansei* system, abolished by Prime Minister Yamamoto in 1913, was restored, allowing the army to overthrow cabinets again by refusing to appoint a minister. These powers were not merely on paper: the army leaders used them almost immediately to overthrow Prime Minister Hirota Kōki and prevent the formation of another cabinet by General Ugaki, unloved because of the unpopular structural reforms he led in 1925 and his ambiguous role in the March Incident.⁹ Gradually, the power of the army in successive cabinets was increasing, and, as before, officers were advancing far deeper into China in defiance of their superiors, civilian and military alike.

Later in 1936, young officers led by Colonel Mutō Akira and the intelligence specialist Doihara Kenji instigated a "Mongolian independence movement,"

⁷ For a full length study of the incident in English, see: Shillony, *Revolt in Japan*. For other surveys see Maxon, *Control*, 108-2; *NSSS-S* 2:157-245; Marion Laurinat, *Kita Ikki (1883-1937) und der Februarputsch 1936* (Munster: Lit., 2006).

⁸ Shillony, *Revolt in Japan*, 209-10.

⁹ Shillony, *Revolt in Japan*, 210; Tanaka, "Iwayuru Sangatsu Jiken", 9.

reenacting the Manchurian Incident of 1931.¹⁰ Ishihara Kanji, the architect of the previous incident and now the operations chief at the General Staff, tried to stop the new encroachment. In a rare fit of historical irony, he was told by Mutō that “my current behavior is similar to yours during the Manchurian Incident. I am surprised to hear such things from you now.”¹¹ Following the process delineated throughout this study, the army became simultaneously stronger and weaker – powerful as an institution **within** the state, but devoid of any ability to control its own junior officers.

The appointment of General Tōjō Hideki to the premiership in 1941 might be seen as a final attempt to control the army by merging it with the government. This endeavor proved successful in a certain way, as Tōjō controlled the army as no leader had before, but even then military defiance did not stop.¹² In the eve of the Pearl Harbor attack, for example, two army majors delayed the transmission of a personal appeal for peace from President Roosevelt to Emperor Hirohito, intentionally hiding information from their sovereign in order to ensure that war broke out. This act probably lacked strategic significance, and yet it shows the extent to which army defiance lived on even in 1941.¹³ Along with Prime Minister Tōjō, the

¹⁰ For a study of this incident, see: B. Winston Kahn, *Doihara Kenji and the "North China Autonomy Movement", 1935-6* (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1973).

¹¹ Tsutsui Kyotada, *Shōwaki Nihon no Kōzō: sono Rekishi Shakaiteki Kōsatsu* (Tokyo: Yūhikaku, 1984), 97.

¹² Maxon, *Control*, 176, 214-15, 18-19.

¹³ Iguchi Takeo, *Demystifying Pearl Harbor: A New Perspective from Japan*, trans. David Noble (Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2010), 218-36, 41. For the version of one of these officers see: Tōmura Morio, "Shōwa Tennō eno Shinden wo naze Watashi wa okuraseta no ka?", *Shokun!* (February, 1992), 206-9. The official at the Japanese embassy in Washington, who initiated direct communication between Roosevelt and the Emperor as a last ditch attempt to avoid war, were afraid to be killed by

army and navy led Japan into the Pacific War and finally to the disintegration of the empire which had been built since 1895.

There is an ongoing controversy, quite difficult to solve, about the role of military disobedience in this tragedy. During the Pacific War, the American journalist Hugh Byas, who lived in Japan for many years as a correspondent, published an influential book titled *Government by Assassination*. In his vivid account, Byas argued that the military assassins and their allies from the patriotic societies effectively ruled Japan during the 1930s, pushing timid and cowardly civilian cabinets to the path of internal dictatorship and international aggression. "The army," wrote Byas, "installed itself in power with the concurrence of a docile nation intoxicated by foreign war, its civilian leaders terrorized by assassination."¹⁴ Some Japanese scholars supported this view. Tanaka Azusa, for example, wrote that the "incidents" engineered by the army were leading and manipulating the course of Shōwa history up to the Pacific War.¹⁵

Other scholars, however, have been more doubtful. James Crowley, a representative of the so-called "realist approach" to international relations, strongly argued that the impact of rebellious officers on national policy was minimal. The assassinations, according to Crowley, did not significantly influence Japan's foreign policy, largely developed in the cabinet and other responsible agencies through legal

radical army elements. See: Roger B. Jeans, *Terasaki Hidenari, Pearl Harbor and Occupied Japan: A Bridge to Reality* (Lanham, MD.: Lexington Books, 2009), 115-6.

¹⁴ Byas, *Government by Assassination*, 39.

¹⁵ Tanaka, "Iwayuru Sangatsu Jiken", 1.

means. In view of this fact, Crowley concludes that the military rebellions of the 1930s, dangerous as they were to individual Japanese leaders, produced more noise than essence.¹⁶

However, Crowley has a significant blind spot: he failed to see that foreign policy, indeed, policy in general, is never a linear process. At any given point of time, statesmen are subject to contradicting pressures from multiple quarters, forcing them to decide between different alternatives, change their plans or compromise. In Japan, just like in any other country, pressures came both from within and without. For example, we have seen in chapter eight how much the Tanaka Cabinet was worried about British and American pressure when fishing in Manchuria's troubled waters in the late 1920s. In a world without military disobedience, Japanese statesmen could have responded to such pressure in different degrees, according to their perception of the national interest.

But unfortunately, military disobedience significantly reduced the maneuvering space of the government in face of external pressure. The variety of blackmail tools available to the army, from the withdrawal of service ministers (dangerous for any cabinet even after the demise of *bukansei*), to independent defiant action, assassinations and coups d'état, precluded potential compromises with the Westerners and the Chinese. Prime Minister Tanaka Giichi learned this lesson when his attempts to subdue Zhang Zuolin by political means were destroyed by Kōmoto Daisaku's independent action. Shidehara and Wakatsuki had undergone a

¹⁶ James B. Crowley, *Japan's Quest for Autonomy: National Security and Foreign Policy, 1930-1938* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 380-4.

similar experience during the Manchurian Incident, and Inukai Tsuyoshi's attempt to reach some kind of modus vivendi with China on the Manchurian question had cost him his life during the coup d'état of May 1932.¹⁷

In other words, given the context of rebellions, defiance and assassinations, it is inadequate to consider, as Crowley does, what Japanese statesmen did in practice. It is no less essential to check what they **could not do** as a result of military disobedience, and which options were unavailable to them because of military pressure. The army, in this sense, was akin to a shepherd dog running around a herd of sheep and frightening them into going in one direction only. The sheep might or might not have wanted to go elsewhere. In any case, they could not, at least not without exposing themselves to sharp teeth. In the case of Japan, that road led to bitter confrontation with China and finally to a disastrous world war.

But it is also important to note that the military disobedience, which led to such disastrous consequences, was far from being the result of a well-planned conspiracy. The process leading to military independence, a country in which "the tail wags the dog," was also not a result of malice, stupidity or negligence on the part of statesmen, politicians, generals and bureaucrats. Each leg of this disastrous journey, each policy decision pushing Japan one further mile down the road, was reasonable and understandable in and of itself.

¹⁷ Joos, Joel, "The Liberal Asianism of Inukai Tsuyoshi (1855-1932): Japanese Relations with the Mainland between Opportunism, Pragmatism and Idealism", *Bulletin of Kochi Woman's University: Series of Faculty of Cultural Studies* 60 (March, 2011), 43-6.

The decision of Saigō Tsugumichi to defy the government in the Taiwan Expedition of 1874 was born out of momentary pressures, not out of malice or an intention to disobey. It was perfectly reasonable for his brother, Saigō Takamori, to rebel in 1877, believing that the government had attempted to assassinate him. Yamagata's response to the events of the time, by conducting the military reforms and building the *tōsui-ken* system in the 1880s, was a rational countermeasure to prevent the reoccurrence of such rebellions. The decision of Miura and his advisors to assassinate Queen Min was atrocious, indeed, but not out of tune with the political pressures of the time. The Taishō political crisis was also a result of decisions by different political actors, each of them taking care of his own particular interests and none of them planning the final result. Kōmoto's decision to assassinate Zhang Zuolin was based on an already established tradition of *tōsui-ken* and *dokudan senkō*, which endowed defiance with an air of legitimacy in military circles. If senior generals could interfere in politics, and junior officers were allowed to take tactical decisions in the field, it was not unreasonable for Kōmoto to take an independent strategic decision in order to solve the quagmire of the Japanese Empire in Manchuria. And when violence against Chinese leaders could not solve the *Manmō* problem, it took just one small step to use the same ideology to justify violence against Japanese leaders, as Hashimoto Kingorō and his *Sakura-kai* had done. Of course, the people responsible for these events could have decided differently. Almost nothing was inevitable. But at no time were their decisions insane or out of tune with the realities they faced.

And yet, despite the fact that each step made a certain amount of sense in and of itself, *all of them together* led to a disastrous result, unimaginable by the

people who began the journey. Decisions taken in a certain time and place may lead to altogether different consequences in future years when combined with changing political, military and social circumstances, different contingencies and unforeseen decisions of other actors. What Japan lacked, therefore, were not reasonable civilian and military leaders. Its leaders were quite reasonable, in any sense, no less than those of other countries. Instead, it lacked leaders with exceptional foresight – people who could see beyond the immediate, the reasonable, the calculable, and grasp the direction of history. Men who could, in Bismarck’s catchphrase, discern the movement of God in history and grasp his coat while He is passing by. But such people are rare indeed, in Japan as in most other countries.

Nothing was predetermined, but still, Japanese disobedience moved in a certain direction. To understand why it ended where it ended, the logic of the movement has to be deciphered. And this logic, as explained hereafter, is strongly related to three “bugs” programmed into the political and ideological code of Japan during the Meiji Restoration. All of the three, taken together, allowed the Imperial Army’s culture of disobedience to grow, prosper and radicalize with the passing years.

The First Bug: Hazy Legitimacy

Political legitimacy may be defined as an ability of a regime to ensure obedience by most people, most of the time, without recourse to coercive means. That is, most of all, a matter of resources. No regime in the world has enough power to apply constant coercion on everyone. Like a bank, a regime is able to “pay” in the

currency of violence to some people. But when too many people have to be “paid,” the bank goes bankrupt, and so does the state. Seen in this light, political legitimacy rests on two different pillars: intimidation and ideology.¹⁸ Even subjects who dislike the regime may obey most of the time with no need for coercion, because they are afraid of potential sanctions. And yet, especially in modern regimes, this is a necessary but not an adequate condition. Governments usually try to convince most citizens to obey out of their own free will, through multiple ideological agents such as the press, state officials, pro-government social groups and, above all, the education system. In almost any modern state, and Imperial Japan was no exception, political legitimacy rests upon these twin pillars.

The new Meiji regime, established after the Restoration in 1868, had to rebuild political legitimacy from the ground up, after the demise of the preceding Tokugawa order. As soon as the new leaders took power, they made great efforts to legitimize their new system through intimidation and ideology alike, and were reasonably successful on both counts. By the end of Saigō’s rebellion, the military prowess of the regime was proved beyond reasonable doubt. And as for ideology, the government also had significant achievements. At least as late as the turn of the century, the vast majority of Japanese had willingly, and sometimes enthusiastically accepted the centrality and the authority of the emperor, as well as the need of the country to achieve *fukoku kyōhei*, namely, to have a strong army, sound economy and full equality with the great powers of the world. For many people, especially in

¹⁸ For theoretical discussion on coercive and persuasive power see: John Scott, "Modes of Power and the Re-conceptualization of Elites", in Mike Savage and Karel Williams, eds. *Remembering Elites* (Malen, M.A.: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 30. And also: Haley, *Authority without Power*, 6-8, 13-14.

the army, military prowess was also understood as territorial expansion on the continent. That does not mean that Japan, even if we put aside dissenters, was a monolithic society without debates. The opposite was the case. But imperial patriotism, in the sense of the vision of national power exercised on the continent, was accepted by most Japanese citizens.¹⁹ In that sense, the Meiji regime's ideological quest was a profound success.

And yet, this otherwise immaculate ideological code had a crucial bug programmed into its basic edifice. The oligarchs who had actual, extra-constitutional power in Meiji Japan, the leaders of the inter-domainal alliance and their protégées, were never able to ideologically legitimize **their** own power, in contrast to that of the emperor. In a sense, they did not even try, because that would have undermined the official, absolute authority of the throne. After 1878, they were able to solidify their rule by force of intimidation and clever political compromises, but not through binding legitimacy. In absence of binding traditions and sophisticated ideological justifications, most components of the government, apart from the emperor, were challenged by rebellious actors at different stages. Why should one obey the *genrō*? Does the prime minister have power over the army? Should civilian politicians be allowed to exercise majority rule through the Imperial Diet? The hazy, hidden nature of the emperor's power made all of these problems subject to constant negotiations, whose results had always, inevitably, left some people unhappy.

¹⁹ Gordon, *Imperial Democracy*, 332-3; Gluck, *Modern Myths*, 247-9.

These unhappy people, who felt marginalized, exploited or betrayed by the system, came from many quarters. One group, disgruntled officers of both high and low rank, have been subject of this study. From 1878 to 1931 they could no longer hope for a successful rebellion, which the government had blocked by way of intimidation. They could also not resist the imperial regime *in toto* – that road was blocked by state ideology, shared even by those disgruntled soldiers. And yet, the “bug” programmed into the ideological edifice of the regime had left them one main venue to express their frustration, the process we have named “escape to the front”: to honor the emperor by striving for *fukoku kyōhei*, faster, better and more decisively than the inadequately legitimized government.

Theoretically speaking, this patriotic opposition did not have to amount to international aggression. General Tani Kanjō, hero of the Taiwan Expedition and the Satsuma Rebellion, attacked the imperialistic policy of the government, as he believed that a small Japan would serve the emperor and the nation better. But Tani was a lonely figure in the army, "a flower in a field of grass."²⁰ Unfortunately, oppositional patriotism was more often expressed by charging ahead against orders to further territorial expansion. This fact was related to a second crucial bug in the political code of modern Japan.

The Second Bug: *Fukoku Kyōhei* as a One-way Street

Leaving aside outliers such as General Tani, the official ideology of *fukoku kyōhei* was interpreted in the armed forces, the ruling elites and large segments of

²⁰ Tani was appraised as a "flower in a field of grass" by Mutsu Munemitsu, Japan's foreign minister during the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-5). See: Teters, *Conservative Opposition*, 36.

the public as national growth, both in the territorial and the financial sense of the term. The costs and the pace were often disputed, but the direction much rarely so. Spatially speaking, *fukoku*, and especially *kyōhei*, were a one-way street. If the universally accepted ideology was constant expansion, it made no sense to reverse achievements once made, even if the fruits of victory were obtained by defiant officers in violation of Japanese law. As shown in both the Queen Min and the Zhang Zuolin affairs, it was also difficult to punish such officers, defiant as they were, because in essence they were advancing along the same road as the government. Misguided they may have been, but their “pure” motives had always evoked the compassion of leaders who sympathized with their goals, if not their means. That was one of the most enduring, and disastrous, legacies of late Tokugawa *shishi* culture.

In such conditions, the one-way nature of *fukoku kyōhei* encouraged officers to express their opposition to the government in the form of aggression against other countries, and gave them assurances that their achievements would never be reversed. That feeling of legal impunity and vindication by history, which naturally increased with every failure of the army or the government to punish defiance, created strong optimism in one’s ability to change reality through disobedience. And such optimism, as we have seen, had been the fuel of military defiance from the 1870s to the *Sakura-kai*.

The Third Bug: *Fukoku Kyōhei* as an Endless Road

What made this rebellious optimism an enduring phenomenon, however, was yet another fatal bug programmed into the ideological code of the imperial

Japanese regime. *Fukoku kyōhei*, as already mentioned, was a one way road, but also an endless one. Unfortunately for Japan, this ideological vision was dangerously vague. When could one know, for example, that the army was strong enough? For military officers, both during the Taishō political crisis and the late 1920s, always wanted more divisions, more budget and more political influence. How big should the empire have been? Would Korea, Taiwan and Manchuria suffice, or was further expansion into China required to safeguard the territorial achievements already made? There was no way to know, no objective standard, no agreed-upon measure to ascertain that Japan's destiny was fulfilled, its mission complete. No matter what the government did, not matter how much territory was won, the vague nature of Japanese imperialism had always left much to be desired, and the ideological thirst of radicals, civilian and military alike, could never be quenched.

This constant discontent was significantly radicalized in the late 1920, as the internal situation in Japan increasingly became an additional source of frustration. As Banno Junji noted in his study of the Taishō political crisis, Japanese imperialism suffered from an unsolvable contradiction: Japan, as a country poor in resources, lacked the means to keep a large enough army to maintain the country's dream of being a first-rate empire.²¹ Rebellious officers such as Hashimoto Kingorō and his many copycats during the 1930s were worried both about the poverty in Japan and the slow pace of territorial expansion. Their goal, to create an economically

²¹ Banno, *Taishō Seihen*, 9-13.

prosperous country with an ever-expanding army and endless military expenditure could never be met. Therefore, no matter what happened, they **had** to be frustrated.

The ideology of right-wing thinkers such as Ōkawa Shūmei, enjoying increasing currency in rebellious military circles from the late 1920s, made things even worse, as it added a whole new Utopian dimension to the already confused vision of these officers. The dream to fix the entire gamut of military, social and ideological problems through a “Showa Restoration” was yet again a push towards an unattainable Utopia, symbolized by vague phrases such as “national reconstruction” (*kokka kaizō*) or the “kingly way” (*ōdō*). Naturally, no one knew how to build such a regime. It was therefore unsurprising that the rebels of February 1936 mainly shrugged their shoulders with indifference when they learned, before being shot, that the army’s position was strengthened by their acts. “We did not draw our swords,” wrote Muranaka Kōji, “to secure a bigger military budget or to enhance the position of the army. We did it for the sake of the poor farmers, for the sake of Japan, and for the sake of the world.”²² With such ambiguous goals, it was no wonder that Muranaka could not be satisfied. He himself hardly knew what he wanted.

Summing up, this disastrous reality evolved as a result of the aforementioned bugs in the political and ideological edifice of modern Japan. The first bug encouraged disgruntled military elements to express their frustration in perilous ways. The second endowed them with optimism and vindication, while the third

²² Op cit. in Shillony, *Revolt in Japan*, 214.

ensured that they would never be satisfied. And the government or the army leadership could do nothing to appease these constantly frustrated dreamers. Nothing, that is, but giving way or fighting back, and that was increasingly difficult as time wore on. The moderate Japanese politicians gave way, in a series of compromises leading them all the way to Manchuria, the Marco Polo Bridge, Nanjing, Pearl Harbor, Saipan and Okinawa. And when they realized the direction Japan was heading, it was already too late to do anything about it.

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Note: the Japanese term 文書, translated as the private or official papers of an individual, can be transliterated to English as either "Monjo" or "Bunsho". In this study, I have chosen to use the reading "Monjo" which is more accepted in Japan, though the reading "Bunsho" does appear in many Western library catalogues. However, there is one exception to that rule. I have consulted two versions of the private papers of Katsura Tarō: the originals which are kept in the National Diet Library, Tokyo, and another version of the papers bound in book form. To differentiate between the two, I have named the original **Katsura Tarō Kankei Monjo** and the book form **Katsura Tarō Kankei Bunsho**, though in Japanese they are written in the same way.

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¹ This is a selection of Katsura's letters in book form. It is only a part of Katsura Tarō Kankei Monjo (cited throughout this study as **KTKM**) which is kept at the modern Japan political history reading room at the National Diet Library (cited as **MJPH-NDL**).

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