

# FROM PARTY POLITICS TO MILITARY DICTATORSHIP

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## INTRODUCTION

Article XI of the Meiji Constitution states, "The Emperor has the Supreme Command." This article was generally referred to as the *tōsuiken* 統帥權 (Prerogative of the Supreme Command). The *tōsuiken* was equally of the Imperial Prerogatives (*taiken* 大權) which gave dictatorial powers to the Emperor, and it was distinguished from the *kokumuken* 國務權 (Prerogative in the Duties of the State), which included, for example, Exercise of legislative power, Promulgation and execution of the laws and others, Conferment of titles and marks of honour, etc. The *kokumuken* in general required the advice of the state ministers, but the *tōsuiken* excluded the advice of the state ministers, and was considered to be independent of *kokumuken*. Both *tōsuiken* and *kokumuken* directly appertained to the Emperor and were formally exercised by the Emperor: while on the actual stage of politics the government exercised *kokumuken* and the Army and Navy exercised the *tōsuiken*. The various party governments tried to make their influence upon the *tōsuiken* felt in the course of establishing under their position, but the independence of *tōsuiken* prevented party governments from so doing because the right of the Emperor was to be inviolable. This system as established under the Meiji Constitution was unique to the *Tennōsei* 天皇制 (Emperor System) and became the frame of pre-war Japan, but at the same time it became an obstruction to Japan's growth as a modern state. The contradiction between *tōsui* and *kokumu* determined the direction of Japanese politics before the defeat of the war.

## I. FROM GUMBATSU TO GUMBU

The overwhelming majority of the important bureaucrats and members of *gumbatsu* 軍閥 (military cliques) in the Meiji governments came from Chōshū 長州 and Satsuma 薩摩 clans. They, the leaders of the

Meiji Restoration, became the centre of the Meiji governments, and throughout the Meiji period they directed the politics of Japan. They used the *taiken* as a basis for dictatorial powers and monopolized the direction of politics by concentrating powers in the hands of cliques to which they themselves belonged.

Yamagata Aritomo 山縣有朋 of Chōshū, the important man in the *gumbatsu*, was builder of the Army; while the builder of the Navy was Yamamoto Gonnohyōe 山本權兵衛 from Satsuma. Men from Chōshū established their customary right to direct the Army, while men from Satsuma established their right to direct the Navy. From this derived the expression "An Army from Chōshū and a Navy from Satsuma." Natives of Chōshū did not entirely monopolize the Army nor did natives of Satsuma monopolize the Navy; for example, Uehara Yūsaku 上原勇作<sup>1</sup> of Satsuma was in 1912 the Army Minister in the second Saionji 西園寺 cabinet.

Up to this time the law stipulated that only officers on active-duty could be appointed to the posts of Army and Navy Ministers. In 1912, Yamamoto Gonnohyōe formed a cabinet in the midst of the *Kensei yōgo undō* 憲政擁護運動 (Campaign for the Defence of the Constitutionalism, hereafter referred to as *Goken* Campaign) which demanded the revision of the *gumbatsu*, and opened the way to enable reserve officers and retired officers as well as officers on active-duty to occupy the post of the service ministers. If reserve or retired officers appointed to the posts of the service ministers were at the same time members of a political party it would be possible for the political party to exercise control over the *gumbatsu*. This measure would represent a concession to the *Goken* Campaign on the part of the *gumbatsu*. In fact, however, none of the reserve or retired officers was appointed to ministerial posts in the service ministries.

Although this reform proved to be a superficial character, rule of *gumbatsu* was obliged, with the passing of time, to undergo revision. However, the revision of rule by *gumbatsu* was spurred on not only by the demands of the *Goken* Campaign, an external force, but also by changes occurring within the Army itself. Tanaka Giichi 田中義一 of

1 He caused the general resignation of the Saionji cabinet when he demanded the establishment of another two divisions in the Army. Opposing to his policy, the mass movement supported by the political parties broke out and forced the Katsura 桂 cabinet formed after the Saionji cabinet to the general resignation (Taishō Upheaval). He later became Chief of the General Staff Office, and in the period of the First World War he built up immense personal power in the Army. Araki Sadao 荒木貞夫 and Mazaki Jinzaburō, who were leaders in the Army in the 1930's following the Manchurian Incident, were officers who had received direction from Uehara.

Chōshū, who was Vice-Chief of the General Staff immediately after the First World War and was regarded as the successor to Yamagata Aritomo, may be seen as embodying in himself these changes. His official biography, *Tanaka Giichi denki* 田中義一傳記, describes the changes within the Army as follows:<sup>2</sup>

“By the mid-Taishō period it became impossible for the Chōshū *gumbatsu*—which was celebrated from the beginning of the Meiji period as ‘an Army from Chōshū’ along with ‘a Navy from Satsuma’—to remain securely seated in its position of power. Talented officers who did not come from Chōshū and who had been active as officers in the Russo-Japanese War gradually ascended into the higher ranks. The new trend of thought of the post-war period did not leave the Army untouched. The talented persons from outside the cliques who now raised their heads had been directly or indirectly subject to protection and selection for appointment by seniors who belonged to the so-called ‘Chōshū *batsu*’ (Chōshū clique), before they finally attained ranking positions; but since at this time they themselves making efforts to extend the power of the faction to which they belonged, the cry of ‘Down with the Chōshū *batsu*’ was replaced with the slogan, ‘Down with the *batsu*.’ When Field Marshal Yamagata died in 1922, this tendency became stronger and more intense, the most notable development being the case of the Satsuma *batsu*, which took advantage of the rise of Field Marshal Uehara Yūsaku and brought together all those who came from Kyūshū 九州. Furthermore, they regarded General Tanaka as the holder of the real power in the Chōshū *batsu* after the demise of Yamagata Aritomo.

“Indeed, at this period there were so many instances of occurrences such as men being refused admission to the Military College and being moved to inferior positions in the government service merely on account of the fact that they came from Chōshū, that there were some of them who transferred their domicile to other parts of Japan.

“At this time, however, General Tanaka had withdrawn himself from any such narrow field of vision based on the feudal cliques..... He never extended special patronage merely on the sentimental grounds of geographical connexion with Chōshū. The promotion of personnel was always motivated by a consideration of the interests of the Army as a whole and of the Empire of Japan. Thus when power in the Army passed from Yamagata to General Tanaka, as we have noted above, the officers promoted to important posts by General Tanaka did not come from Chōshū and the Chōshū *batsu* vanished like a bubble.”

The question is, then, what were the concrete aims which lay behind General Tanaka’s promotions “in the interests of the Army and of the Empire of Japan.” While Tanaka’s biography says practically nothing on this subject, it may be safe to assume that with the First World War, there was pressure for a radical reform of the Army.

Nagata Tetsuzan 永田鐵山, who shared the power in the Army in the 1930’s with the Araki and Mazaki group, was accredited to Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and other Western European countries in the years 1913–1923: during this time he gained detailed first-hand knowledge of

<sup>2</sup> *Tanaka Giichi denki* (Biography of Tanaka Giichi), Tokyo, Tanaka Giichi denki kankōkai, 1960, Vol. II, p. 353.

“total war” as exemplified by the First World War. That is, the First World War taught Japan the lesson that future wars would be fought as total wars. Only he who had clear ideas about “total war” and possessed the political power to create a “total war” order could carry out the necessary reorganization and assume responsibility for the Army’s future. It was by no means a coincidence that Nagata Tetsuzan, who had been impressed with the necessity for a “total war” order, rose to eminence among the leaders of the Army during the war which began with the Manchurian Incident.

In the age of “total war,” it became impossible to run an army on the basis of personal relationships within cliques which had their roots deep in the feudal society. With the passing of Yamagata and Uehara, *gumbatsu* had begun to break up. Ugaki Kazushige 宇垣一成, who had directed the Army at the time when a party formed a cabinet for the first time in 1924, directed the modernization of the Army, which gave rise to a new age in the Army, and also produced a change of leadership. In the Shōwa era (which began from 1926), the word *gumbatsu* was not generally used, and in stead of this, *gumbu* (the Military) became current.

Tōjō Hideki 東條英機 stated in the affidavit presented on the 30th of December, 1947 at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East after the Second World War:<sup>3</sup>

“In the early part of the Meiji Era, when ‘clanship,’ actually an extension of the feudal age, controlled all political life, as well as the social, it might in a sense be called ‘a militaristic clique.’ It may be said that it was in the nature of a ‘clique,’ but in consequence of the ascendancy of party politics this concentrated military group, together with the old feudal system, lost their footing in the political circle... Later on, it is undoubtedly a fact that the military influence again appeared within the political orbit to replace the political parties, but this was not by any means a re-emergence of the old military clique. Should the prosecution have such an erroneous belief in mind, the reference to a ‘military clique’ is unquestionably a misuse of the term. The factor of influence at this later stage was the official military institution itself, and not a fictional existence.”

Tōjō’s contention possessed a certain rational basis. The expression the *gumbu* 軍部 as distinct from the term he used, the armed forces (*gun*) was associated with the Army considered as the political group demanding the reconstruction of the state for the purpose of establishing a “total war” order. Furthermore, this reconstruction of the state was embarked upon under the banner of the defence of the Emperor System against party politics at a time when the Emperor System was exposed to a crisis caused by development of the political parties.

<sup>3</sup> “Record of the Proceedings of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East,” pp. 36473-474.

## II. FROM PARTY POLITICS TO THE MOVEMENT FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE STATE

The *Goken* Campaign which arose on the eve of the First World War was a movement run by the political parties, which sought to uphold constitutional politics in opposition to the despotic rule of the bureaucrats and *gumbatsu*. At this time the political parties were still unable to secure a ruling position in politics, but eventually they tried to obtain the leadership in politics after the First World War, sustained by the new democracy movement which was also opposed to the despotic rule of the bureaucrats and *gumbatsu*. Party politics<sup>4</sup> began with the cabinet organized by Hara Satoshi (Kei) 原敬, leader of the Seiyūkai 政友會, in 1918, and seemed firmly established in 1924 when Katō Takaki 加藤高明, leader of the Kenseikai 憲政會, organized a cabinet through the second *Goken* Campaign by the *Goken sampa* 護憲三派 (Three Political Parties of the *Goken* Campaign), Kenseikai, Seiyūkai, and Kakushin kurabu 革新俱樂部.

In the course of establishing their rule, the political parties naturally demanded control of the armed forces. The Army, however, under the *tōsuiken* (Prerogative of the Supreme Command), possessed special right enabling them to act independently of either the government or Diet. In so far as the political parties sought to establish their rule it was inevitable that they should demand that the *tōsuiken* be placed under their control. Since, naturally enough, the Army was not inclined to entrust to the control of the political parties the *tōsuiken* which assured them of their special rights and privileges, the parties and the Army became involved in fierce dispute over the *tōsuiken*. Whether or not the political parties could place the *tōsuiken* under their control was the basic factor determining whether or not they could establish their rule.

Japan planned a war of intervention against the Soviet Revolution in 1918 together with America and England, and dispatched a force to Siberia. The cabinet of the day was headed by General Terauchi Masatake 寺内正毅, an officer reared in the Yamagata's tradition: after the Terauchi cabinet had fallen as a result of the Rice Riot, the prosecution of the war was taken over by the Hara cabinet. However, the chance of winning a victory in the war against Soviet Russia had been already lost. The problem which the Hara cabinet faced in 1919 was

<sup>4</sup> By the word "party politics" we here refer to the custom of political parties holding the political powers hitherto monopolized by the bureaucrats and the *gumbatsu*, and the party which had the majority of the Diet handing power over to one another.

how the war could suitably be brought to a conclusion. In the end Prime Minister Hara considered the withdrawal of Japanese forces from Siberia. Uehara Yūsaku, Chief of the General Staff, opposed the withdrawal supporting his position by reference to the *tōsuiken*.

Prime Minister Hara came to a conclusion that in order to drive through his policy it would be necessary to limit the Imperial Prerogatives (*taiken*): the *tōsuiken* was supposed to be the nucleus of the *taiken*. He wrote as follows in his diary, dated 2nd September, 1920:<sup>5</sup>

“The General Staff Office, backed by Yamagata, has not the slightest appreciation of the present situation of affairs. The situation today is completely different from that of the times of His Majesty and it is very dangerous for the future of the state to abuse the *tōsuiken*. That the government should assume full responsibility in seeing that no ill befalls the Imperial House is in accord with the essential principles of constitutional politics and is also, I believe, to the advantage of the Imperial House. We are to consider that if the Imperial House had no direct connexion with political affairs and were the ‘Seat of Paternal Benevolence and Gratuitous Works,’ the Imperial House should be securely at ease, we may be adopting the line of policy. The military men associated with the General Staff Office, however, do not understand this point and have a tendency to bring itself the Imperial House in confronting the political world. This is an error of the most extreme order.”

The contention that the *taiken* should be limited to the Prerogative of Glory (*eiyo taiken* 榮譽大權)—the Prerogative of Paternal Benevolence and Gratuitous Works—meant a desire to convert the absolute monarchy supported by *taiken* of the Emperor into a constitutional or parliamentary monarchy. It was a revolutionary contention affecting the roots of the Meiji Constitution. However, Prime Minister Hara was unable to bring into effect this revolutionary contention.

Although Hara was unable to convert the absolute monarchy into a constitutional or parliamentary monarchy, the political parties always brought forward this problem. “The Dispute over the Prerogative of the Supreme Command” sparked by the London Naval Conference in 1930 was a typical example of how the political parties could increase their power and check the *tōsuiken*, and place the conversion of the Emperor System as the absolute monarchy on the agenda.

Extending the scope of the limitation policy of the Washington Conference of 1921, (which established proportional limitation of capital ships), the London Naval Conference of 1930 had the task of limiting auxiliary vessels. The Japanese Navy, which had accepted 60 per cent of the American tonnage as the Japanese quota for capital ships, strongly

<sup>5</sup> Hara Keiichirō 原奎一郎 ed., *Hara Kei nikki* 原敬日記 (The Diary of Hara Kei [Satoshi]), Tokyo, Fukumura-shuppan, 1965, Vol. 5, p. 276.

favoured a 7 : 10 ratio in the case of auxiliary vessels. The Japanese delegation, however, was disposed to make a concession to 69.75 per cent of the American aggregate, and accepted the London Naval Treaty. The government of that time was the Hamaguchi cabinet formed by the Minseitō, and of all the successive parliamentary administrations of Japan the Hamaguchi cabinet represented most faithfully the interests of the finance capitalists. Japan in these days was in the midst of the world depression which had spread outward from America in the previous year, and the reduction of armaments was the supreme order of the day. The Hamaguchi cabinet sought to bring about naval disarmament even at the cost of making a concession to America's demands.

However, the Naval General Staff which ruled the Navy under the *tōsuiken* was opposed to the limitation of auxiliary vessels at any figure under 70 per cent. It was on the 21st of January, 1930 that the London Naval Conference opened, and it was on the 14th of March that the Japanese delegation asked their home government for instructions regarding a concession in the form of acceptance of 69.75 per cent of the American tonnage. On the 1st of April, the government passed to the Navy a copy of its proposed reply to this request for instructions, where the concession in terms of 69.75 per cent ratio was accepted; but on the 21st of April the Naval General Staff drafted the following memorandum:<sup>6</sup> "The Naval General Staff is unable to agree to the proposed London Naval Treaty, because there are insufficiencies in the content of the tonnage of auxiliary vessels permitted under that Treaty when considered as the minimum necessary naval power required for the defence of the Empire."

With that, the Naval Staff and the government joined in the fierce controversy which then extended to the Diet. Because the main problem centred on who was to decide the strength of the Navy, the government or the Naval Staff, and so ultimately concerned the matter of to whom the right of command pertained, the dispute was called "Dispute over the Prerogative of the Supreme Command."

The opinion of Premier Hamaguchi Osachi 濱口雄幸 was made clear through the controversy in the House of Peers on the 7th of May:

*Question* (Ikeda Nagayasu 池田長康): I wish to enquire as to one point. Was or was not the agreement of the Chief of the Naval Staff obtained when decisions were made regarding the strength of forces?

*Answer* (Hamaguchi): As regards this I have nothing to say except that before the Treaty was signed the government gave the fullest consideration to the expert opinions of the service departments and signed the Treaty after having done so.

<sup>6</sup> *Katō Kanji Taishō den* 加藤寛治大將傳 (Biography of Admiral Katō Kanji), Katō Kanji Taishō denki hensankai, Tokyo, 1941, p. 896.

*Question* (Sakamoto Toshiatsu 坂本俊篤): Please give an explanation regarding the meaning of the word 'consideration.'

*Answer* (Hamaguchi): The government asked specialists to undertake studies of the matter and after receiving their opinions gave the fullest consideration to these opinions, and thereafter made its decision. The word 'consideration' has the meaning of 'to provide for reference or consideration.' Although there have been questions as to whether the word means that all of the opinions of the specialists were adopted, I regret that as to the question of whether all the specialists' opinions of the service departments were actually adopted, or only part of them, and if a part of them, within what sphere and to what degree, I cannot inform the House regarding the course and the results of the negotiations involved, because these are matters of internal administration.

Prime Minister Hamaguchi's expression 'consideration' did not necessarily show clearly to whom the right of command pertained, but the contention that the right of final decision regarding the strength of forces resided in the government was clearly implied. If it was assumed to be so, it meant that the *tōsuiken* as dictatorial powers residing in the Emperor Himself was denied, and it could be expected that the Emperor System itself, supported as it was by the *taiken*, would be subject to change. On the 14th of May, Shimizu Koichirō 志水小一郎, a member of the House of Peers, expressed his uneasiness that the Emperor System was to be negated or changed:

"If the government's opinion were perfectly right, then the General Staff Office, which was independent of either the government or the Diet, would have to be abolished, and so would the Naval General Staff. The independent decision-making powers of the General Staff Office and the Naval General Staff Office, those of the important organs of military command which belong directly to the Emperor, would become impotent, and the government would be superior to all these military organs. The government's opinions seem to imply that no one would be able to oppose these powers of the government, and if this is a fact, it constitutes an extraordinarily important problem."

It was truly "an extraordinarily important problem." The Emperor System as an absolute monarchy was exposed to a crisis.

The man who expressed the most stubborn opinion in the Naval General Staff Office was none other than Katō Kanji 加藤寛治, Chief of the General Staff. Katō drafted the following statement of his opinion on the 19th of May and presented his resignation of the 10th of June:<sup>7</sup> "The arbitrary presentation for Imperial sanction of important matters which might bring about changes in the strength of the permanent forces, as in the case of the recent reply to the request for instruction at the London Conference, not only obscures the *tōsuiken* of His Majesty, but by extension renders unstable the basis of the employment

<sup>7</sup> "Shōwa yonen gonon Rondon kaigun jōyaku hiroku" 昭和四年五年倫敦海軍條約祕録 (Confidential Documents of London Naval Treaty of 1929-1930), in Katō Kanichi 加藤寛一 ed., *Ko Kaiguntaishō Katō Kanji ikō* 故海軍大将加藤寛治遺稿 (The Late Admiral Katō Kanji's Posthumous Works) pp. 64-65.



of forces and the conduct of operation, opening the way to the defence policy of the state being continually subjected to shocks and changes in accordance with the vicissitudes of politics, and thus it would become a matter of doubt to whom the command of the armed forces should be attributed."

"The Dispute over the Prerogative of the Supreme Command" ended in a compromise between the government and the Navy, and the transition from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional or parliamentary monarchy had once again been frustrated. However, the fact that the absolute monarchy had once run into a crisis produced a severe impact in the armed forces, and resulted in causing the military to undertake a counter-attack on the political parties. At the same time the *gumbu* was already drawing up its plan for the invasion of Manchuria. From the previous year, 1929, Tatekawa Yoshitsugu 建川義次, Chief of the Second Division, General Staff Office, had been engaged in drawing up a Japan-Manchuria "Self-Sufficiency Plan" with a view to bringing Manchuria under Japanese control. The Kwantung Army was laying down its "Plan for the occupation of Manchuria and Mongolia." The reaction of the *gumbu* to party politics took the form of a movement for the reconstruction of the state by which the Emperor System would be saved from party politics and a "total war order" (*sōryokusen taisei* 總力戰體制) would be created for the purpose of the invasion of Manchuria. The London Naval Treaty was signed on the 22nd of April, was tabled before a session of the Privy Council called by the Emperor on the 1st of October, and was ratified on the following day, and it was also on the 1st of October that a number of young officers organized the Sakurakai 櫻會 (Cherry Society), the first body to aim at a reconstruction of the state.

### III. FROM THE MOVEMENT FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE STATE TO A NEW ORDER

The Sakurakai (Cherry Society) stated its programme as "having the reconstruction of the state as its final aim, for which purpose we will not refrain from the use of force, if it be needed."<sup>8</sup> In March, 1931, members of the Sakurakai were handing round plans for a *coup d'état*. The plans, however, did not materialize.

At this time the Army was already pressing forward its plans for the Manchurian Incident. They tried to carry out the reconstruction of the state in Japan by making use of the *fait accompli* of the military

<sup>8</sup> Hata Ikuhiko 秦郁彦, *Gun fasshizumu undō shi* 軍ファシズム運動史 (History of the Movement of the Military and Fascism), Tokyo, Kawade-shobō-shinsha, 1962, p. 21.

activities in Manchuria. The "Draft of the General Principle for the Reconstruction of the Imperial Government" 皇政維新法案大綱 (Kōsei ishin hōan taikō) which was laid down on the eve of the Manchurian Incident by the Army, placed emphasis on the "Ishin Nihon 維新日本 (Constructing Restoration Japan) by assisting and establishing the personal direct rule of the Emperor," and stated in order to attain this aim that "we shall consistently contend for the development of Manchuria and Mongolia under the principle of unity among the Army and the people, and with this as a lever we shall begin with reconstruction, contriving a movement of the locus of political authority in Japan." Thus the Manchurian Incident was carried out on the 18th of September, 1931.

Immediately after the invasion of Manchuria, the Army further planned another way to divert the eyes of the world from Manchuria and brought about the Shanghai Incident on January, 1932. However, within the Army there was a split over the question of how the Shanghai Incident was to be brought to a conclusion. Nagata Tetsuzan, Chief of the Military Affairs Division of the Ministry of Army, supported expansion of hostilities in China. Obata Toshishirō 小畑敏四郎, Chief of the Operation Division, and Mazaki Jinzaburō 眞崎甚三郎, Vice-Chief of the General Staff, contended that the hostilities in China should be concluded. The group centred around Nagata later came to be called the "Tōseiha" 統制派 (Control Faction); while that centred on Obata and Mazaki was referred to as the "Kōdōha" 皇道派 (Imperial Way Faction), and these two began to struggle for leadership of the Army. The Tōseiha consistently insisted on expanding the war overseas and seeking to use the war overseas as a lever to carry out the reconstruction of the state, while the Kōdōha sought first to carry out the reconstruction of the state and thereafter to embark on war overseas. The Kōdōha stressed anti-Soviet strategy, while the Tōseiha directed its attention to the invasion of China with a view towards continually expanding overseas warfare.

The Manchurian Incident entered a new phase with the proclamation of Manchukuo on the 1st of March, 1932, while the Shanghai Incident was terminated by the Shanghai Cease-Fire Agreement on the 5th of May.

The young officers associated with the Kōdōha planned and carried out *coups d'état* for the purpose of the reconstruction of the state. The May 15th Incident of 1932, caused by a group centred on young Navy officers, stifled party political rule. The February 26th Incident of 1936, instigated by young Army officers, shook Japan for four days. The

Tōseiha, meanwhile, sought to advance the reconstruction of the state, through bringing the whole Army under their control. The antagonism between the Tōseiha and the Kōdōha led to the incident in which Lt. Col. Aizawa Saburō 相澤三郎, a member of the Kōdōha, assassinated Nagata Tetsuzan with his sword in the year before the February 26th Incident on the 28th of October, 1935.

The incidents from the May 15th Incident in 1932 to the February 26th Incident in 1936 were caused by the Kōdōha, but the Tōseiha planned to take advantage of the confusion resulting from these incidents and set up a military dictatorship under their control. At three o'clock in the afternoon of the day, when the February 26th Incident broke out, the Army invoked the *Senji keibirei* 戦時警備令 (War-Time Defence Law) and undertook to "guard important property, and at the same time maintain public order in general," but at 8:40 p.m. it changed policy and instead proclaimed Martial Law. The Army Minister, Kawashima Yoshiyuki 川島義之, taxed Sugiyama Hajime 杉山元, Vice-Chief of the General Staff, with the question, "When you presented the War-Time Defence Law for the Imperial sanction did you not think that this would be fully sufficient for the attainment of your aims?" Sugiyama replied, "Changes in the situation are also involved, and at the same time, if Martial Law is proclaimed there is the advantage that one can take over control of the police, telecommunications, and other administrative organs." Taking advantage of the confusion resulting from the incidents the Tōseiha had sought to "take over control administrative organs," and create the pre-conditions for the establishment of a military dictatorship.

After creating a four-day upheaval, the February 26th Incident ended with the suppression of the Kōdōha by the Tōseiha. The power of the Kōdōha was negated, and the Tōseiha gained leadership of the Army. On the 18th of May, 1936, the Army revised the existing provisions which allowed reserve and retired officers to be appointed to the posts of the Army Minister and limited appointment to these posts to active-duty officers. They thus annulled the concession which the bureaucrats and the *gumbatsu* had made to the *Goken* Campaign on the eve of the First World War.

While the Tōseiha aimed at establishing a military dictatorship, the political parties and the people had still not given their recognition to the establishment of such a régime. Not only did the Minseitō and Seiyūkai continue to get the overwhelming majority of votes in the general election of April, 1937, but the Shakai taishūtō 社會大衆黨 (Socialist Popular Party) secured a large number of seats—thirty-seven out of 466.

In addition to these, the Nihon musantō 日本無産黨 (Japan Proletarian Party) secured three seats, and the number of seats held by the proletarian parties reached the highest figure since the beginning of their history.

Konoe Ayamaro 近衛文麿 who formed a cabinet after the election, declared on the 4th of June, 1937:<sup>9</sup>

“It would be a great embarrassment if antagonism and struggle were to continue as hitherto within Japan, as Japan would be subject to foreign insult. We must mitigate and struggle as far as possible, but if one is to liquidate antagonism. It is unreasonable to expect this to be achieved, merely by telling people to be friends. I feel that the cabinet should take the leadership in a manner which will liquidate this antagonism under a single general principle of direction.”

Ironically, however, the Lukouch'iao Incident broke out on the 7th of July, 1937, a month after the Konoe cabinet had taken office, and the antagonism and struggle in Japan were, on the contrary, intensified. The government and the Army, each divided into a faction in favour of enlarging the incident and a faction opposed to this, contended with each other and eventually victory of the faction in favour of escalation resulted in Japan's war with China. The Konoe cabinet resigned on the 4th of January, 1939. Konoe Ayamaro later reflected thus on the measure which caused the war with China:<sup>10</sup>

“The conclusions I draw from my life as Prime Minister over the past year and more especially in my first cabinet are that my cabinet was predestined to be a fencesitting one, and was entirely unsupported by public opinion. . . . The *tōsuiken* and the *kokumuken* were completely divorced from one another as though they were entirely separate entities; so the link connecting them came to consist only in the contact provided by the Army Minister, who was of a very vague and ambiguous nature. Furthermore, the Army Minister was always in a position to terminate the existence of any administration. The government, and consequently the conduct of state business (*kokumu*), could proceed only feebly, manipulated by the *tōsui*. Both domestic and foreign policies were determined, revised, and cast aside under the influence of the will of the military which was by now entirely divorced from the consensus of public opinion, or to express it in yet another way, the vague and hard-to-understand the *tōsuiken*. Very frequently I demanded of the service ministers that I should be allowed to grasp the true substance of this vague thing—the will of the military—and this was due to my desire to satisfy to some degree my sense of political responsibility and political conscience. For the purpose of a change in policy vis-à-vis China, I welcomed Ugaki Kazushige as Foreign Minister, but his work on the China problem was again frustrated by attacks from the military. However, I cleared off the government with the character of fencesitting one in order to take responsibility for the enlargement of the Sino-Japanese Incident, and tried to suppress the military with the support of public opinion. In 1938 when I published the

<sup>9</sup> Yabe Sadaji 矢部貞治, *Konoe Ayamaro* 近衛文麿, Tokyo, Kōbundō, 1952, Vol. I, p. 387.

<sup>10</sup> Yabe Sadaji, Vol. II, pp. 74-75.

Konoe Declaration<sup>11</sup> my desire and determination were already to clear off my fencesitting government. At the same time the political parties had been on the wane since the May 15th and February 26th incidents so it was now impossible to suppress the military with the power of an individual party alone. For these reasons, I came to the conclusion that only when a government which based its political power on an organization other than the existing political parties—only when an organization with its roots spread throughout the entire nation—could be formed, could it be possible to suppress the military and solve the Sino-Japanese Incident. To study how the nation could be organized in this fashion was the great desire which filled my mind at the time of the resignation of my first cabinet, as well as being my chief desire when forming my second cabinet.”

Konoe sought to solve the contradiction of the state by the power of the “organization of the people.” It was this “organization of the people” that he portrayed as his New Order and tried to realize in the concrete form of the Taisei yokusankai 大政翼賛會 (the Imperial Rule Assistance Association). He obtained the idea of the “organization of the people” from the Shōwa kenkyūkai 昭和研究会 (Shōwa Society) which was acting as a brain-trust; what Konoe was interested in was not liberating the people from the rule of the Emperor System but recovering leadership of politics within the framework of the Emperor System. Under the Taisei yokusankai far from being liberated, all the spontaneous and free liberation movements of the people were suppressed and all Japanese were compelled to render up unconditional loyalty to the Emperor and uphold the Emperor System. This attempt to consolidate the political power of the people even for the purpose of contending with the military for the political leadership was contradictory in itself, and it was clear from the first that the movement would bring about a division of the ideals and the confusion of the body itself. The New Order and Taisei yokusankai became a battleground in which the military, the political parties, the business world, bureaucracy, etc., milled around each group concealing its intentions, while the people were ignored. Far from resolving the contradiction between the *kokumuken*

<sup>11</sup> Konoe declared on the 16th of January, 1938, “The Chinese government, without appreciating the true intention of Japan, blindly persists in its opposition to Japan with no consideration either internally for the Chinese people in their miserable plight or externally for the peace and tranquillity of all East Asia.

“Accordingly, the Japanese government will cease henceforth to deal with that government and it looks forward to the establishment and growth of a new Chinese regime.... With this regime, the Japanese government will cooperate fully for the adjustment of Sino-Japanese relations and the building of a rejuvenated China.” (English translation of this statement was taken from the *New York Times* of the 16th of Jan., 1938, quoted in James B. Crowley, *Japanese Quest for Autonomy: National Security and Foreign Policy 1930-1938*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966.)

and *tōsuiken*, the result was that a springboard to war was provided for the military.

#### IV. FROM WAR TO TŌJŌ'S DICTATORSHIP

In July, 1940, Konoe formed his second cabinet. He began to negotiate with America on diplomatic settlement on April, 1941, and again he was fated to suffer from the contradiction between *tōsui* and *kokumu*.<sup>12</sup>

“What is felt most deeply upon looking at the history of the breakdown of the Japan-America negotiations is the disunity of *tōsui* and *kokumu*. From the first, the fact that *tōsui* was independent of *kokumu* had a cause of vexation for the successive cabinets in Japan. On occasion of these Japan-America negotiations, too, while on the one side the government was negotiating with might and main, on the other the forces were pushing ahead with their preparations in case the negotiations should fail. Since we had not the slightest idea what these preparations were it was impossible for us to keep our diplomacy in step with them. They kept moving their ships about and this became known to the Americans so that the Americans came to doubt the sincerity of our diplomacy, and we were greatly embarrassed because the interests of our diplomacy and the forces did not get on well together.”

In October, 1941, he dismissed his cabinet. While Tōjō Hideki became Prime Minister, and Japan was thrown into the Pacific War, not only did the contradiction between *tōsui* and *kokumu* remain unsolved, but the Pacific War itself intensified it still further.

“Total war” required war leadership based on the highest degree of concentration and unification of authority, and the inherently divided and dispersed character of authority under the Emperor System was a marked impediment to this. Moreover, within the *tōsui* itself there was rivalry between the Army and the Navy; within the Army there was competition between the Army Ministry and the General Staff Office; and in addition there was severe disagreement between the central and local office. The origin of these complex situations, as a result of which the Army, the Navy, the organs of military administration and military command, and central and local office each possessed responsibilities in the form of powers delegated to them by the Emperor under His Prerogatives but did not possess any responsibilities in relation to one another, lay in the peculiarity of the Emperor System state. Thus the contradiction of the Emperor System could not but manifest themselves as fatal contradictions in the war.

<sup>12</sup> Konoe Ayamaro, *Shuki—Heiwa eno doryoku* 手記—平和への努力 (Note—Efforts to the Peace), Tokyo, Nihon denpō tsūshinsha, 1946, p. 101.

When Tōjō became Prime Minister he held concurrently the post of Army Minister. In terms of political custom dating from the 1930's it was proper for an officer who became Prime Minister to retire from active-duty status. The "Army Officers' Status Order" (Rikugun shōkō bungenrei 陸軍將校分限令), issued in the name of the Emperor in 1941, made this custom a matter of law. Thus, Tōjō should have given up his status as an active-duty officer and gone on the reserve list when he became Prime Minister, but because of a special edict of the Emperor he was able to remain on the active list and concurrently hold the post of Army Minister.

This concurrent holding of posts was the first step by which Tōjō sought to solve the contradiction between *kokumu* and *tōsui*. Since an institutional solution was impossible if the Meiji Constitution were not revised, a solution could, then, be accomplished by the concentration of authority in a single individual. However, the concentration of authority in a single individual merely produced a unification of hitherto divided and dispersed authorities in the person of one individual, the Prime Minister; while the contradictions inherent in the Emperor System state were not dealt with in the least. Even if it had proved possible to bring the Army Minister under direct control by means of concurrent tenure of the posts of Prime Minister and Army Minister, the General Staff Office still remained outside control; and even if it had proved possible to bring the entire Army under his direct control, the Navy still remained outside of Tōjō's control. In February, 1944, Tōjō added the concurrent post of Chief of the General Staff to his office as Prime Minister and Army Minister, but even with this extraordinary measure, in which *kokumu* and *tōsui*, military administration and military command, were united in Tōjō himself, the Navy still remained as the last blind-spot. He later expressed his feelings on this matter as follows:<sup>13</sup> "According to the old constitution, military operations and military strategy, that is, the Supreme Command, were not implied under the meaning of state affairs, and they were placed independently outside the scope of it, excluding any interference from the civil administration. That was a system peculiar to Japan, which never could have a counterpart in any modern nation today. Accordingly, so far as the Supreme Command was concerned the government had no authority to restrict or direct it but could merely to coordinate the civil administration and High Command by means of Liaison Conferences or Imperial Conferences or both. Furthermore, any such coordination could not be permitted to include operations and tactics, which constitute the essence of war. Consequently, once hostilities started, they were in all cases carried on solely in accordance with the unilateral decisions of the Supreme Command; the civil Government served only to supply what the High Command demanded, thus always yielding to the latter's will. In modern

<sup>13</sup> Tōjō Hideki's statement. ("Record," pp. 36478-480.)

times, war must need be prosecuted on the scale of a global war, requiring mobilization of all the potentials of a nation, differing decidedly from that at the time when the system of the independence of the High Command was instituted. Indeed, Japan had no organ politically even to restrain the High Command from plunging the nation into hostilities, much less no such authoritative sanction that might master and [sic] employ the High Command at its own will. This is the reason why every successive cabinet worried and speculated on how to adjust and coordinate ordinary civil affairs and the High Command. Being anxious to get rid of the above inconsistency, I dared accept the position of the Chief of the General Staff in February 1944 in addition to the Premiership. It was rather too late, then, I regret, to accomplish very much; but by this means even I could not put a finger in matters affecting the Naval High Command."

Tōjō established a dictatorship with all authorities vested in himself, but limitations were placed on the power by the Emperor System state and contained many contradictions. Satō Kenryō 佐藤賢了, who as Chief of the Military Affairs Bureau stood close to Tōjō, had said that it was for this reason that "if anything, Prime Minister Tōjō did not have enough authority, considered either from the institutional or the personal point of view." Tanemura Sakō 種村佐孝, who participated in the direction of the war in the General Staff Office, came to the following conclusions after making a more profound analysis of Tōjō's characteristics as a dictator:<sup>14</sup>

"General Tōjō's greatest adversary was not the enemy, but the Navy. The truth was that the reverse side of the so-called dictator was of a frail and feeble nature. This was a bitter destiny deriving from the form of national organization in Japan, something that a mere individual like Tōjō could do nothing about."

The "form of national organization" spoken of here is nothing other than the Emperor System state order, and even with the powers which Tōjō had at his command, the fact that the Emperor System state remained inviolate prevented the complete solution of the contradiction between *tōsui* and *kokumu*, a solution which was absolutely necessary for the direction of the war.

The causes for Japan's defeat in the Pacific War are many, but one of the basic causes was the Emperor System state order, which stood in the way of a centrally-controlled direction of the "total war." The inevitable result of the contradictions in the conduct of the war was the reform.

## V. FROM WAR TO THE REFORM

The movement for the reconstruction of the state aimed at the

<sup>14</sup> Tanemura Sakō, *Daihonei kimitsu nisshi* 大本營機密日誌 (Confidential Diary of the Imperial Headquarters), Tokyo, Daiyamondosha, 1962, p. 181.



creation of a "total war" order in which the *gumbu* should be the central body in the name of the *Tennō shinsei* 天皇親政 (Personal Rule of the Emperor). In so far as it stressed the personal rule of the Emperor, thus presupposing the Meiji Constitution the creation of a "total war" order during the 15 years from the Manchurian Incident to the Pacific War inevitably had the contrary effect of enlarging to the utmost extent contradiction inherent in the Empire of Japan. Tōjō's dictatorship indicated the measures which could be taken for the solution of these contradictions within the limits set by the Meiji Constitution, but what sustained the Tōjō dictatorship was merely the Imperial edict under which the Prime Minister could be kept as active-duty and personally appointed by the Emperor to the posts of Army Minister and Chief of the General Staff. That is to say, in the last resort, only the Emperor's personal confidence and trust lay behind the Tōjō's dictatorship. This is why the concentration of authority in Tōjō as an individual possessed the weakness of being foredoomed to collapse the instant the Emperor's confidence and trust were lost. No one knew this better than Tōjō himself. On the 5th of February, 1943, he spoke as follows before the 81st session of the Diet regarding the difference between the dictatorial governments of Hitler and Mussolini and his own conduct of government:<sup>15</sup>

"Tōjō the person is merely an ordinary citizen. I am with no office at court. I am not in the least different from any one of you. Only I have been given the responsibility of active as Prime Minister. That is where we differ. Such a person shines only when shone upon by the light of His Majesty, and without that light would be as nothing. I am able to be honoured because I enjoy the trust of His Majesty and is appointed to this position. Therein I am of an entirely different character from the gentlemen of Europe who are known as 'dictators.'"

In July, 1944, Tōjō's power vanished in an instant when the anti-Tōjō *Kyūtei kakumei* 宮廷革命 (Palace Revolution) proved effective and the cabinet fell, Tōjō himself being placed on the reserve list.

The authority of the Emperor System built up the Empire of Japan during the seventy-five years since the Meiji Restoration, but the fifteen years of war upon which it finally embarked led to the collapse of the Empire in a single instant. The greatest lesson, profoundly felt by all the leaders in charge of the conduct of the war during these fifteen years, was the necessity of revising the Meiji Constitution and reforming the Emperor System order. Hattori Takushirō 服部卓四郎, formerly Colonel

<sup>15</sup> Tōjō Hideki's answer in the Committee for the War-time Administrative Regulation in the House of Representatives, *Asahi shimbun* 朝日新聞, Feb. 5, 1943.

of the Army, was engaged in the compilation of a history of these fifteen years of the war under the Allied G.H.Q. and he describes the contradictions in the direction of the war in terms of indignant regret, arriving at the following conclusions:<sup>16</sup>

“The key to the solution of the question consists in penetrating to an awareness of the atmosphere in which total war is directed and in grappling with the reform of the state order—the revision of the Constitution. Further, it would seem that the main theme in the tragedy of Japan in the Pacific War is to be found in the fact that it proved impossible to supersede a tradition of seventy years’ standing.”

The democratization of the state and the revision of the Constitution were necessarily presented as a result of the total defeat of the fifteen years of war. The original material basis of the authority of the Emperor System was the ownership of agricultural land by landlords, but the necessity of increased food production for the war produced policies which gave greater protection to the cultivating peasants than to the parasitic landlords, while the reform of the ownership of agricultural land by landlords also became inevitable. However, after the collapse of the Tōjō cabinet the rulers of Japan, faced with the devastation of war, found themselves unable to think of anything but the protection and preservation of the *kokutai* 國體 (national polity) of their defeated country. In February, 1945, Konoe Ayamaro advised the Emperor to make peace, emphasizing that while he considered that:<sup>17</sup>

“Defeat, I regret to say, is by now inevitable. . . . The greatest cause for worry from the point of view for the protection and preservation of the *kokutai* is not defeat, but a Communist revolution which would accompany defeat.”

Since up to that date American public opinion did not seem to have demanded a “change of *kokutai*,” mere defeat would still offer the possibility of protection and preservation of the *kokutai*, but if there were a “Communist revolution” it would be impossible to protect and preserve the *kokutai*. The reasons of Konoe’s opinion were, first, “an extreme advance of the Soviet Russia”: second, “the League for the Liberation of the Japanese” which was active in Yenan in China, centred on Nosaka Sanzō 野坂參三. If the “League” were active in the internal affairs of Japan, it would certainly demand the recognition of the Communist Party, the entry of Communists to the cabinet, the repeal of the Chian *ijihō* 治安維持法 (Peace Preservation Law), the abrogation of the Anti-Comintern Pact, etc. The third was a “part of the

<sup>16</sup> Hattori Takushirō, *Daitōa sensō zenshi* 大東亞戰爭全史 (Complete History of the Pacific War), Tokyo, Masu-shobō, 1953, Vol. IV, p. 119.

<sup>17</sup> Yabe Sadaji, Vol. II, p. 529.

reformist movement in the armed service, and the so-called 'new bureaucrats movement' which would take advantage of the situation, and the machinations of the left-wing elements who would manipulate circumstances from the background." Konoe did not give much consideration to Communists in Japan, and the fact that he devised his counter-measures on the assumption that the "Communist revolution" would consist of "the reformist movement" in the armed service and "the new bureaucrats' movement" on the one hand reflected his understanding of the situation of Japan under which the Communist Party had been annihilated. On the other hand, the *gumbu* and the reformist bureaucrats were frequently circulating secret documents calling for one nation and one party along Nazi lines so that the Emperor System, the principle of which was not that of one nation and one party but that of one nation and one individual, was exposed to a new crisis. Thus to Konoe it appeared that "all the conditions for the achievement of a Communist revolution are daily being prepared" and that if this were so "to continue any further a war in which there is no prospect of victory will mean playing right into the Communist Party's hands." Konoe expressed his conviction that "from the point of view of the protection and preservation of the *kokutai* steps should be taken to find some way of bringing the war to a conclusion at the earliest possible date." The theme which runs through Konoe's thought is his insistence on the logic of a peace in which "the protection and preservation of the *kokutai*" would be supreme, and he gave not the slightest consideration to the fate of the nation, quite apart from leaving entirely outside his range of vision the responsibility of Japanese Imperialism in relation to the masses of Asia.

For duration of the fifteen years of war the Japanese people had been entirely deprived of freedom, and they did not possess in the slightest degree any margin which would permit them to accept, as a sovereign body, the Potsdam Declaration, which called for respect for freedom and human rights. When after the occupation G.H.Q. sought to embark on the democratization of Japan, the rulers of Japan, having perceived the inevitability of reform, attempted to halt the inevitable reforms at the points they desired by making forestalling moves for reform, but the democratization of Japan as envisaged by G.H.Q. was not of so mild a character that it could be forestalled by moves made by the rulers of Japan. There was no alternative to the democratization of Japan being carried forward by means of powerful "pressure" from America and the Far East Commission.