

**From Campus to Battle
- Student Mobilization and Transition of
Japanese Imperial Military's Draft Policies—**

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【要約】

建軍当初、国家戦略の一環として学生に付与された様々な特権は、軍に智者・富裕層を引き込む手段となり、予備将校を確保する手段へとその性格を変えた。そして特権は代償を伴うものとなり、学生を予備将校の供給源にすることに成功すると、特権は軍が学生を自由にコントロールするための手段となった。

1. Introduction

In December 1943, two years after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese government made the decision to send students of higher education to the battlefields. The deteriorating situation in regard to the war in Asia and the Pacific meant that students would no longer be able to pursue their educational goals at universities, high schools, or vocational schools. Japan had no choice but to withdraw the suspension of conscription privilege for the first time since it was granted in Meiji period.

After intensive basic training, drafted students went to the front lines as junior officers or noncommissioned officers. Though not fully trained, they were required to fill the vacant positions due to the death or injury of regular army personnel. They fought bravely and many died in combat, some in special suicidal attack missions widely known as Kamikaze.

As mentioned above, Japanese students could be exempted from the conscription until the end of 1943. The withdrawal of this privilege was for most a

great loss and for some a tragedy. Needless to say, many of them never returned to campus.

Students had long been granted three privileges in regard to service in the military; (1) they were exempt from conscription while in school, (2) they could choose to become a reserve officer when they wanted, and (3) as a reserve officer the required service period was shortened.

This paper shows how these privileges were modified in accordance with the Imperial Military's intentions. Looking at the issues surrounding student privileges and the changes made may help to illustrate the unique relations between the military and civilians in modern Japan. What follows in is a summary.

2. Establishment of the Japan's Modern Military: Students Expected to contribute to the Modernization outside the Army and Navy

In 1868, the modern Meiji government was founded. A main goal of it was to modernize society. Its motto was a "Wealthy Nation and a Strong Army." Every effort was made to insure the defense of Japan from foreign encroachments and to join the "club" of the Western Powers.

A modern educational system was a prerequisite for achieving these goals. Therefore, various educational institutions were founded. Those who completed the curriculum of higher education were to be treated as national treasures.

As for the construction of a modern military, the Meiji government enacted the first conscription law in 1873 stipulating military duty for males. It should be emphasized that since the national modernization required various human resources outside the military such as industries, sciences, and cultural arenas, the government decided not to conscript students who were at or graduated from the secondary or higher educational institutes.

Students would be expected to contribute to the modernization through their learning. Rapid modernization would need their knowledge. These students did not have to take military drills. It was seen by students as a distinct benefit.

3. Establishment of One-year Volunteer System: The Beginning of Taking Males with Higher Educational Backgrounds into the Military

An Amendment to the conscription law in 1889 was the first step that paved the way for wealthy and intellectually capable young people to be taken into the military. This move was suggested by a German military advisor, Klemens W. J. Meckel (1842-1906).

Meckel insisted that medical doctors, government officials, and students should not be exempted from the conscription; they should be invited to become part of the military as reserve officers. As a result, a one year volunteer system for reserve officers, modeled on the German style training, was adopted.

This system was to offer one-year special training for volunteers who had certain academic backgrounds, and then to appoint them reserve officers. It is interesting that the military did not offer an allowance: even the uniforms were at the volunteers' own expenses. Except for this burden, volunteers could enjoy certain privileges. For example, they were not called into service until they were 28 years old, and then only one year of service was required. Such advantages indicate the government's desire to recruit as many upper-class young men as possible.

Official gazettes explained that the special favor of the one-year volunteer system was meant to increase the number of reserve officers. However, the true purpose was to attract men of the upper-class, especially the educated and the rich into the military. Many men from such a background had avoided the military by taking advantage of various exemption rules.

In addition to this, the military aimed to dispel the widely held belief that military service was dirty and hard. Taking the upper-class into the military and displaying them was a good way to suppress such a view. The military also intended to ease a complaint of ordinary people that the upper-class did not serve the military. In sum, the one-year volunteer system with full of privileges was a "lure" to entice the upper-class into the army and navy.

4. After the WWI: A Further Step to Increase Reserve Officers

The military learned much from the First World War; most importantly, Japan came to realize the importance of preparing for a future total war. In addition, the military noticed from the war that those who had received secondary and above education demonstrated they were competent in their performance during the war. Furthermore, Japan was also able to see trends in military training for youth in European countries. An analysis of these training methods resulted in further reforms in the military.

Such findings made the Japanese military even more eager to attract the educated into the military. The government expanded mandatory military service. It took further steps to prevent educated men from escaping the draft, and the applied age of eligibility was lowered. This reform was also intended to reduce the complaint of the ordinary people who only had lower education.

Furthermore, preparatory military drill became compulsory for students under the conscription age. For this training, active-duty officers of the Army were assigned to junior and high schools. Now, the privilege had changed its nature from a measure to attract to the one that might effectively expand the number of reserve officers: It was a great step forward to the original purpose.

5. Establishment of Officer Candidate System: Students as a Resource of Reserve Officers

In 1927, the one-year volunteer system was abolished and officer candidate system was introduced. Under this system, a student, after graduating from vocational school or equivalent educational level, could be appointed as a reserve second lieutenant after 11 months training, provided he had already passed the preparatory military drill.

The nature of the privilege did not greatly change. Students were still exempted from the draft while at school. However, it should be noted that the officer candidate

system was established by an act of the army, not a military service law. This meant that students' fates were now at the hand of the military, and the Diet could not intervene. Students were now considered to be a part of potential army trainee and reserve officers.

Students had the option to choose not to join the officer candidate system. If they made that choice, they instead had to serve for three years as a private. Thus, the military accomplished its objective of making students a source of reserve officers.

6. The WWII in Asia and the Pacific: Students Mobilized to the Fronts

Just before the Pearl Harbor attack, a grace period of conscription for students could be abbreviated by an imperial decree. The decree could be issued without Diet approval, but rather according to the prerogative of the supreme command which was believed to be an exclusive power of the military. This meant that the military could control student privileges as it wished, and any given student's destiny was in the hands of the military.

On October 1943, the grace period of conscription for students at school was suspended except for students majoring in science. From that time many students were called and sent to the battlefields. Some students were called to the military with holding school register, and others were forced to shorten their period of school attendance by 6 months. Full scale "student mobilization" was finally realized in this way. Taking 1943 as an example, it is estimated that nearly 50,000 students from colleges and vocational schools were mobilized.

In what ways did these ex-students serve? Those who qualified for aviation training were ordered to be pilots. They were not allowed to turn down this order. Approximately 3,000 ex-students in the army and 5,000 in the navy were assigned to pilot courses in the year of 1943 alone. They were deployed to operational units after no more than 10 months flight training. Their abilities were far from perfect and many of them lost their lives (40% in the army and 30 % in the navy in 1943). Some died in suicide attacks.

Many of those who were not qualified for aviation training received quick drills for reserve officers and were then sent to the various fronts to fill the need for

officers. Only a few lucky ones became instructors in military schools or accounting officers where they could use their academic knowledge. Some did fight as non-commissioned officers and soldiers.

7. Conclusion

Since the conscription law of 1873, the privileges granted to students changed in character over time passed. These privileges were at first intended to attract the educated and the rich into the military and to bring up the number of reserve officers.

The privileges may have been attractive, but at the same time, the military in the end maneuvered to mobilize students. In retrospect, it is ironic that the original privilege which was intended to keep the students away from the military became an instrument to force them to go to the war.

A suggested source is *Listen to the Voices from the Sea*, which is available in English. This is a collection of letters and diaries by Japanese students who faced immediate death.

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