

# The Military Component and its Role in the History of the Japanese State and Society: The Specifics of the Japanese Military System in the 7<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> Centuries

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The purpose of this article is to analyze the role of the military component underlying the functioning of the Japanese state in the 7<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was during this period that military houses appeared in Japan, and military service began to be perceived as one of the most important government functions. The recruitment of the armed forces was based on universal conscription. As part of the most important government codes, the Military Defense Law for the first time in Japan laid the foundation for the formation of the institution of universal conscription. In this regard, it is extremely interesting to trace how much the Japanese recruitment system coincided and whether it coincided at all with the Chinese one. Created at the turn of the 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> centuries the army recruitment system was a complex phenomenon, which was undoubtedly a progressive step towards the formation and development of the Japanese state. However, despite all the progressiveness of this system, which was borrowed by the Japanese from China, in the conditions of Japanese reality (exorbitant burden for peasants and the absence of enemies) it turned out to be unnecessary and by the 9<sup>th</sup> century it was replaced by “private” formations. However, the fact that this system, with minimal changes, was taken as the basis of the Japanese Imperial Army in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and existed until 1945, speaks of its advanced character and enormous historical significance.

*Keywords:* Japanese armed forces, *gumboryo*, *gundan*, universal conscription.

Despite the fact that European-style armed forces appeared in Japan relatively recently by historical standards (the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), and also existed for a not so significant period (until 1945), the role they played not only in the history of Japan, but also in world history, seems truly enormous. It is no coincidence, as already noted, that their history has always attracted the interest of researchers. But, against the backdrop of a very detailed study of the imperial army and navy of Japan on the eve and course of the war in the Pacific, the initial pages of its history remain practically unexplained.

Based on this, it seems extremely necessary to begin studying the issue with the appearance in Japan of special military units, the history of which begins with the formation of Japanese statehood in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. This is all the more necessary since the formation of the imperial army and navy during the Meiji period 明治 (1868–1912) was formally

justified by the restoration and return to the system that existed in the 7<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> centuries, and many of its elements were incorporated into the new state structure.

As M. V. Vorob'ev notes, in the 4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> centuries military units consisted of separate independent squads of clans that went on a campaign if the state regime was interested [1, pp. 154–155]. In addition, there were detachments of the so-called imperial guard, which included the personal troops of the ruler. Naturally, there could be no talk of any centralized recruitment system. However, throughout the 6<sup>th</sup> century, there was a process of differentiation between government units, which represented the beginnings of a future centralized army, and the personal squads of rulers. The armed forces needed to reform their clan organization, which had shown extreme ineffectiveness during hostilities on the mainland.

The first experience in Japanese history of manning the armed forces with personnel recruited on the basis of conscription dates back to the era of the formation of Japanese statehood — the periods of Asuka 飛鳥 (593–710) and Nara 奈良 (710–794).

The first attempt to limit the squads of local government officials dates back to 645, for which arsenals were created for storing weapons, and edicts were issued aimed at disarming clan members. The process of forming unified armed forces, which continued during the reign of Emperor Temmu 天武 (631–686), was dictated by the threat of a possible invasion of China or Silla state armies. A series of defeats that Japan suffered on the mainland at the beginning of the late 7<sup>th</sup> century forced it to abandon an active foreign policy and focus on domestic reforms. Realizing the unsuitability of the country's existing system, in which troops were recruited only when necessary, Temmu, relying on the experience of China, began to create regular armed forces. In 675, a *hyobusho* 兵部省 military ministry named was created in Japan, its task was to organize a centralized state recruitment system. At the edict of Empress Jito 持統 (645–702), in 689, a state system of military service was established, and part of the male population of the country was supposed to serve in their free time from agricultural work. "Centralized recruitment of recruits has become one of the most important components of the process of organizing state armed forces..." [2, p.235]. In accordance with the new doctrine, the old recruitment system, based on tribal squads, was abolished and replaced by compulsory military service.

However, the issue regarding recruitment rules has not yet been finally resolved. M. V. Vorob'ev points out that one-fourth of the combat-ready population of each province were simultaneously conscripted into state military service [1, p.202]. In turn, A. N. Meshcheryakov notes that the essence of the system was that every fourth man in the family served military service [2, p.235]. The *Nihon Shoki* notes that "In each province, young men should be divided into four parts; one of them should be declared an army and exercises should be conducted with them in military affairs" [3, p.276]. According to M. V. Vorob'ev, the famous historian Asakawa Kanichi believes that each province was divided into four parts and at the same time all the recruits from one of the parts were called up [1, p.202].

In our opinion, the most plausible system of recruitment appears to be the one specified in the official legislative acts of the early 8<sup>th</sup> century, — the codes of Taiho Ritsuryo (大宝律令) and Yoro Ritsuryo (養老律令), the names of which can be translated as "Administrative and criminal codes of the years of reign under the mottos of Taiho (701–703) and Yoro (717–724)." The 17<sup>th</sup> law of the Yoro Ritsuryo Code — Gumboryo (軍防令, Military Defense Law), which essentially is a law on functioning of the armed forces as a whole,

clearly defines the conscription procedure. The third article of the law states: “Military units should always be formed on the basis of territoriality... During conscription, take one man out of three adult men from one household” [4, p. 16]. Thus, based on this article alone, it can be stated that the recruitment of the system created by the decree of 689 was based on the principle of territoriality, and one recruit out of three men was called up for service from each household (family).

However, if we turn to the “Ryo no Gige” compiled in 833, it turns out that the principle of “one out of three” appeared in the “Military Defense Law” of the Yoro Ritsuryo Code, but in the Taiho Ritsuryo Code there was a principle “one out of four” [5, p. 183]. Taking into account that the Taiho Ritsuryo code was introduced in 702, the Yoro Ritsuryo code in 757, and already at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the system of universal conscription was abolished, it turns out that the “one out of four” recruitment system was decisive in the first experience of creating armed forces with mass conscription throughout the state.

Since the Military Defense Law appears to be the first attempt in Japanese history to define a system for recruiting the armed forces based on the principle of conscription, and, moreover, given that the provisions of the codes in question were officially in force until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, (although in practice this system began to collapse in the 10<sup>th</sup> century), it is worth considering it in more detail.

According to the articles of the Law, only the free population was subject to conscription in order of priority. It was prohibited to recruit people into the army outside the conscription period, as well as to dismiss them (Article 36). According to the second article, the army consisted of two types of troops — infantry and cavalry.

Regarding the age of the conscript, it can be assumed that it varied widely — from 21 to 60 years, which correlates with the concept of an adult able-bodied man at that time. At the same time, the upper age limit for conscription was set by Article 36 at 60 years. The same article provided for the exemption from service of physically weak and sick people.

According to the eighth article, the length of service varied from one year in the capital to three years in the border troops. In this case, the time spent on the way to the place of duty was not counted to the period of service. During the service, each warrior was entitled to 6 *to* (1 *to* = 10.35 liters) of dried rice and 2 *sho* (1 *sho* = 1.035 liters) of salt. It was emphasized that in case of spoilage of food, it must be immediately replaced with good quality food (Article 6). The next article determined the number and types of weapons and personal belongings of a warrior. A separate article (27) prohibited taking women with you on a hike. Article 12 determined the gradation of the military. The warriors who served in the capital were called guards — *eishi* (衛士), those who serving to guard the borders was called border guards — *sakamori* (防人). A special place was occupied by the guard, to which from each county one person was sent from the sons of the county administration who knew martial arts (Article 38).

Article 14 provided for the compilation of service records for all soldiers, which indicated the places of campaigns and membership in the taxation group. The lists were compiled in two copies, one of which remained at the place of service, and the other was sent to the War Ministry. The same article established a procedure according to which soldiers who had completed regular service in the capital or on the border were exempted for one and three years respectively from serving in the provinces.

The law also provided benefits for military families. According to Article 16, if there are people in the family who require care from a warrior, the latter cannot be drafted to

the capital and border units. It should be noted that this benefit did not apply to soldiers serving in territorial units at their place of residence.

Articles 20 and 25 determined responsibility for violation of discipline and penalties in a combat situation. While troops were on a campaign and returning home from service, soldiers were forbidden to disperse, overtake or linger, attack peasants, spoil rice fields and crops, and damage lacquer and mulberry trees. During hostilities, the commander-in-chief was given the right to independently punish those guilty in cases of failure to comply with combat orders and assignments, insufficient or poor weapons.

Articles 55 to 63 determined the procedure for serving as border guards. Since the Japanese were constantly under fear of external invasion (often unjustified), border protection was considered a matter of national importance. In addition, service in the border troops was long and, for the most part, took place far from the warrior's home. All this contributed to the fact that special rules were established for border guards. Thus, Article 54 allowed a warrior to take servants, slaves, a horse and an ox with him to the place of service. At the end of their service, the soldiers received travel allowance and were immediately sent home, even if there was a shortage of recruits (Article 60). Border guards on duty received empty lands, the harvest from which went to their sufficiency (Article 62). According to Article 63, in case of illness, the border guard must be provided with the necessary assistance and care. The same article provided for the accrual of one day of vacation for every 10 days of service.

The system of troop control and staffing of the army with command personnel deserves special mention. According to Article 17, troops numbering over 20 people could go on a campaign only with the sanction of the emperor. At the same time, the military leader — *taisho* (大将) received the sword granted by the emperor (Article 18). According to the first article, the command staff included a fifty-fifty commander — *taisho* (隊正), commanding a detachment of 50 warriors, a centurion — *ryosui* (旅帥), commanding a hundred warriors, a commander of two hundred — *koi* (校尉), managing 200 warriors, commander of a territorial military detachment — *gundan taiki* (軍団大毅) and assistant detachment commander — *shoki* (少毅), under whose command were 1000 warriors. At the same time, Article 13 determined that the positions of the commander of a territorial military detachment and his assistant should be occupied by noble people from the local leadership with the appropriate rank, and non-noble persons who were fluent in the military arts were to be appointed to the remaining positions. In the event of an army going on a campaign, Article 24 provided for the appointment to the headquarters of an army of over 10,000 people of one commander — the *shogun* (將軍) and two of his deputies — the *fukushogun* (副將軍). For every three combined armies, a single commander-in-chief was appointed — the *Daishogun* (大將軍). It can be assumed that the lowest rungs of the command ladder were occupied by foremen — *kate* (火長) and commanders of five people — *gotyo* (伍長), there are no explicit indications of the existence of which in the law.

Other articles of the law contained the procedure for rewarding distinguished soldiers, established the obligation to treat the sick and wounded, and the procedure for recruiting bodyguards [4, p. 70] and handling weapons, introduced a system of signal posts, etc.

As part of the most important government codes, the Military Defense Law for the first time in Japan laid the foundation for the formation of the institution of universal conscription. In this regard, it is extremely interesting to trace how much the Japanese re-

cruitment system coincided and whether it coincided at all with the Chinese one, whether the Law is an act created in the emerging state without external influence, or, like many other things in the political, economic, cultural and social sphere, were its provisions borrowed from China?

In China, a regular army based on universal conscription was formed already during the reign of the Qin 秦 dynasty (221 BC — 206 BC). Every man fit for military service for health reasons was required to serve in the army. In 25 (Han Dynasty 漢, 206 BC — 220 AD), this system was abolished. Reforms were carried out in the army recruitment system, and one of the first steps in this direction was the abolition of universal conscription. There were two categories of troops left in the army: permanent (professional) and local, recruited from peasants if necessary [6, pp. 22–24]. During the period of the Sui 隋 (581–618) and Tang 唐 (618–907) dynasties, the Chinese acquisition system underwent further changes. A conscription system called *fu bing* 府兵 (“military district system”) was created, the essence of it was the creation of military garrisons or settlements. This system allowed China to significantly reduce the cost of the army, since in peacetime conscripted soldiers were engaged in farming, and during military campaigns they had to support themselves. A similar system was established in Japan, where soldiers who served as border guards and soldiers of territorial armies also engaged in agriculture in peacetime, ensuring their own existence. It should be noted that towards the end of the Tang dynasty, this system began to decline. The soldiers were not demobilized on time; they were used as a source of free labor. All this led to weakening of discipline and desertions. So, for the protection of the state, at the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century China was forced to begin hiring and recruiting soldiers to serve in border garrisons.

As for the borrowing of Tang legislation by Japan, comparing the Military Defense Law with the corresponding Chinese document, M. V. Vorob'ev notes that out of 76 articles of Japanese law, 35 articles are comparable to the Chinese code. At the same time, only the first article is almost completely identical and 5 articles have moderate agreement [4, p. 190].

Of the most important differences from the point of view of the problems under study, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that the Chinese article, similar to Article 36 of the Japanese law, is much shorter than the Japanese one and specifies only recruitment every three years and demobilization upon reaching 60 years of age. There are also differences in the system of organizing the command staff of the troops. However, in general, the list of articles of Japanese and Tang laws is the same, and the differences lie in their content. At the same time, as G. Franke notes, unlike Tang laws, in which the military-administrative component comes first, Japanese laws are purely military [7, p. 7]. In general, it can be stated that when creating the section of codes on military defense, the Japanese drafters relied entirely on a similar Chinese legislative code, but did not simply copy it, but adapted it in accordance with the realities and specifics of the emerging state.

Regarding the practical functioning of the system established by the codes, it's need to say that from the soldiers recruited on the basis of universal conscription, a special local units *gundan* (軍団) were formed, each of *gundan* was located in about four counties — 郡 (*gun*). The number of these units varied, accordingly, its name also changed. A unit of over 1000 soldiers was called a large unit — *taigundan* (大軍団), from 500 to 1000 medium — *chugundan* (中軍団) and less than 500 small — a *shogundan* unit (小軍団). The total number of *gundan* was about 140 units.



Gundan units, recruited on the basis of conscription, were stationed in the places where the bulk of the conscripts lived. From time to time, training sessions were held, during which the warriors became very superficially acquainted with the basics of military art. Some of the conscripted soldiers served in the defense of the southern borders of Japan, were deployed to guard the capital, and participated in the northeastern campaigns against Emishi.

The units serving in the capital were called *efu* (衛府) — corps or guards. In the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century the total number of troops involved in guarding the capital was 5290 people [2, p. 236], half of which served in the guard formations, and the rest were units of the personal guard (bodyguards) of the emperor and his entourage. The Guard consisted of five corps: the Gateway Defense Department or Palace Guard — *emonfu* (衛門府), two corps (right and left) of the Imperial Guard Department or Life Guard — *ejifu* (衛士府) and two corps of the Combat Defense Department or imperial guard — *hōefu* (*konoefu*) (兵衛府) [8, p. 43]. The responsibilities of the *emonfu* included guarding the space between the middle and outer fences of the imperial court and performing police functions.

The palace guard units were staffed with privates and commands as follows. The *emonfu* was headed by a commander, *kami* (督), and his assistant, *suke* (佐). Below there the first and second senior officers — *taiyi* (大尉) and *shoyi* (少尉), respectively, the first junior — *taishi* (大志) and the second junior — *shoshi* (小志) officers. The junior non-commissioned officer command staff numbered about 200 people. The rank and file *ejī* (衛士) warriors were recruited from the local *gundan*. Their number depended on the situation in the capital and varied from 400 to 600 people. In fact, the palace guard corps was the only competent fighting force in the capital.

*Ejifu* units were deployed to guard the imperial palace itself and were considered elite units, but in reality they performed more representative than military functions. The Life Guard was headed by a commander — *taisho* (大将), who was in charge of the senior — *chūjō* (中将) and junior — *shōshō* (少将) assistants. The next level was the officer corps, represented by senior — *shogen* (将監) and junior — *shoso* (将曹) officers. Below there the layer of ordinary command personnel and the ordinary soldiers themselves — *e* (衛).

*Hōefu* warriors were used to guard the palace complex externally and accompany the emperor during his travels. The hierarchy of military ranks in *hōefu* coincided with the ranks that existed in *emonfu*. The rank-and-file warriors, who initially numbered 400, were called *hōe* (兵衛).

Considering the functions performed by the guards formations, this part of the armed forces was considered the most elite, but in practice it turned out to be the least combat-ready. Clanism and heredity of command posts, lack of practical skills in combat operations — all this did not contribute to the improvement of the fighting qualities of the guard.

Much more successful was the activity of the units that came into contact with the direct enemy, which were Emishi 蝦夷 in the north of the country and Korean pirates who carried out raids in the south.

On the one hand, the recruitment system created by the late 7<sup>th</sup> century made it possible to obtain, if necessary, a fairly large number of soldiers. For example, during the suppression of the uprising of Fujiwara Hirotsugu 藤原広嗣 (?–740), the government mobilized a 17,000-strong army from all provinces, with the exception of the island of Kyushu,

in less than a month [9, p.252], two weeks later, reinforced by another 4,000 thousand soldiers and suppressed the rebellion without much difficulty. In the late 50s of the 8<sup>th</sup> century for the military expedition to Korea that failed due to the removal of its organizer from power, an army of 47,000 infantrymen and 17,360 sailors on 394 ships was prepared [2, p.375].

In the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century an army numbering 47,000 infantrymen and 17,360 sailors on 394 ships was prepared [2, p.375] for the military expedition to Korea. However, the expedition failed due to the removal of its organizer from power.

Finally, the total number of the army that took part in the Thirty-Eight Years' War (三十八年戦争), which lasted from 774 to 811, aimed to subjugate the Emishi, according to the maximum estimate, reached 52 thousand [10, p.304].

On the other hand, the system had one serious drawback that predetermined its future fate — the low professional training of soldiers and, as a result, poor combat effectiveness. The troops fought with numbers, not skill. So, if we compare the warriors of the regular Japanese army and the Emishi warriors, the former, being, in fact, poorly trained peasants, could hardly inflict serious blows on the latter, who were born riders and brilliant archers. Another factor that discredited the system of compulsory military service was its exorbitant burden for peasants. As noted by S. S. Paskov, this burden was so great that the saying “Hitori torareba ikko horobu” was widely spread among the peasants — “if one is taken [for military service], the whole family will perish” (一人取られれば一戸滅ぶ) [11, p.80].

It is necessary to pay attention to one more circumstance. The Japanese are introducing a system of recruiting the armed forces based on conscription based on Chinese experience. However, the *fu bing* system that existed in China, the main advantage of which was the ability to quickly mobilize a large number of soldiers at relatively low costs for their maintenance, essentially turned out to be unnecessary for Japan. Tang China waged regular wars with external enemies. In contrast, Japan, largely due to its geographical location, did not have such enemies, and the possibility of an external invasion, put forward as the main argument for creating a recruitment system based on conscription, turned out to be clearly exaggerated. Therefore, the Japanese army, created to combat external threats, was not needed. Internal territorial expansion, carried out in the north by the hands of warriors and which was, rather, an imitation of the actions of China, also did not bring practical benefit to the state. The Japanese state was not yet ready to develop the northern territories of Honshu, which were unsuitable for rice growing. The costs of maintaining a conscript army significantly exceeded the profit it generated. It is no coincidence that the first attempt to eliminate the Gundan system dates back to 739, when most of these units were abolished and restored to their previous scale only in 746. In 780, the number of provincial Gundans was significantly reduced, primarily due to the disbandment of units, not engaged in the protection of important strategic points. In the Battle of Subuse 巢伏の戦い that took place in 789, the government army of six thousand suffered a crushing defeat from Emishi troops of one and a half thousand. This defeat made the political elite aware of the weaknesses of the existing recruitment system.

As a result, in 792, compulsory universal military service in its existing form was abolished, and the military squads of most provinces were eliminated. The basis of the armed forces was the same as that of Emishi, professional detachments of horse archers, who were recruited on the basis of the conscription system — *kondei* (健児). At the same

time, the number of recruits from each province was strictly regulated and varied from 30 to 200 people, recruited mainly from among wealthy peasants and small landowners. Recruits were required to have their own horses. The changes also affected border units. According to new rules established in 795, soldiers of border detachments began to be recruited exclusively from the peasants of the western provinces, territorially close to the place of service [12, p. 52]. This immediately affected the fighting qualities of the army. Carried out in 794 and 801 punitive expeditions against Emishi were very successful, and the Japanese were able to significantly expand the controlled territories in the northeast of the country.

In next centuries, the process of collapse of the existing recruitment system continued. Trying to improve the fighting qualities of the guard, in 811 the guard units were reformed. The total number of corps was increased from 5 to 6. Emonfu was divided into right and left. The edzifu corps was reorganized into the Close Defense Department — Konoefu (近衛府) [8, p. 56]. But the main change was the cessation of recruitment into the ranks of the guards on the basis of compulsory military service. Structural changes also occurred in border formations.

In general, in the 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries two interrelated processes took place in parallel: the official state armed forces disappeared, and were replaced by “private” troops subordinate to the metropolitan aristocracy, provincial governors and local noble houses. It seems impossible to draw a clear line between state and private formations, since even the same people could serve in them [13, p. 197].

As noted by one of the few Russian researchers of the military features of medieval Japan, A. M. Gorbylev, the military squads of this time consisted of local feudal lords and their dependents — professional warriors. They did not yet have the multi-layered vassal connections characteristic of the later period. Ordinary soldiers were dependent on landowners and were recruited to war if necessary; most of them were peasants, mobilized in their free time from agricultural work [14, p. 172].

The largest formations were at the heads of the border provinces. The unifying principle of state and private military units was the fact that they could begin military operations only with the sanction of the emperor. In case of violation of this rule, the violator was declared a rebel.

Despite the shortcomings that led to the abolition of the armed forces formation order in 789, created at the turn of the 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> centuries the army recruitment system was a complex phenomenon, which was undoubtedly a progressive step towards the formation and development of the Japanese state. The command staff was represented by career soldiers, and the rank and files were recruited for various terms. A three-tier service system (regular metropolitan units of guards and watchman, border detachments and soldiers of territorial units constituting a kind of large reserve) with appropriate professional training would be able to ensure the necessary level of external and internal security of the state. It is no coincidence that this system, with minimal changes, was adopted as the basis of the structure of the new Japanese imperial army in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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### **Военная составляющая и ее значение в истории японского государства и общества: специфика военной системы Японии VII–IX вв.**

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Целью настоящей статьи является анализ роли военной составляющей, лежащей в основе функционирования японского государства в VII–IX вв. Именно в этот период в Японии появляются военные дома, а военная служба начинает восприниматься как одна из важнейших государственных функций. Комплектование вооруженных сил базировалось на всеобщей воинской повинности. Являясь частью важнейших государственных кодексов, Закон о военной обороне впервые в Японии положил начало формированию института всеобщей воинской повинности. В этой связи чрезвычай-

но интересным представляется проследить, насколько совпала и совпала ли вообще японская система комплектования с китайской; был ли упомянутый закон создан в складывающемся государстве независимо от внешнего влияния, или, как и многое другое, его положения были заимствованы из Китая? Созданная на рубеже VII–VIII вв. система комплектования армии представляла собой сложное явление, ставшее, несомненно, прогрессивным шагом на пути становления и развития японского государства. Трехступенчатая система службы (регулярные столичные подразделения стражников и гвардейцев, пограничные отряды и составляющие своеобразный многочисленный резерв воины территориальных подразделений) при соответствующем профессиональном обучении была бы в состоянии обеспечить необходимый уровень внешней и внутренней безопасности государства. Однако, несмотря на всю прогрессивность данной системы, которая была заимствована японцами из Китая, в условиях японской действительности (непомерная тяжесть для крестьян, отсутствие врагов), она оказалась ненужной, и к IX столетию ей на смену пришли «частные» формирования. Тем не менее тот факт, что данная система с минимальными изменениями была взята за основу японской императорской армии во второй половине XIX в. и просуществовала до 1945 г., говорит о ее передовом характере и огромной исторической значимости.

*Ключевые слова:* вооруженные силы Японии, *гумборё*, *гундан*, всеобщая воинская повинность.

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