

## **Training Manuals for Military Personnel in the Meiji Period (1868-1912)**

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**Abstract.** The article discusses training manuals for military personnel which were the basis of the ideological education of soldiers and officers in the Imperial Japanese Army. These manuals, being an important instrument of ideological education, played an important part in the life of Japanese society in the Meiji period. Their authors took into account all possible aspects of the military service, seeking to give answers and explanations to all questions of spiritual, legal, and practical character. Those manuals regulated every movement of the soldiers, shaping their consciousness and way of thinking.

**Keywords:** training manuals, regulations for military personnel, ideological indoctrination, Imperial Japanese Army.

After creating the armed forces which were based, unlike the previous samurai military units, on representatives of the common people, most of whom were from the peasant class, the government faced a serious problem. The core of the issue was that, despite the historically high level of general literacy of the Japanese people, the new historical reality did not let the Japanese keep up with the current rate of westernization, which not only generated various myths about the Western way of life and technical means but also caused certain difficulties related to the army life organized in the European way.

Thus, one of the government's objectives was to make the armed forces, the core of which was young people, a vehicle for spreading new knowledge, which, after the demobilization of the military personnel, would be disseminated among the civilian section of Japanese society. Consequently, in the situation where the europeanized education system was practically absent, it were the armed forces that, in addition to their direct duties, also performed the educational function. In this context, there is an obvious relationship between the armed forces and the Japanese society as a whole. Many servicemen recalled that they owed their success in life primarily to the knowledge and skills they had received during their service in the army.

The first mass-produced printed materials meant for training military personnel appeared among the troops practically at the same time when the formation of the armed forces began under the Conscription Law enacted in 1873. As the bulk of the Japanese people had very vague ideas about a centralized army and navy to be created and about military service, the purpose of these documents was to dispel the myths widespread among the peasants with regard to military conscription as well as to provide answers to the most frequently asked questions in the course of active military service. Also, since the text of the Law was written in rather complicated language, these materials could be easily understood by poorly educated sections of Japanese society.

Among the documents of this kind the best known are materials explaining procedures for exemption from military service, which, given the desire of the majority of the male population to avoid recruitment in the first Meiji years, were very popular in society. A good example is the document *Explanation of Conscription Exemption (Chōhei men'eki yōroku 徴兵免除要録)*, which throughout the 1870s was a reference book in many families where there were men of military age [Chōhei men'eki yōroku 1875].

Unlike the typical 1870s works which focused on how to avoid conscription and were written for the most part by people who had served military conscription, the documents of the 1880s were completely different. With amazing regularity appeared the *Memorandum for*

*Servicemen*, compiled by various authors. The most popular was the *Memorandum* written in 1886 by Aizawa Tomizō, a well-known author of such documents for those doing military service. This 88-page book was a pocket companion for many soldiers in the Imperial Japanese Army. In 1877, its author was called up for military service, which he did in the 1<sup>st</sup> Engineer Regiment at the Tokyo garrison. After demobilization, he established a publishing house, *Kōseidō* (厚生堂), which specialized in publishing printed materials for the military. Until his death in 1915, Aizawa published over 100 works on different aspects of military service, which were very popular in society. In the preface to his *Memorandum* he wrote, “A family’s prosperity or decline, life or death are inextricably linked with the life of the state. Harmony can only be achieved through mutual care. Servicemen must realize themselves that the state is their home and the whole nation is their family. When defending the state, soldiers defend the graves of their ancestors.” [Aizawa 1886, p. 4]. Thus, the importance and significance of military service was explained to new recruits simply and without undue pomp, for which purpose the author used fundamental constructs that existed in the mind of every Japanese from childhood, such as native places (*furusato* 故郷) and ancestors’ graves (*fumbo* 墳墓). Naturally, the main objective of such documents was not just to clarify the issues of military service, but to promote the development of a certain system of values, as a result of which the entire population of Japan would come to realize the importance and, ultimately, the honor of doing military service.

Meanwhile, before the Sino-Japanese War, each military unit published its own materials reflecting their specifics and meant only for their own personnel. Even very important matters such as handling weapons, addressing the commander, marching formation, etc. were explained differently in the training manuals of different regiments, and in most cases (especially in the first half of the Meiji period) these rules were announced by the commanders orally.

Major General Soga Sukenori (曾我 祐準), who in 1882-1885 was Vice Chief of the General Staff, emphasized in his article *On Education in the Army* (*Taichū bunkyōron* 隊中文教論) that “a man who has become

a soldier must remember that he is obliged to do his duty without sparing himself for the sake of every person in our country... To help him in this, it is necessary to write appropriate teaching aids that will make him an educated person in the broad sense and an expert in military matters in the narrow sense” [Soga 1876, p. 2]. Based on this, it can be assumed that at least by 1876 such textbooks had not been created yet. However, starting from 1883, such publications began to appear in many regiments.

What did these manuals teach? The common feature to all of them was that they began with the text of the 1882 *Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors* and comments on it. As a rule, a manual consisted of several sections, the first of which contained rules of conduct in the barracks. These rules were arranged in the form of questions from soldiers and answers of the commander, i.e. resembling oral answers. In this sections, for example, there were questions like “What is to be done if liquid starts to leak out of the barracks window?” And, accordingly, the answer was “If liquid leaks out or solid objects get in or something knocks on the frame, in no case can the lamp be lit without permission” [Heisotsu kuchijūmon kotaeroku 1886, p. 8]. The answer to the question “When is it allowed to ease oneself?” was “Number one and number two should be done only in the latrine” [Heisotsu kutijūmon kotaeroku 1886, p. 11].

The second section dealt with military personnel’s attitude towards civilians. “A soldier should not be arrogant or insolent towards civilians. Otherwise he will be considered vulgar and rude” [Heisotsu kuchijūmon kotaeroku 1886, p. 42]. In addition, this section focused on the concept of duty: a soldier is the defender of the people who is highly valued in society. Thus, pursuing the aim to strengthen discipline, by means of the explanations contained in this section, the ideologists sought to tame the violent spirit typical of the soldiers before the Sino-Japanese War.

The third section was devoted to soldiers’ weapon handling. So, one of the manuals, made in the form of questions and answers, gave an explanation of the functions of small arms, their names and roles of their main parts. Question: “What is a rifle?” Answer: “In the broad sense a rifle is a tool for protecting the country, while in the narrow sense it

is a means of self-defense [Heisotsu hikkei, 1883 p. 52]. Through this explanation the soldiers were to correlate their life and destiny with the destiny and existence of the state, which, in the long run, helped to form the sense of “internal nationalism”.

The next section of such manuals had to do with the soldier-state relations and was often called “relations between me and the state” (*watakushi to kokka to no kankei* 私と国家との関係). This section had, for example, questions like “What should you do if, after serving active military duty, you return home and see that your parents are very ill and that you have come under the call-out of reserves?” The ideologically correct answer to this difficult question was “Honest and loyal service is very important for the soldier, and even if your parents are ill, you should immediately go to do military service, as you are indispensable for the state that personifies your ancestors and parents” [Yonjūichinenshiki hohei kyōkasho 1908, p. 103]. Influenced by such explanations, soldiers embraced the idea that the state was the main value and that for its sake they should go to serve, even leaving their sick parents.

However, the growing education level of the Japanese, the increasing role of the armed forces in society and the state, the rising status of the soldier, tightened censorship, etc. stopped the publication of training manuals in the regiments. These materials were replaced by national-level manuals that were written by prominent authors and champions of military ideology. Such manuals were published until the defeat of Japan in the Pacific War and played a great role in nurturing fidelity, courage, selfless devotion, and contempt of death in the soldiers.

As an example, let us look at the interpretation of the concept of “patriotism” presented in the 1895 manual for soldiers. “Patriotism is love of one’s country, our Great Japan, ruled by the continuous imperial dynasty. Patriotism helped us to avoid the invasion of foreign powers after the opening of the country and to become a prosperous and world-famous state. Our ancestors protect us because they love and take pride in Great Japan” [Heisotsu kyōkasho 1895, p. 4]. This passage in its pathos is evidently different from the more mundane phrases in the textbooks and memos published before the Sino-Japanese War.

Having defeated the great continental power, which for a long time had been a teacher and a store of knowledge for Japan, supporters of militarization began to make every effort to ensure that this victory had the greatest possible impact on Japanese society. While before the Sino-Japanese War the need to create armed forces was explained by the need to preserve Japan's sovereignty, since the mid-1890s the answer to the question why the army was needed started to sound in a slightly different way. In his *Manual on Military Science*, Idota Ititarō, the author of numerous works on the war with China, wrote the following on this subject: "The reason for the existence of armed forces in the state is that they do not allow other countries to offend us, guarantee harmony, contribute to our glory abroad and, like a fence, ensure peace inside the country" [Idota 1901, p. 30].

In general, the idea of the army as a fence protecting society from all evils was quite popular. For instance, Takahashi Seiko wrote in his work *Gunjin dokuhon* on the social role of the armed forces: "The army is like a wall of a warehouse or a fence around a house. If a warehouse does not have a wall, the wares will not be safe. If there is no fence around a house, thieves can easily enter it at night. That is why the men of our country must do the duty of military service and be responsible for protecting the empire" [Takahashi 1902, p. 24]. Thus, the need for armed forces and military service was explained in a simple and easily understandable manner.

The slogan *army is a school of life*, popular in the USSR and in modern Russia, began to be used in Japan back in the 1870s in a slightly different form. The expression *life school* (*jinsei gakkō* 人生学校) with regard to the armed forces was closely associated with the personal gain of the soldier. The government tried to not only show its concern for military personnel during their military service, but also give them knowledge that would be in demand in society after their demobilization. Given the social nature of the knowledge gained during the years of military service, the expression *the army is the school of the people* was popular in the period under review, meaning that old-timers share their knowledge and experience with new recruits. The main effort

of the military leaders was aimed at making a new recruit regard the service as his personal gain, giving him a great advantage over those who were not honored to be a soldier.

After Japan's victory in the war with China, the tone of materials meant for the education of military personnel changed somewhat. Although the general theoretical ideological constructs remained unchanged, the enemy image was radically reviewed. On the eve and during the Sino-Japanese war the main objective was to strengthen the patriotism of the Japanese soldiers, which was often achieved through anti-Chinese rhetoric, whereas during the preparation and waging of the war against Russia anti-Russian rhetoric came to the fore. For example, some training manuals stated that Japan's aim was to protect China against Russian expansion in the Far East. The claim about the defense of China was fully justified in the sense that, after its defeat, it could not pose any serious competition to Japan. Thus, the soldiers were indoctrinated with the idea that the support and protection of China were linked to the independence and security of Japan.

The texts of many materials meant for soldiers show that, in addition to purely theoretical questions of duty, fidelity, courage, etc., practical legislative issues were also very important. The Japanese legislation during the Russo-Japanese War prescribed to a person to be mobilized to settle all domestic matters in advance. This was explained by the fact that a new recruit or a reservist called up for service during a large-scale war may not return from the battleground, which could cause certain legal difficulties.

The well-thought-out materials and the precise planning of each step, even a very insignificant one, conditioned in many respects the far-sightedness and sagacity of the Japanese, which still amaze researchers. Thus, the materials that inspired soldiers during the Russo-Japanese War do not only clearly express confidence in the victory of Japan, but also describe the triumphant return of the soldiers in a number of sections. For instance, *Speeches to Welcome and to See Off the Military* (*Sōgei gunjin shukusai enzetsu* 送迎軍人祝祭演説), published in mid-1904, contained a section titled *Solemn Speeches on the Occasion of*

*the Triumphant Return of the Soldiers* (兵士の凱旋祝文). One of the speeches there included the following passage: “Our soldiers have accomplished a great task in defeating Russia and have restored peace in the Far East, thanks to which we have risen high in the world. Now, rejoicing and jubilant, they are returning home in triumph” [Sōgei gunjin shukusai enzetsu 1904, p. 93].

In general, it was during the Russo-Japanese War that the theoretical constructs which finally took shape after the war with China were worked out in practice. The fact that the army, the state, and society were a single monolithic whole during the conflict with Russia is confirmed by the fact that this war was perceived in Japan as a truly people’s war. This is evidenced, for instance, by mass production and sale in all shops of cheap popular prints with military scenes and portraits of war heroes, which enjoyed enormous popularity with the people; there were lots of children’s toys ranging from sailor suits with the names of famous ships to small models of ships, weapons, and all kinds of tin soldiers. Vladimir Kraevskiy, who was travelling across Japan at that time, rightly noted: “the war is a continuous holiday in all of Japan” [Kraevskiy 1905, p. 32].

In certain situations, the training manuals required that soldiers should abandon all sorts of human feelings. This was particularly pronounced not with regard to the enemy, which would be quite natural, but to their comrades in arms. An example is the ban on providing any aid to wounded fellow soldiers until the end of the battle, including bandaging the wounds and sending them to the rear area. The reason for this ban was explained in the following way: rendering aid to one wounded man meant two people coming out of action – the wounded soldier and the one helping him. “This weakens the combat capabilities of the unit, which plays into the hands of the enemy. So, by assisting the wounded soldier, you indirectly help the enemy, thus committing treason” [Yonjūichinenshiki hohei kyōkasho 1908, p. 35]. It should be noted that this phenomenon, typical of the entire subsequent history of the Japanese army, was actively discussed by Western researchers, who consigned it solely to the natural cruelty of the Japanese without trying to understand properly its true causes.

After the Russo-Japanese War there appeared a stereotype: “a good citizen is a good soldier, and a good soldier is a good citizen”. In fact, this determined the nature of the whole of Japanese society, which was now based exclusively on moral categories typical of the military milieu. Therefore, a man who did not serve in the army without objective reasons had many professions banned for him; moreover, society regarded him as an outcast. By analogy with the well-known proverb *He who is not a Taira is not a man* (*Taira ni arazu mono wa hito ni arazu* 平らに  
あらずものは人にあらず), a saying came along at the end of the Meiji period which stated: *He who has not served is not a man* (*Nyūei wo shinai hito wa hito ni arazu* 入營をしない人は人にあらず); it was the best possible way to define society’s attitude to military service and the army as a whole.

Aiming to strengthen the connection between the civil and military sections of Japanese society, in 1908, the Imperial Military Association – (*Teikoku gunji kyōkai* 帝国軍事協会) – began to publish the *Sword and Quill* magazine (文武). The issues of this magazine, whose main readers were the families of military personnel, published materials (diaries, letters, essays, etc.) written by ordinary soldiers and related to various aspects of the army service. The preface to the special issue *Collected Works of the Military Personnel* (*Gunjin bunshū* 軍人文集), published on the basis of these materials, explained the purpose of the publication as follows: “...dissemination of the views of the military milieu among the civilian population..., familiarization of the population of the empire with the situation in the army” [Gunjin bunshū 1910, p. 4.]. Although this magazine and its special issues were not training aids for soldiers in the literal sense, the fact that these publications were very popular among conscripts and recruits, who wanted to know the details of the service, makes them worth mentioning. The fact that the writings of ordinary soldiers were published in magazines was an unprecedented luck for the Meiji military men, which naturally played an important part in the ideological education of Japanese society. Words written by ordinary soldiers were often more effective than official government propaganda.

Concluding the analysis of materials intended for the military personnel of the Imperial Army, a few words should also be said about the more mundane, but at the same time very important and, in fact, fundamental things – money allowances and food supply for the soldiers. Pursuing the aim of creating a militarized society in a certain sense of the word, Japanese ideologists also took into account the negative aspects of the public perception of the military institution in the first half of the period under study, and in its second half they managed to completely eliminate these negative points. Training materials, too, played a certain role in the process. Thus, before the Sino-Japanese War, money transfers to soldiers from their parents were quite widespread. This fact prevented the formation of a favorable image of the armed forces, since the army in the minds of the people was seen as a place where a person suffered certain hardships, which money helped to overcome. Moreover, taking away even a small sum from the meager incomes caused public dislike. Therefore, by the beginning of the Russo-Japanese War, money transfers to soldiers had already been prohibited.

After the Russo-Japanese War, during the period of active service, soldiers received a very decent salary by the standards of that time. Thus, according to the 1910 *Army Salary Code* (*Rikugun kyūyo rei* 陸軍給与令), the average monthly salary of privates ranged from 1 yen 56 sen to 1 yen 95 sen. In principle, given the prices of that period, this money was quite enough for the basic daily expenses of soldiers – purchases of ink, brushes, postcards, stamps, tooth powder, soap, etc. Buying these goods at the military store cost on average from 53 sen 7 rin to 1 yen 2 sen and 3 rin per month. Since many soldiers smoked, the additional spending on buying tobacco was about 52 sen per month, with 5 cigarettes smoked per day. So, soldiers had about 50 sen left to buy sweets or small souvenirs for their families.

One more component in the shaping of a favorable image of the armed forces was propaganda of the food security of the military. The soldier manuals stressed that the army ration was quite sufficient and varied, and well-balanced in composition and taste. It was put in soldiers' heads that the government took great care of them, and society began to

view the army as a place where the food was very good and satisfying, which also played an important role in shaping the general perception of the armed forces. Taking into account the fact that the food of ordinary peasants was rather simple and meager, the variety of food in the army was a secondary but still important incentive to sign on as a soldier.

Thus, we can conclude that training manuals for the soldiers, being an important instrument of ideological education, played an important part in the life of Japanese society in the Meiji period. Their authors took into account all possible aspects of the military service, seeking to give answers and explanations to all questions of spiritual, legal, and practical character. These manuals regulated every movement of the soldiers, shaping their consciousness and way of thinking. It is safe to say that no army in the world at that time had such a large number of printed materials intended for military personnel. Moreover, a specific feature of many of these manuals was that they were meant not only for the military, but also for the civilian audience, thus covering the whole of Japanese society.

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