Academic Paper

Social Aspects of Military Elites in Japan in the Early Twentieth Century

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Abstract

This paper focuses on army officers known as the military elite, with the aim of discussing their social aspects by comparing them with those of civilian officials from the perspective of their social background and selection process. On this basis, one of the causes of the destabilization of harmonious relations between military and civilian elites from the late-1920s onwards is examined. Since educational opportunities and professional employment opportunities became more inclusive and disassociated with specific groups, both elites began emerging from the same social base. The theory in previous studies, which states that this resulted in a gap between the social backgrounds of the two elites, causing instability in their relationship, lacks accuracy. In fact, attention must be paid to the examination-based system in elite circles instead. Both, the military elite and bureaucrats, were recruited from a wide range of people socially characterized as survivors of intense competition. Both elites enhanced their pride, and the groups became composed of those worthy of their status in 1920. As a result, the degree of compromise between the two declined and became one of the factors of the conflict.

Keywords: military officers; social background; civilian officials; selection

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1. Introduction

As modernization progressed in Japan, the military elite and civilian elite, especially the civilian bureaucrats, despite occasional confrontations, had maintained harmonious relations as a whole since 1868. In addition to wartime periods such as the First Sino–Japanese War (1894–1895) and the Russo–Japanese War (1904–1905), army officers did not stand out excessively, and neither did bureaucrats act in an egocentric manner during peacetime.

However, the destabilization of the harmonious relationship between the two began causing conflicts in the late-1920s. This change was not brought about by a single factor but by a combination of multiple factors. In political science, for example, it is suggested that the deaths of all the powerful and dominant politicians, bureaucrats, and army officers in modern Japan by the early 1920s enhanced institutional autonomy and encouraged individual movements (Hata, 1980, p.7). The field of military history argues that the social trend of disregarding the military prompted by the disarmament in the 1920s provoked a military backlash that significantly influenced the subsequent actions of officers (Tobe, 1998, p. 246). The fluctuation of the harmonious relationship is important as it led to the collapse of domestic integrated systems and eventually to the loss of control over the army. The topic thus needs to be discussed more multilaterally.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the factors of this conflict from the perspective of educational sociology. Although this perspective may seem to give a peculiar impression, this approach is effective as the modern elite is produced through school and education. This paper focuses on army officers known as the military elite, with the aim of discussing their social aspects by comparing them with those of civilian officials. More specifically, one of the causes of the destabilization of harmonious relations is discussed based on the analysis of their social background and selection process.

Previous studies related to this topic are as follows. According to Takeuchi (1999), since both elites belonged to the social class of warriors (*shizoku*) for a while after modernization, internal ties had been developed between them. As a result, conflicts of interest were easier to mitigate, maintaining stability in their relationship. From the mid-1910s onwards, however, the Military Academy (*Rikugun Shikangakkō*) training the army elite based their source of recruitment on the traditional sector dominated by farmers, while the modern sector predominantly consisted of white-collar workers became the main recruitment source of the civilian elite produced in the route from secondary schools to the Imperial Universities. Consequently, the homogeneity between the two was reduced

and their relationship became unstable.[1] In addition, the army became connected with physiocracy and radicalized as many army officers came from farming families.

Hirota (1997) also argues that while the recruitment base of army officers expanded to the agricultural sector, the civil elite focused on the modern sector, thus creating a gap between them. According to the sociologist, this social segmentation influenced the trend of the army from the late 1920s onwards.

In short, the divergence of the social backgrounds of the elites—the loss of the common origin—contributed to the conflicting relationship. However, the validity of applying the schema of class conflict, frequently referred to in the Western society to analyse modern Japan, is questionable. Modern Western Europe was generally a society in which education and professions are closely tied to particular social classes. Such a society does not create competition based on academic achievement alone, and it is not easy to reduce social class differences through escalation based on academic achievement (Sonoda, 1983, p. 54). In fact, the overheating of academic competition in Japan was attributable to the lack of ties between education or professions and specific classes. Therefore, it is inadequate to attribute the origins of the two elites to their conflicting relationship.

Based on this understanding, this paper aims to examine the background of incompatibility between social class and education and attempts to analyse groups selected based on academic achievement in terms of attribute and performance to discuss the factors of the conflicting relationship. Part 1 focuses on the secondary school curriculum and the subjects of the entrance examination for higher education, as the incompatibility seems to have been predicated on the curriculum. Part 2 elucidates the social backgrounds of the two elites based on data. Although previous studies have emphasized the agriculture-minded army officers and the deviation from the recruitment base of the civilian elite, this part attempts to determine the validity of such arguments because it is hardly a theory derived from empirical analysis. In Part 3, the competitive selection process experienced by the military elite is examined in comparison with the selection process of public officers. And then this paper presents a conclusion, drawn based on the findings.

[1] In this paper, the traditional occupational community consisting of farmers (including landlords), merchants, and craftsmen is referred to as the traditional sectors. In contrast, the occupational class born in the modern society is categorized as the modern sector. The latter sector consists of military officers, office workers, and other professionals.

2. Curriculum and Social Classes

This part examines the characteristics of the secondary education curriculum first to highlight the social aspects of modern Japan.

In the pre-modern era, the Edo period, the classics were the mainstream discipline in the dominant group of the warrior class. It included Chinese studies (*kangaku*) and Japanese classics (*wagaku*), and the former was highly valued. Based on the generalized assumption that the samurai must learn the fundamentals of Chinese studies, it was the centre of education in the fief schools (*hankō*) they attended.

In addition to being educated, enhancing their knowledge of Chinese studies was a matter of life or death for them. Some fiefs (*han*) imposed sanctions, such as disbarment from official appointments, refusal of permission to succeed to a family headship, and reduction of hereditary stipends, on those whose proficiency level failed to satisfy the standards (Dore, 1984, p. 87). Also, the required proficiency in Chinese studies was higher for those of high status. Utmost importance was placed on Chinese studies, while modern foreign languages, mathematics, and natural sciences were not regarded as academic disciplines. Although Fukuzawa Yukichi was a *samurai*, he studied Dutch in the 1850s in a private school (*shijuku*) instead of a fief school. Yamakawa Kenjirō, who studied at a fief school in Aizu fief (Aizu han) in the 1860s and later became the president of Tokyo Imperial University (*Tōkyō Teikokudaigaku*), recalled that those who studied mathematics at that time did not even deserve to be called a *samurai* (Ko Yamakawa Danshaku Kinenkai, 1937, p. 96). Legitimacy was conferred on the traditional study of the classics.[2]

Nonetheless, Japan began to pursue the path of to a modern nation through the Meiji Restoration (*Meiji Ishin*) in 1868. Leaders of the new era also promoted the modernization of education, and as early as four years later, a framework of the educational curriculum of secondary schools began to include not only the classics but also foreign languages, mathematics, and natural sciences. Modern academic disciplines became compulsory subjects in public education.

According to the Outline of Secondary School Regulations, guidelines on secondary school education, published by the Ministry of Education (*Monbushō*) in 1881, the classics (Chinese and Japanese classics) accounted for 23.8 percent, English for 23.2 percent, and

[2] In this paper, the academic disciplines regarded as classics in the cultural area to which a country belongs is referred to as traditional studies. Latin and Greek in Europe and Chinese studies and Confucianism in countries in the East Asian cultural sphere are deemed traditional studies. In contrast, modern studies refer to modern European languages, mathematics, and natural science.

mathematics and natural sciences for 23.8 percent of the total number of classes. As these figures indicate, the classic was no longer the only valued subject in secondary education, as subjects introduced from the West began to be included. From this period onwards, the number of classes of each subject slightly changed depending on the period although this basic line was maintained in the next century. This guideline also positioned secondary schools as a route to higher education, while emphasizing foreign language learning as a preparatory discipline for higher education. This was how the early modern era departed from traditional studies and transformed into the era of modern academic disciplines.

This emphasis on modernism in secondary education was extremely innovative from a global perspective. In Rugby School, one of the public schools in the UK, Latin and Greek classic languages accounted for 52.0 percent of all subjects in 1895 (Hashimoto, Fujii, Watanabe, Shindō, & Yasuhara, 2001, p. 31). In contrast, no school was enthusiastically teaching mathematics, and the subject was optional at Eton College while it was completely disregarded at Harrow School (Bamford, 1967, p. 62). In addition, while Rugby School had thirteen classical language teachers, there were only two teachers of mathematics and modern foreign languages (Fujii, 1996, p. 176). In other countries, the classics accounted for 42.9 percent in Lycee, France, in 1890 (Hashimoto et al., 2001, p. 93), and for 40.2 percent at gymnasiums in Germany in 1901 (Mochida, 1998, p. 68). In Western countries that developed earlier, the core of secondary education training the elite at the turn of the century was still the classics that accounted for 40–50 percent.

Since the bureaucratic appointment system was supported by imperial examinations, modern studies were neglected in the Qing dynasty facing the impact of the West ahead of Japan. The absolutism of traditional disciplines was never changed, as the degree of familiarity with the classics determined the relative merits. If it had been undermined, the ruling elite of the Qing Empire would have lost the legitimacy of its own status and capability authorized by the imperial examinations. It was only natural that the empire was reluctant to value modern study, which would have been self-denial. The bureaucratic selection system hindered the growth and penetration of modern education (Miyazaki, 1984, p. 225).

As is well known, Japan during the Meiji period developed a modern education system based on that of Western countries. It is important to note that the Western system was introduced as a framework, yet the country opted for its own path for the legitimacy of knowledge and curriculum.

What follows next is the examination of the process of institutionalization of modern studies from the perspective of admissions

to higher education institutions. The trend of entrance examinations in the West is first explained briefly prior to the discussion on the trend in Japan.

Classical education was valued in the mainstream of secondary education in the West as it was closely related to higher education opportunities. Knowledge of Latin and Greek was mandatory for studying at Oxbridge until the end of the First World War (Fujii, 1995, p. 70). Similarly in France, although Ecole Polytechnique used to be a garande ecole training scientists and engineers, the institution began to favour secondary school graduates of classical language courses in the mid-nineteenth century (Hashimoto etal., 2001, p. 96).

A limited number of secondary schools taught the two classical languages the elite should learn in the multiple-track system with many different types of secondary schools, and the curriculum of the secondary schools, the emerging bourgeoisie, and children of commoners attended did not include them. As a result, higher education was only available to the graduates of a very few schools teaching the two languages and not accessible to the rest of the population. In Germany, Realgymnasium, in which only Latin was taught, did not recognize the same right to enter university as gymnasium until the twentieth century (Mochida, 1998, p. 68).

As the classics continued to be the core subject, the discipline of traditional studies became a condition of the elite in the Western countries. The affinity of the traditional ruling class with traditional studies impeded the class mobility, that is, the possibility of upward mobility. The system was designed to regard traditional studies as legitimate and support the reproduction of the traditional ruling class.

The subjects of the entrance examination of major Japanese higher education institutions are explained below in relation to the situation in the West. As described above, the formation of the secondary school curriculum focused more on modern studies from the beginning. The knowledge and education higher education institutions sought in their new students are described subsequently.

The Imperial College of Engineering (*Kōbu Daigakkō*), the predecessor of the Faculty of Engineering at Tokyo Imperial University, had focused on English and mathematics as the subjects of the entrance examination since its inauguration in 1873. According to the college regulations of 1885, English accounted for 59 percent, mathematics for 24 percent, Chinese classics for 9 percent, and geography for 8 percent of the full marks of the entrance examination (Kyu Kōbu Daigakkō Shiryō Hensankai, 1931, p. 286). As the figures indicate, English and mathematics accounted for a very high percentage, with a total of over 80 percent. The subjects of the entrance examination in

1886 of the First Higher School (*Daiichi Kōtōgakkō*), almost all whose students go on to the Imperial Universities after graduation, were Chinese classics, modern foreign languages, and mathematics (Daiichi Kōtōgakkō, 1939, p. 129).

Army and navy schools indicated a similar trend. In the Naval Academy (*Kaigun Heigakkō*), Chinese classics, English, and mathematics were compulsory subjects in 1875 (Kaigun Heigakkō, 1968, p. 212). Literature and mathematics were the compulsory subjects of entrance examination of the Military Academy in 1878. The examination of foreign languages was optional, yet its mark was counted in the total score since those with knowledge of foreign languages undoubtedly had an advantage. In 1888, foreign languages became compulsory (Hirota, 1997, pp. 41-46). Top-level higher education institutions, such as the First Higher School, the Military Academy, and the Naval Academy added natural sciences to the subjects of the entrance examination by 1890 and raised the demand of each subject.

These three institutions were the three major paths of young men in modern Japan. In contrast to Western countries that maintained their focus on traditional studies, mastery of modern studies became an essential condition of elite.

The focus on modern studies became the condition of discontinuity of the ruling class in the transition period from the pre-modern to the modern era. This change helped activate the meritocratic recruitment to avoid favouring the *samurai*, the former ruling class. Leaders of the Meiji Restoration consisting of former *samurai* had the choice to deliberately adopt the selection method of focusing on Chinese studies that had an affinity with the warrior class (former *samurai*), the group to which they belonged, and to create an elite culture reflecting *samurai* disciplines such as equitation and martial arts. This enhanced the advantages of the group they belong to and prompted schools to function as a mechanism of reproduction. It was precisely for this reason that secondary schools in the West insisted on classical languages.

However, the leaders adopted a policy that required the elite to be proficient in modern studies to force through the reorganization of knowledge, leading themselves to undermine their own advantages. This was what caused the decline in the value of intellectual property that the *samurai* had inherited from the previous era. Since the legitimatization of modern studies was a novelty for the *samurai* and the nobility (*kazoku*) as well as for farmers, merchants, and craftsmen, no specific group had an absolute advantage in the academic competition. As it was a novelty for all people, schools lacked teachers capable of teaching the subjects, and an overwhelming majority of candidates failed the entrance examination. Nevertheless, the Meiji govern-

ment did not return the academic focus to Chinese classics or relax the standards.

As a result, educational opportunities grew more inclusive without ever being excessively tied with a specific social class. Education and academic qualifications were no longer the privileges of some people and they became the subjects of interest for people of almost all classes. Their involvement transformed the entrance examination into a competition participated in by many ambitious individuals rather than a mere formality. Elites were no longer associated with a particular class, instead they were selected by competition. In Germany, traditional educated citizens and emerging economic citizens engaged in conflict over schools and educational opportunities for a prolonged period (Mochida, 1998, pp. 57-60).

The former denied the latter's demand for their privileges and advantages. This type of conflict did not arise in Japan owing to the boundlessness of educational opportunities explained earlier.

The inclusion of modern foreign languages and modern Western philosophy, rather than Chinese classical literature and philosophy, in the education of the modern Japanese elite symbolized its inclusiveness. The selection and definition of disciplines from modern studies as well as the emphasis on Western philosophy underpinned the fact that education is a modern product lacking the backbone of the class system. The Western elite insisted on the knowledge of classical languages to differentiate themselves culturally from other groups. In contrast, Japanese elites displayed their level of education to demonstrate their academic ability and educational background. In this sense, modern studies transformed schools into social mobility systems.

In modern Japan, as already explained, those taking the path of the military elite and those aiming for the civilian elite studied in secondary schools based on the same curriculum, after which they took similar entrance examinations for selection. There are two key factors in understanding Japanese elites. One is that the curriculum did not function favourably to any particular class, and the other is that both elites had the same educational background.

The next part analyses the social background of the two elites.

3. Social Backgrounds of the Two Elites

As mentioned at the beginning, previous studies have indicated the difference between army officers and the civilian elite in the replacement sources. This raises the question of the existence of a significant dissociation between the two. This part discusses the social background of the generation constituting the major part of the officer group in the early part of Shōwa period

(1926–1945), that is, those who became military students around 1900 as well as of those who graduated from the Military Academy around 1940.

There were two routes to become army officers. The first route was to enter the Military Academy from the Army Cadet School (*Rikugun Yōnengakkō*), and the second was the route to enter the Military Academy from a secondary school. The two routes met in the Military Academy, whose graduates became members of the officer corps. Previous studies have suggested the connection between army officers and the agricultural class based only on analysis of the social background of those who took the latter route without giving any attention to those who took the first route. This raises the question of how the combination of the two changes the image of army officers.

Table 1: Family occupations of the Military Academy students

	Military officer	Professional Employee	Monk Priest	Farmer	Merchant	Craftsman	Other	Unemployed	Total
Class of 1905–1917	10.6	22.8	1.5	29.3	9.7	3.5	3.5	19.1	100.0 (8590)
Class of 1918–1929	17.4	22.6	1.1	29.1	9.4	5.0	3.7	11.7	100.0 (5050)
Class of 1930–1942	8.7	28.3	1.2	26.7	11.7	4.6	5.2	13.6	100.0 (7372)

Rikugundaijin Kanbō (issued each year). *Rikugunshō tōkei nenpō*. Tokyo: Rikugunshō.

For example, 42.7 percent of the fathers of enrolees in the Military Academy from secondary schools in 1917 were farmers, while only 18.7 percent of the father of their fellow students from the Army Cadet School had the same occupation (Rikugundaijin Kanbō, 1914, pp. 35-36); Rikugundaijin Kanbō, 1919, p. 18). It is essential to study both groups, so as to elucidate the social background of army officers.

Table 1 shows the occupations of the fathers of both groups combined. The main focus is placed on graduates after 1905 as they played parts in the army after 1920. The table indicates the following three aspects.

First, not many of them came from farm households, and the figure remained at less than 30 percent throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The combination of students of the Army Cadet School into the figure slightly reduced the relation between the military elite and agriculture.

Second, the modern sector consisting of military officers, professionals, and employees had a high occupancy rate. The figure, which shifted from 33.4 percent to 40.0 percent, and then to 37.0 percent, remained consistently higher than the farmers.

In the third place, the occupational composition varied over a period of around

forty years. This suggests that access to the Military Academy was widely available and not monopolized by some social classes.

As described above, children of parents from different occupations had the possibility to become an army officer. As army officers were recruited from a wide range of backgrounds, they did not represent any specific occupational class.

Likewise, the paternal occupations of students of the Imperial Universities reveals the social classes constituted the civilian elite. According to a survey conducted in 1926, 18.2 percent of the students of Tokyo Imperial University, which was the most prestigious Imperial University at that time, came from farming households, whereas 44.3 percent belonged to the modern sector (Tokyo Teikokudaigaku Gakuyūkai Kyōsaibu Jōmuiin, 1926, pp. 34-45). In Kyoto Imperial University (*Kyōto Teikokudaigaku*), the second most prestigious university, 14.6 percent of the students were from farm families and 33.8 percent from the modern sector in 1932 (Monbushō Shisōkyoku, 1933, pp. 131-132). Children of farmers accounted for 14.6 percent of the total number of students at Hokkaido Imperial University (*Hokkaidō Teikokudaigaku*) in 1935 (Hokkaidō Teikokudaigaku, 1936, p. 3). The proportion of farming families was low compared to the graduates of the Military Academy, yet it was merely a relative difference. What is important is not the proportional difference between the Imperial Universities and the Military Academy, but that a certain number of students of the both institutions came from farming households. This demonstrates that the opportunity to enter not only the Military Academy but also the Imperial Universities was available to children of farmers as one of their possible career paths.

The view of Kikuchi (2003) on higher education opportunities in modern Japan accurately describes the above situation.

> The composition of family occupations of students enrolled in higher education institutions in Japan was characterized by diversity instead of monopolization, except for Buddhist private universities. Students of government schools, the Imperial Universities, private schools, and vocational schools shared similar social backgrounds. Although the social components of students varied to a certain degree depending on the type of school, they came from almost the same social background. (p. 367)

Although different types of higher education institutions existed, he argues that they did not correspond to any specific classes, and that students of those institutions shared almost the same social background. In accord with this, since elites were formed not based on attributes such as family background but through higher education performance, both military and civilian elites were produced from almost the same social infrastructure. In other words, although a slightly larger number

of students at the Military Academy came from a farming background and the modern sector was at the core of the university group, classes were not divided based on the educational opportunities of each institution.

Therefore, the military elite was never monopolized by the children of the traditional sector, or the civilian elite by the modern sector. According to a study conducted to analyse the elite born around 1900, that is, the generation starting higher education after around 1920, the political elite consisted of those from non-urban areas (Mannari, 1965, p. 118), suggesting that many members of the civilian elites also were from rural areas.

Table 2 describes the composition of graduates of the Military Academy (class of 1903–1927) who assumed a position above the level of division chief in the centre of the army including the Army Ministry (*Rikugunshō*), the Office of Army General Staff (Sanbō Honbu), and the Inspectorate General of Military Training (*Kyōiku Sōkanbu*) (military leaders), as well as those of the same generation who assumed equivalent posts (civilian leaders), and whose fathers' occupations were known. It represents the social background of those at the core of the nation with policymaking power, that is, the power elite in modern Japan.

Table 2: Paternal occupations of military and civilian leaders

	Military officer	Professional Employee	Monk etc.	Farmer	Other	Total (N)
Military leaders	37.6	24.2	5.7	17.0	15.5	100.0 (141)
Civilian leaders	5.4	46.3	3.6	18.5	26.2	100.0 (168)

Takeishi (2010).

Despite the difference between the former group, whose centre was the modern sector consisting mainly of military officers, and the latter group composed of the modern sector dominated by professionals and employees those sectors accounted for more than half of each group, for 61.8 percent (37.6 + 24.2) and 51.7 percent (5.4 + 46.3), respectively. Attention must be paid to the fact that the ratio of farmers is about the same in both groups and even higher in the group of civilian leaders at 18.5 percent than the military leader group. This suggests that both military and the civilian leaders in modern Japan emerged from almost the same base. The argument that conflicts arose between military officers and the civilian elite due to the predominance of children of farmers in the former group is proven to be invalid for the above reasons. The conflicts between the two elites were not triggered by a lack of common ground.

Table 3: Classes of directors, managers, and ministers in each ministry (April 1900)

	Heimin	*Shizoku*	*Kazoku*	*Total*
Army Ministry/ Office of Army General Staff	1	10		11
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	1	3		4
Home Ministry		7		7
Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce	3	5		8
Ministry of Education		5		5
Ministry of Finance	1	5		6
Ministry of Communications		6		6

Naikaku Kanpōkyoku (1900).

Regarding hierarchical positions in modern Japan, there existed three classes, namely, *kazoku* (nobility), *shizoku* (warrior class), and *heimin* (commoners). In simple terms, *kazoku* consisted of former court nobles and feudal lords (Kanazawa, Kawakita, & Yuasa, 1968, p. 9), and distinguished politicians, military leaders, and bureaucrats were also added to this class. *Shizoku* is a social stratum created based on the former *samurai* (Sonoda, Hamana, & Hirota, 1995, p.46). Those who are neither aristocrats nor *samurai*, such as farmers and merchants, were called commoners.

The executive composition of each ministry after the turn of the century is examined from the perspective of this hierarchy. Tables 3 and 4 both show the ranks of the top elite such as directors, managers, and ministers of each ministry in April 1900 and July 1930, respectively. The following three points should be noted.

Table 4: Classes of directors, managers, and ministers in each ministry (July 1930)

	Heimin	*Shizoku*	*Kazoku*	*Total*
Army Ministry/ Office of Army General Staff	6	6		12
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	4	4		8
Home Ministry	4	3		7
Ministry of Commerce and Industry	2	4		6
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	4	2	1	7
Ministry of Education	7	1		8
Ministry of Finance	3	3		6
Ministry of Communications	7	4	1	12

*In April 1925, the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce was abolished and separated into the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.
Naikaku Insatsukyoku (1930).

First, the warrior class (shizoku) was predominant in the positions of ministries in 1900 (Table 3). In this table, forty-one out of forty-seven members (87.2 percent) were samurai. Ten out of eleven in the Army Ministry and the Office of Army General Staff, and all members of the Home Ministry, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Communications belonged to the warrior class. Both military and political leaders were former rulers.

Second, however, this composition completely changed in 1930 (Table 4). Twenty-seven officials out of a total of sixty-six (40.9 percent) belonged to the warrior class, and they accounted for no more than half (six out of twelve) in the Army Ministry and the Office of Army General Staff. In the Home Ministry, which used to consist of only the warrior class, commoners became predominant members.

The decline in the dominance of the former ruling class became evident in the twentieth century. It is important to note that both the military and civilian elites demonstrated the same trend during these thirty years.

Similar trends were observed in the military of different countries. According to Nun (1986), at the end of the nineteenth century, the majority of Latin American officers began to be recruited from the middle class (p. 63). In Brazil, for example, where the dominant feudal power began to decline in 1930 (Pereira, 1962, pp. 313-326), 19.8 percent of the Military Academy students from 1941 to 1943 came from the traditional upper class, yet during the period from 1962 to 1966, the figure decreased to 6.0 percent, while the ratio of children of squires also dropped from 3.8 percent to 0.5 percent (Stepan, 1971, p. 31). Although the above

research does not refer to whether a similar trend was observed in the civilian elite, army officers began to be recruited from the middle class at least in South America.

As already explained, commoners (*heimin*) became predominant in both military and civilian service. This represents the decline in the dominance of the formerly privileged group because of the introduction and thorough application of merit-based selection or, selection based on academic performance and examination, to be more specific. Table 4 indicates the presence of *kazoku* bureaucrats, yet they were also selected after taking the same examination as commoners and the *samurai*. According to a survey of former court nobles conducted in the mid-1930s, fifty out of 131 worked as private company employees, civil servants, teachers, and soldiers with the warrior class and commoners (Asami, 2005, p. 26). They were no longer in honorary positions and had become salaried workers. Due to the arrival of the age of merit-based selection, some *kazoku*, or former court nobles, were required to work.

If children of peasants and craftsmen studied hard, graduated from the Military Academy, high schools, or the Imperial Universities, and rose to the positions of division commander and state minister, their positions in the Imperial Court would be higher than those of dukes (*kōshaku*). In the United Kingdom, aristocracy was the centre of the Imperial Court, whereas the Japanese nobility was only given complementary positions in the bureaucratic hierarchy (Sonoda, 1983, p.110). The influence of the class culture in society was reduced by the shift of emphasis from origins to abilities. In other words, the cultures and behaviours of the upper classes ceased to serve as tickets to the elite world. Smith (1988) points out as follows.

> Whether a young man came from a warrior family could no longer be reliably told from his speech, manners, or social ideas; moreover, his origins were far less important to his self-esteem and the good opinion of others than whether he had a university diploma and where he was employed. (p. 144)

As discussed earlier, since only specific groups learned classic languages and became elite, they were homogeneous groups in the West. In contrast, the elite no longer consisted of members of certain social groups in Japan due to the influence of modern studies and the examination system based on academic performance. Unlike in the West, members of the elite were homogeneous in the sense that they were all selected based on their academic ability. Despite the homogeneity, a hierarchy was established based on the relative merits of academic performance. The next section analyses the selection of elite

from the perspectives of academic ability and examination.

4. Selection Processes

The school education system in modern Japan functioned as a place for selection of personnel as well as for education. The system provided those aspiring for success and upward social mobility with extensive opportunities for competition, where academic ability became synonymous with competence.

This was how the influence of ascribed statuses based on birth and lineage declined and the elite began to consist of those selected based on their academic achievement. Entrance examinations, particularly those of higher education institutions, were opportunities for them to demonstrate their academic skills. In contrast with Germany, where Abitur, a certificate of passing graduation examinations of secondary education, was the university entrance qualification, Japan adopted a system in which each higher education institution conducted academic examinations independently to select students. As a result, numerous secondary school graduates were engaged in competition to gain academic achievement.

Nonetheless, not all higher education institutions were difficult to enter. In fact, competent candidates concentrated in some institutions. Amano (1983) provides an accurate account of the hierarchical structure in relation to the entrance as follows.

> Many private universities and vocational colleges struggled to attract enough students to meet their quotas and granted admission to non-selected candidates. The intense examination competition arose not from the lack of capacity in the system, but instead from the movement of candidates aspiring to enter specific schools, the schools that were at the top of the hierarchy. (p. 197)

What was taught and learned at universities was not as important as what higher education institution to enter and graduate from, which greatly influenced the rest of students' lives.

Table 5: Situation of entrance examination at the Military Academy and high schools

	1900		1912		1924		1936	
	Candidates	Admitted	Candidates	Admitted	Candidates	Admitted	Candidates	Admitted
Army Cadet School	992	300	4424	300	1759	150	5894	300
Military Academy	2272	547	4542	514	1510	93	8988	550
High schools	3832	1426	9185	2065	31588	5193	30412	4632

Rikugundaijin Kanbō (issued each year). *Rikugunshō tōkei nenpō*. Tokyo: Rikugunshō; Monbudaijin Kanbō Bunshoka (issued each year). *Monbushō nenpō*. Tokyo:Monbushō.

Table 5 summarizes the competitive situation of admission of the Military Academy and high schools, which were referred to as two of the three major paths in modern Japan, as well as of the Army Cadet School. There are two points to be emphasized in this respect.

First, those were all competitive schools. The competition became intensified each year, as the enrolment ratio of the Military Academy increased from 21.1 percent (547/2272) to 6.1 percent, from 37.2 percent to 15.2 percent in high schools, and from 30.2 percent to 5.1 percent during the period between 1900 and 1936.

Second, the figures suggest that the competition was constantly more intense in the Military Academy than in high schools. Although the number of candidates decreased significantly in 1924 due to disarmament, since the admission quota was also reduced, the rate was lower than high schools that attracted more than 30,000 candidates.

This suggests that the Military Academy was a leading institution. The competition to enter the Naval Academy, another one of the three major paths, was also fierce. In 1900, 200 candidates out of 1,422 gained admission (Sugimoto, 1908, p. 30), 130 out of 2,262 in 1915 (Anno, 1916, p. 138), and 240 out of 6,847 in 1936 (Kaigun Yūshuūkai, 1937, 130). The enrolment rate in 1936 was only 3.5 percent. In the same year, 16,270 out of 33,932 candidates (enrolment rate: 47.9 percent) obtained admission to private universities, whereas 20,792 out of 41,567 candidates (enrolment rate: 50.0 percent) entered private vocational colleges (Monbudaijin Kanbō Bunshoka, 1943, pp. 139-141). This highlights the prominence of the three major institutions.

To study the quality of enrolled students, the percentage of the top 20 percent of enrolees of each higher education institution in 1918 based on their performance in secondary school was: 67 percent in the Military Academy, 65 percent in high schools, 63 percent in navy schools, 45 percent in state vocational colleges schools, 29 percent in medical colleges, 31 percent in nautical

colleges, and 14 percent in other public and private schools (Shōkōseito Shiken Jōchiiin,1919, p. 7). Navy schools include the Naval Academy, Naval Engineering College, and Navy Paymasters′ School, and the figure would have been higher if it excluded the latter two institutions. In any case, the trend of the highly academic group underlines the difference between the three major institutions and other schools.

Since high school graduates were promised admission to the Imperial Universities, while the Military Academy and the Naval Academy produced the military elite, the civilian elite came from the route of the Imperial Universities after graduating high school. They enjoyed a high social reputation not only because they were engaged in public and professional occupations, but also because they had academic background of having entered and graduated from extremely competitive higher education institutions.

Appointment to second lieutenant was guaranteed for those who passed the entrance examination and graduated from the Military Academy. However, a new and real competition started after entering the academy, as the grades with which they graduated were directly reflected in their ranks when they were appointed to second lieutenant. A strict distinction between senior and junior position was made within the same age peer group and the same rank of lieutenant, which greatly influenced the rest of their lives. Officer cadets were never free from the ordeal of examination.

After World War I, British officer cadets became officers after 1,372 hours of classroom lessons and 245 hours of self-study. In contrast, officers in Japan were appointed to their posts after 3,382 hours of lessons and 2,765 hours of self-study (Harries, 1994, p. 172). The former figure of Japan was two-and-a-half times and the latter ten times that of the UK. As suggested by this comparison, Japanese cadets studied and were made to study for a substantial amount of time. This represents the army′s emphasis on academic achievement.

The top graduates of the Military Academy were awarded the Imperial Prize of a silver watch (*onshi no gindokei*) at the graduation ceremony. Their ranks were not mere representations of honour but rather directly influenced the allocation of their posts. For example, they were required to graduate in the top third of their class to be able to assume the post of a company commander of the Military Academy (Akamatsu, 1985, p. 246). At the same time, those graduating in the top half were promoted quickly compared to those in the bottom half, and there were cases where some of the fellow graduates of a colonel were majors. As it was really important to graduate with the best grades possible, many devoted strenuous efforts to achieving them. Tsuji Masanobu, who graduated top of his class in

1924, studied without leaving the dormitory of the Military Academy on Sundays, when students were free from strict discipline and intense training (Sugimori, 1963, p. 23). Not all cadets were as diligent as he was, yet his case was by no means exceptional.

In contrast to Japan, the US Army seems to have placed little emphasis on the grades of West Point. According to the data obtained in 1950, only 36.4 percent of army generals graduated in the top quartile from the academy. Even generals, the highest-ranking officers in the army, did not have outstanding records of academic performance (Janowitz, 2017, pp. 134-135). Dwight Eisenhower and George Patton, who rendered distinguished service in World War II, graduated sixty-first out of 168 (Gunther, 1952, p.57) and forty-sixth out of 103 (Axelrod, 2009, p. 24), respectively. They might not have earned their place in history if the Japanese standards had been applied. According to Janowitz (2017), while the possibility of becoming a general slightly increased for those graduating in the top 50 percent, the possibility was slightly lower for those graduating in the bottom half, yet there was not much difference between the two (p.135), as academic achievement was not a key factor to be taken into consideration.

Graduates of the Military Academy competed to enter the War College (Rikugun Daigakkō). Graduating from the War College was highly valued, as it greatly expanded the possibility of promotion and was in fact a necessary condition to be appointed to important positions (Lory, 1943, p. 103). The examination handbook emphasizes that "the qualification is granted to true officers to demonstrate their true value only after they enter the college" (Aramusha, 1916, p. 16). Young first and second lieutenants were qualified to take the examination, and they required the recommendation of the regimental commander of the unit to which they belonged. Since it was an honour for regiments to send officers to the War College, regimental commanders reduced the burden of service on those who had graduated from the Military Academy with good grades and encourage them to take the entrance examination. As a result, top graduates of the Military Academy engaged in competition to enter the War College.

Table 6 shows the distribution of the graduation-class rankings of the War College enrolees when they graduated from the Military Academy. Of those who graduated from the Military Academy during the period 1903 and 1912, 620 graduates entered the War College. While those whose graduation results put them in the top ten percent of their class accounted for 52.5%, the proportion of those who graduated in the lower 50 percent only reached 3.3 percent. Those graduating with high honours have higher occupancy rates. Despite slight differences, the same trend was observed in other periods.

Table 6: Distribution of graduation ranks of the War College enrolees in the Military Academy

	Graduated from Military Academy between 1903-1912		Graduated from Military Academy between 1913-1922		Graduated from Military Academy between 1923-1932	
～10%	52.5	316	46.9	281	37.8	169
11～20	26.3	158	23.4	140	23.4	105
21～30	11.6	70	11.9	71	15.6	70
31～50	6.3	38	12.5	75	13.8	62
51～100	3.3	20	5.3	32	9.4	42
Total	100.0	602	100.0	599	100.0	448

Hata (1991).

As a result, the entrance examination of the War College became highly competitive. Arisue Seizo, who entered the college in 1921, recalls that approximately 500 to 600 candidates applied for a place at the War College, and seventy applicants gained admission through fair written and oral examinations (Jōhō, 1973, p. 296). Since the competition was fierce in quantitative terms, candidates normally began preparing for the examination three years before, and even those whose abilities were recognized failed the examination several times (Kurono, 2004, p. 65). General Tōjō Hideki, who served as prime minister, army minister, and chief of the general staff in the 1940s, failed twice in a row in the entrance examination, after which he finally entered the college in 1912 with the assistance of senior officers (Suyama, 1983, p. 63). General Anami Korechika, who served as army minister at the time of the surrender of Japan, failed the examination three times and finally passed the fourth time in 1914 (Oki, 1995, p. 84).

From 1920 onwards, the core of the army had the base of the War College graduates in common. Humphreys (1995) has noted that all the important posts in the army began to be assumed by them in the 1930s (p. 108). In the meantime, most of those who did not graduate from the War College remained in the post of lieutenant colonel until retirement. Although the wartime military expansion also expanded opportunities for them to be promoted to commanders, such opportunities were limited and excluded senior staff officers and other senior positions. Selections of the War College determined the future of officers (Drea, 2009, p. 155).

As many as 285 of the Military Academy graduates (class of 1903–1927) assumed the office of section chief at the core of the army including the Army Ministry, the Office of Army General Staff, and the

Inspectorate General of Military Training, of which 266 (93.3 percent) graduated from the War College. It was generally impossible to play a central role in the army without graduating from the War College. Based on the information available on the grades of 221 officers both at the Military Academy and the War College, 108 of them, that is, more than half graduated from both institutions in the top 20 percent of their classes. Eighty-seven officers were in management positions or higher, of which eighty-five (97.7 percent) graduated from the War College. According to the information available on the ranks of seventy-eight of those officers, forty-four of them graduated from both institutions in the top 20 percent of the class (Takeishi, 2010, p. 37).

In modern Europe, which was highly influenced by the class culture, and in the aforementioned US Army, academic achievement was not given much importance in distribution of posts and promotion. However, the phenomenon was observed in Japan and other non-Western later-developing countries. In Peru, around 1960, 80 percent of the division generals graduated from the Military Academy in the top quarter. At the same time, 40 of 102 line generals in Brazil in 1964 graduated top of the class from one of the three major military schools. As suggested by these examples, the true success in the army depended on academic achievement in Brazil (Stepan, 1971, p. 51). To be qualified for promotion to a general in those countries, candidates were required to graduate from the Military Academy, Junior Officer's School, and the three-year General Staff School. Less than a quarter of the applicants of the General Staff School passed the entrance examination (Stepan, 1986, p. 139).

Attention is now returned to Japan. Officers were not the only ones who demonstrated strong commitment to examination and academic performance. They were also highly valued in bureaucratic circles. Those aspiring to become elite bureaucrat needed to pass the Higher Civil Service Examination (*kōbun*) to be qualified candidates. As to the difficulty of this main examination, the passing rate in 1918 and 1928 was 16 percent, while the rate in in 1938 was only 8 percent. In 1906, 50 percent of the applicants from Tokyo Imperial University, Japan's most prestigious university, which played the role of a training institution for bureaucrats, passed the Higher Civil Service Entrance Examination, whereas in 1941, only 16 percent passed and the majority failed (Spaulding, 1967, pp. 265-269).

Those qualified took the recruitment examination of each ministry. The ministries focused on applicants' grades obtained at Tokyo Imperial University and performance in the Higher Civil Service Examination and competed to hire competent candidates. Applicants also studied in the university to obtain the highest grades possible, as excel-

lent academic records were necessary to be hired into highly popular ministries (Takeishi, 2017, p. 168).

Academic records were important not only for the recruitment process but also after they joined ministries. The first departments of new bureaucrats were determined based on their performance both at the university and in the *kōbun* examination (Abe, 1998, p. 546). In other words, those with excellent grades started their service in central posts that would lead to a successful career. Those to whom this was not the case were appointed to low-profile departments. Although the positions were reversed in some cases in the subsequent career competition, those with top grades had an extremely strong tendency to become section chiefs, director generals, and the vice-ministers of the ministry.

As has been discussed above, the army placed emphasis on academic performance and test results in selection and promotion of officers. It was not something unique to the military bureaucracy. As was observed in the civilian bureaucracy, it was the organizational principle underlying the whole bureaucracy in modern Japan.

5. Conclusion

At the point of departure of modern Japan, the leaders of the Meiji government established a school education system based on modern studies newly introduced from the West and not on the traditional disciplines they were familiar with and highly valued. The elite was selected based on academic performance. This does not simply represent a change in curriculum. Because of this change, while educational opportunities become available for groups other than specific ones, children of farmers, merchants, and craftsmen were able to enter the competition to acquire academic achievement, and the elite began to be selected from a wider range of people.

In contrast with Japan, where the transformation of the orthodox educational system led to the discontinuation of the elite, the West continued to focus on classical languages, thereby reproducing the elite within their group. Both in Japan and Western Europe, diplomaism emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century, yet while the establishment of diplomaism destroyed the traditional *samurai* culture in the former, the academic elite promoted the maintenance of aristocratic culture in the latter (Sonoda, 1983, p. 54).

Through this process, the civilian bureaucracy, which was the civilian elite, as well as the military elite ceased to consist of specific groups in the twentieth century. Therefore, the theory that emphasizes the attributional difference based on the argument that the connection of the former with the traditional sector and the latter with the modern sector destabilized lacks accuracy.

In fact, attention should be paid to their experience of having passed many highly

competitive examinations, as well as to the merit system in which the results of those examinations established a hierarchy the top to bottom, and those positioned high in the hierarchy had the higher the possibility of promotion.

The bureaucratic recruitment examination system in modern Japanese was based on the German system. However, the trainees' system was not introduced. Simply put, the trainees' system permitted those who had passed the examination to be qualified for becoming a bureaucrat after graduating from university to work as long-term unpaid trainees, after which they were appointed as a counsellor earning a regular salary. Since the average age of assumption of office in Germany in the early twentieth century was 40.2 years old, it was difficult for people to become bureaucrats unless their parents or their wives' parents were considerably wealthy (Nomura, 1995, p. 34). In contrast, reasonable salaries were paid to officers and bureaucrats in Japan even during their probation period.

This Japanese salary system encouraged them to take pride in having been selected for their own ability instead of their birth, which also became a public acknowledgement. Their examination results were considered to represent their competence, particularly in the army. According to the detailed analysis of bureaucratic life by Mizutani (1999), bureaucrats graduating with high marks and scoring high in examinations tended to be psychologically superior to those positioned lower than them, especially those belonging to other ministries, and were worthy of their ranks (p. 164). In other words, their confidence in themselves that the level of their achievement and competence was high enough to convince others of their worthiness solidified their status. Personnel selection focusing on academic performance and examination results produces such a mindset.

The social aspects of the military elite in modern Japan were the same as those of bureaucrats. They shared similar social backgrounds, and both had confidence in themselves as they had survived intense competitions. The bureaucracy recruitment system and the army officer training system were established around 1900, and from 1920 onwards, those who had passed examinations with outstanding results came to assume important posts in the army and ministries. This trend became intensified afterwards. The conclusion of this paper is that since both the army elite and the bureaucratic elite became composed of those worthy of their ranks, the degree of compromise between the elites declined, acting as one of the causes of the conflict between the two.

It is ideal to analyse elites of other non-European countries that developed later from this perspective in the future, as the relationship between elites in the area, as in modern Japan, were not predicated on a western-style social hierarchy and lacked

harmony; this resulted in cases of loss of control over the military elites. In later-developing countries, the significance of academic achievement is considered to be important and school education tends to focus on examination (Dore, 1976, p. 72). If the same situation is observed in other countries, it gives a more universal significance to the position of this paper that educational background and emphasis on examination influence relations between elites and sectionalism.

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