

Arms Production Problems and Arms Export Companies in Prewar Japan: Focusing on the Roles of Taihei Kumiai and Showa Tsusho

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This paper presents an analysis studies on the Japanese history of arms production problems from the 1920s to 1940s. In presenting and analyzing documents, we focused on Showa Tsusho. We analyzed the established purposes and expected roles of two arms export companies: Taihei Kumiai and Showa Tsusho. These companies were placed under the strong control of the Japanese army. Focusing on Showa Tsusho, we verified that the Japanese army developed policies for arms export and support. In the verification, we clarified the arms production problems that the Japanese army addressed. We also examined the fact that not only Japan but also Western countries, including Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and the United States, which were advanced countries in arms export, were extremely proactive in arms export in spite of the time of disarmament. The arms production problems could be described as “peacetime war.” Thus, the proliferation of arms through arms production problems was part of the preparation for the next war.

1. Introduction: Prior Research and Problem Setting

The history of Japanese arms exports in the prewar period began in the early Meiji era.¹ This paper traces the historical development of arms production and import/export, that began in earnest during World War I (WWI). The purpose of this study was to examine the establishment of an independent arms production and export system from the following analytical perspectives: The study focused on the privatization of arms production, which was triggered by WWI, as a joint public-private issue and traced the actual situation of arms imports and exports from the Manchurian Incident (1931) to the beginning of the war against the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Netherlands (1941). In particular, it examined the role of the arms export trading companies Taihei Kumiai and Showa Tsusho, which were responsible for export operations under the control of the Japanese army, which led the arms export.²

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Masako Sakamoto writes in “Capital Exports to Europe and Arms Exports during the First World War (I-WWI) (I)” (Nagoya Keizai University Social Science Research Association, Sociological Review, No. 52, November 1991), “The first arms exports were made in 1901 when Mitsui & Co. exported 10,000 guns and 1 million rounds of live ammunition to Korea” (pp. 27-28).

² Arms exporting trading companies in Japan in the prewar period were not only Taihei Kumiai and Showa

I believe that the expansion of Japan's munitions industry, inspired by the generalization of warfare in WWI, resulted in the independence of weapons and the joining of the public and private sectors (privatization). The 1920s was a period of both military expansion and disarmament. It was also a time of conflict between arms expansion and disarmament. The main issue for analysis is the interconnectedness of the establishment of the arms production system through the enactment of the Military Industrial Mobilization Law and the role of trading companies specializing in arms exports, which supported this system from peacetime, as a means of specifically tracking the transformation of the arms production problem in Japan while influenced by such domestic and foreign circumstances.

First, in this paper, we summarize previous studies as references for examining this issue. We also mention some of the issues discussed and not discussed in these studies.

(1) Summary of Previous Studies by Akutagawa, Sakamoto, Nagoya, and Shibata

Tetsushi Akutagawa's "The Genealogy of Arms Exports: The Birth of the Taiheiyo Kumiai"³ is probably the earliest work to focus on the actual state of arms exports in the prewar period and to discuss it as a subject of research. Akutagawa surmised that the Japanese government had a strong interest in arms exports since the early Meiji period. He clearly traced how the Japanese government initially exported unnecessary weapons to the Qing Empire and then expanded its arsenals to meet Russian requests for arms exports during WWI via the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars, as weapons production technology improved after the establishment of the military arsenal. Akutagawa consistently used "The Genealogy of Arms Exports" the title of his article, and left an important mark in the historical clarification of arms exports.

In Akutagawa's articles, he mentioned "Capital Exports to Europe and Arms Exports during World War I (1 & 2)"⁴ by Masako Sakamoto, which elaborates on the military character of Japanese capitalism, especially after the analysis and historical introduction of "Capital Exports to Europe and Arms Exports during WWI(1&2)."⁵ Sakamoto pointed out the historical fact that Japan exported arms that amounted to 100 million yen in 1915, the year after the start of WWI.⁶ He stated that the Japanese army exported arms to Russia alone during the four years of WWI, totaling approximately 180 million yen, and that arms exports to the country amounted to 95% of Japan's total arms exports.

The Imperial Japanese Navy also exported a total of approximately 90 million yen worth of arms to the United Kingdom, France, and Russia. Sakamoto's article argued that the Japanese imperial army and navy, and the leadership of the Japanese government represented by Aritomo Yamagata were extremely active in arms exports and support to Russia to find a possibility of concluding the Japan-Russia alliance to replace the Anglo-

Tsusho but were largely encompassed by these two trading companies,

Kishimoto Shoten and others were also positioned as arms-exporting trading companies in a broad sense. For more information on these companies, see Kiyoshi Nakagawa, "A Study of Trading Companies in the Meiji and Taisho Periods," *Shiroogaku Daigaku Ronbunshu*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1994.

³ Military History (Vol. 21, No. 4 [Vol. 82], Kinshosha, September 1985, in *Military History Society*, ed.

⁴ Sakamoto's article, "Capital Exports to Europe and Arms Exports during World War I" (in Japanese), is published in "Zaibatsu and Imperialism | Mitsui and China |" (Minerva Shobo, 2003). Sakamoto published these and other articles in the book "Zaibatsu to Teikoku-shugi: Mitsui & Co. and China" (Minerva Shobo, 2003).

⁵ Same as above, Vol. 22, No. 4 [Vol. 88], March 1987.

⁶ Sakamoto, "Capital Exports to Europe and Arms Exports during World War I (1)," in *The Review of Sociology*, No. 52, November 1991, p. 24, edited by the Social Science Research Group of Nagoya University of Economics. Sakamoto states that Japanese arms exports began during the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and became quite active after the Russo-Japanese War. Specifically, he stated that "Mitsui & Co. exported 10,000 guns and 1 million rounds of live ammunition to Korea in 1901, which was the first arms export" (pp. 27-28).

Japanese alliance. Sakamoto also made the important point that “arms exports during World War I were certainly carried out from the two aspects of maintaining the management of these military arsenals and foreign policy.”⁷ These two aspects are important issues to consider when discussing the issue of arms exports and transfers. This paper emphasizes these two aspects. On the basis of an elaborate economic historical approach, the political process of the period in question was also examined in this study to determine the reality of arms exports.

However, there is almost no mention of the fact that policies to overcome the marginal nature of arms production at military arsenals through legislation, such as the Munitions Industrial Mobilization Law, which was undertaken in Japan from WWI, were vigorously promoted. The Law for the Mobilization of the Munitions Industry and the Law for the Mobilization of the Automobile Industry should have been important policies that complemented the two aspects pointed out by Sakamoto. This point will be discussed in this paper.

Next is Nagoya Mitsugu’s “Arms Export of Taiheiyo Kumiai.”⁸ Nagoya’s paper clarifies the actual situation of the Taiheikumiai from its activities after WWI to its dissolution, which is not mentioned in Akutagawa Tetsushi’s paper. In this respect Nagoya’s paper plays an important connecting role. As to why the Taiheiyo Kumiai was established as an arms export trading company, he explained, “The advantage of the Army was that the union was an organization that did not have to get its hands dirty in the event of any scandals. Since arms exports had always been highly political in nature, it was a convenient way for Japan not to have to directly face the brunt of any problems if its position became an issue.”⁹ In the Conclusion section of the same paper, Nagoya cites three reasons for the dissolution of Taiheiyo Kumiai: its inability to keep up with the arms standards of Western arms-exporting countries, the enactment of the “Agreement on the Prohibition of Arms Exports to China,” and its exclusion from the Manchukuo military exports, which had been the focus of attention as an arms export target.¹⁰

The article that I referred to most in the discussion of this paper is Yoshimasa Shibata’s “Activities of the Army Military Mission Trading Company | Memorandum of Showa Tsusho Corporation.”¹¹ Shibata identified the reason for the dissolution of Taihei Kumiai, which was that “the War Ministry decided to abolish the existing Taihei Kumiai in order to move toward the establishment of Showa Tsusho for the main purpose of exporting weapons to the occupied areas of China during the Sino-Japanese War.”¹² The article also states that the reason for the establishment of Showa Tsusho was that “the military distributors’ union did not handle weapons and other goods control unions in occupied territories that handled weapons were not established.”¹³ The reason for the establishment of Showa Tsusho was that “the military distributors’ associations did not handle weapons and no other goods control associations in the occupied territories were to be established to handle weapons.” Shibata demonstrated that Showa Tsusho was engaged in trade not limited to arms exports with a much wider range of regions and foreign countries than

⁷ Sakamoto, Maehara, “Capital Exports to Europe and Arms Exports during World War I (2),” p. 17.

⁸ “East Asia: History and Culture” (No. 16, March 2007, in Niigata University East Asian Studies Association, ed.).

⁹ Ibid. p. 8

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 15

¹¹ China Studies Monthly, Vol. 58, No. 5, May 2004, edited and published by the Institute for Chinese Studies (in Japanese).

¹² Ibid. p. 2

¹³ Ibid. p. 3

Taiheiyo Kumiai. In this sense, Showa Tsusho, a military trading company, had aspects other than arms, ranging from grain to opium, that could not be described simply as a trading company specializing in arms exports.

At the same time, “Showa Trading was involved not only in the export of the War Department’s weapons to China, but also in the sale of weapons procured in Europe to the puppet governments in the occupied territories of China. This can be said to be a significant expansion of the scope of Showa Tsusho’s conventional arms handling business not seen in the Taiheiyo Kumiai.”¹⁴ In other words, it points out the aspect of a general trading company that developed its business with the powerful backing of the army. In the military occupied areas of China, for example, “transactions of weapons and other items in Mongjiang were limited to Showa Trading, which was supported by the Ministry of the Army.”¹⁵ Showa Trading continued to occupy a monopolistic position, united with the army. The fact that Showa Tsusho was such a powerful organization can certainly be considered from the fact that when it competed with the Sino-Chinese Military Exchange and Supply Association (commonly known as the Military Distribution Association) in the area of grain procurement, it was ultimately to Showa Tsusho’s advantage.¹⁶

As described earlier, Shibata’s paper is noteworthy in that Showa Trading was deeply involved in general economic activities in the military-occupied administrative areas of China and redefined itself as an international trading company by opening branches not only in Europe but also in South America as a target region for arms exports. However, Shibata’s paper focused too much on Showa Trading’s role as an arms-exporting trading company and paid little attention to the actual status of arms imports. Although this may not be the purpose of Shibata’s paper, it is necessary to take a comprehensive view of the actual situation of arms imports and exports, the reasons for their promotion, and the players in the arms industry to focus on the entire issue of arms production. This is one of the issues discussed in this paper.

Reading through Akutagawa’s, Sakamoto’s, Nagoya’s, and Shibata’s papers consistently, it is possible to grasp the actual situation and background of arms exports, aside from arms imports from the Sino-Japanese War period to the period of Japan’s defeat in WWII. Thus, while learning much from these papers, this paper attempts to approach the issue of arms production from the following perspectives.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 7

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 8

¹⁶ Although Gunpai Kumiai was a powerful organization that entered businesses that competed with Showa Trading, it ultimately fell behind Showa Trading. There are not many studies on the Gunpai Kumiai, but I would like to cite “Chapter 3: Management and Enterprises in Japan’s Occupied China: Section 2, Military Voucher Operations and the Gunpai Kumiai” (pp. 83-94) in Hideo Kobayashi’s “‘The Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere’ and Japanese Enterprises” (Shakai Hyoronsha, 2012). Although Shibata emphasized the overwhelming dominance of Showa Trading, the role of the Daimong Company, which played a decisive role in supplying weapons to the Mongolian regime, should not be ignored. In this connection, Hisao Mori noted that “[Daimong Kougyou] was still able to play a major role in areas that others could not imitate, such as weapons supply to the Mengkang regime, salt control, and distribution control of various important goods” (Mori, “Kwantungun’s Inner Mongolia Operations and the Establishment of the Daimong Company,” in “China 21,” Vol. 31, ed. by the Modern Chinese Studies Association, Aichi University, May 2009, p. 67). (Mori, “Kwantung Army’s Inner Mongolia Operations and the Establishment of the Daimong Company,” in Chugoku 21, Volume 31, May 2009, p. 67). Mori’s point suggests the possibility that some trading companies in China, including Daimong Corporation, may have been involved in supplying weapons (arms exports) in competition with Showa Trading, but this will also be an issue for future research.

¹⁷ Although not directly related to this paper, the most detailed research results on the actual state of arms production at the army arsenals are Sato Shoichiro, “Rikugun Zoubei Arsenal and Reproduction Mechanism | An Analysis of the Army Arsenal Mechanism in the Disarmament Era | (1-4)” (Hosei University Management Society, ed. (Vol. 26, No. 2, Vol. 27, No. 1, Vol. 28, No. 4, Vol. 29, Nos. 1 and 2, 1989-1992) and Shiro Yamazaki,

(2) Location of the problem and establishment of the issue

The Japanese army continued to suffer from the dramatic depletion of artillery ammunition throughout the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). As the possibility of another Russo-Japanese war was discussed, it became keenly aware of the so-called artillery ammunition stockpiling problem. In the process, the question of expanding the arms production system in peacetime was raised again. In fact, it was clear that Japan's munitions production and procurement capabilities were inadequate during that period.¹⁸

For this reason, after WWI, the Japanese army and navy adopted a policy to broaden the base of the munitions industry through the Military Automobile Industry Subsidy Law (enacted on March 25, 1918, Law No. 15) and the Munitions Industry Mobilization Law (enacted on April 17, 1917, Law No. 38) that legally guaranteed the consignment of arms production to private companies in addition to existing military arsenals, and other measures. The direct impetus for this was the Military Industrial Mobilization Law. The direct impetus was an arms order from Russia during the Great War, as will be discussed later, but the lessons learned from this led to the consideration of establishing an arms export system that would permanently outsource arms production to private companies and guarantee a stable record of arms production. From there, the policy of arms exports to neighboring Asian countries such as China and Thailand came into consideration.

The arms production issue is not limited to the military and economic spheres but is also deeply related to the political and diplomatic spheres of promoting friendship and alliances with the exporting countries through arms. For example, the establishment of an alliance mediated by arms exports through the conclusion of the Japan-China Military Agreement is a symbolic case in point. The issue of arms production should be viewed in the context of the overall perspective. On the basis of this research perspective, by reading and understanding historical documents, this study examined the roles and positions of two trading companies specializing in arms exports, namely Taiheikumiai and Showa Tsusho, which promoted arms exports. The following points are unique to this paper.

First, after the Russo-Japanese War and across WWI, the privatization of the military industry was hastened under the slogan of a literal joint public-private partnership for China's arms export market in the 1920s. Probably in the expansion of the arms export market, the army, while showing a strong interest in arms exports from political and military perspectives, considered it difficult to fully delegate the task to private companies owing to the special nature of arms exports. Therefore, it allowed Taihei Kumiai and Showa Tsusho to operate under their control as trading companies specializing in arms exports. To make this possible, it was necessary to privatize the munitions industry through a joint public-private partnership while spreading the idea of total war as a concept that encompassed the entire industry. This paper will emphasize this point in particular.

The conventional studies of arms exports have tended to focus on the arms exports themselves as the objective and have been weak in their focus on the political process of building a total war system by enhancing the arms production system that underlies the

“Rikugun Zoubei Arsenal to Gunsan Kogyo Kikinzoku [The Army Arsenal and Military Industrial Mobilization]” (Fukushima University Management Association, “Shogaku Ronbun,” Vol. 62, No. 4, March 1994) are also cited as pioneering studies.

¹⁸ Regarding the level of Japan's munitions production system at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, Shino Oe wrote, “The technological basis of Japanese capitalism was too limited to cope with the changing nature of the war. Technically speaking, the production of weapons and ammunition, mainly firearms, which belonged to the precision machinery industry, was handled by the two artillery arsenals in Tokyo and Osaka for the Army, and by the naval arsenals and naval arsenals in Tokyo for the Navy” (Oe, *Military Historical Study of the Russo-Japanese War*, Iwanami Shoten, 1976, p. 401).

arms exports. Therefore, this paper proposes a more comprehensive view of the arms export issue as an arms production issue, with the construction of a total war system as its foundation.

With the fundamental background for the establishment of arms export trading companies under the control of the Japanese army, this study traces the actual situation in which the Japanese army increased its interest in arms production and import/export in the transformation of the war triggered by WWI, that is, from cabinet war to total warfare. At the same time, we will examine the actual state of arms production efforts in Japan, taking into account the enactment of the Military Industrial Mobilization Law, which was implemented to broaden the scope of arms production in Japan. The Japanese army, which was intent on increasing the interest in arms production and responding quickly to it, succeeded in privatizing the munition industry despite the repeated confrontations and compromises with private enterprises. This section examines the intentions behind the privatization of the munitions industry and the independence of weapons production during the period in question on the basis of the statements of managers who were actively involved in the privatization of the munitions industry. These points have not been mentioned in most previous studies.

Second, we will discuss the background of the establishment of Taiheiyo Kumiai and the Showa Trading Co., which were founded as organizations to implement Japan's arms export policy before and after the establishment of the military industrial mobilization system, as discussed in the first section. Although previous studies have discussed the issue from many aspects, they have hardly mentioned one issue. The key words are "weapons independence," "government-private sector collaboration," and "total war system." In addition, the enactment of the Military Vehicle Industry Subsidy Law and the Military Industrial Mobilization Law established laws to ensure weapons production and arms exports as part of the actual policy. This paper focused on the latter, emphasizing that this law was positioned as an indispensable legal development to overcome the inadequacy of arms production and exports that began in the early Meiji period.

Third, we will discuss the actual situation of arms imports in the early 1930s. The Imperial Japanese Navy was responsible for the arms trade with the United Kingdom. The fact that arms imports came to a standstill due to the Manchurian Incident was extremely painful for the navy, which had envisioned the improvement of weapons technology. It is possible that an arms import trading company under naval control may have intervened, but the navy had made statements denying the existence of an intermediary. Although it is difficult to credit this statement out of hand, we will introduce it in this paper as a quotation.

This paper, while focusing on the arms exports of Taiheiyo Kumiai and Showa Trade, attempts to approach the issue from military and political historical perspectives, and from the perspective of viewing the total history of arms imports and exports as an arms production issue.¹⁹ The quoted historical documents were corrected to normal *kanji*, and

¹⁹ While various names such as "arms," "weapons," and "equipment" are used interchangeably, the term "arms" is used, in principle, in this paper in the sense of an individual physical device. In addition, although it may not be necessary to repeat it, "arms transfers" in this paper refers to "the general phenomenon of the transfer of ownership and usage rights related to arms and arms technology beyond the domain of states and other international actors," and "arms exports" refers to "the sale overseas of arms, which are equipment used directly in combat." (The term "arms export" is used to refer to "the sale abroad of arms, which are equipment used for direct combat" [Kan Kawada and Hideki Ohata, *International Dictionary of Political Economy*, Tokyo Shoseki, 1933, pp. 553-554]). In this paper, we particularly mention the actual situation of arms exports to Thailand, which we treat as virtually synonymous with "arms support" and "arms aid."

punctuation marks were added as necessary to make them easier to read.

2. Background of the Growing Interest in Arms Exports

(1) Arms export requests from Russia

WWI, which began on July 28, 1914, was fought as an all-out war that required vast quantities of arms and ammunition that completely changed the form of warfare up to that point and literally determined the outcome of victory or defeat by the total power of the nation. Modern weapons such as submarines, aircrafts, tanks, and poison gas appeared on the battlefield one after another, expanding the battlefield to include not only land and sea but also air and sea.

As introduced in the summary of the previous study, Akutagawa stated that the Japanese army was already interested in arms exports from the early Meiji period and then revealed that Japan was unable to adequately respond to the enormous requests for arms imports from Russia under WWI. Akutagawa also pointed out that the Japanese army could not fully utilize the opportunities that existed for arms exports. It is assumed that the issue of not fully utilizing the best opportunities for arms exports led to the enactment of the Military Industrial Mobilization Law in 1917.²⁰

Incidentally, the second Okuma Shigenobu Cabinet (established on April 16, 1914), led by the Ministry of Finance, conducted a survey of the political and economic systems of the countries that entered the war immediately after the outbreak of WWI. At the same time, the Okuma Cabinet launched an economic policy to promote the heavy and chemical industrialization of the Japanese economy, as the situation became apparent that Japan could not fully respond to the huge orders of military supplies from the participating countries.²¹ As part of the policy to promote the heavy and chemical industries in the Japanese economy, the Chemical Industry Research Board (November 1914), the Economic Research Board (April 1916), and the Iron and Steel Industry Research Board (May 1916) were established one after another, and the Law to Encourage the Manufacture of Dyes and Pharmaceuticals (March 1915) was also enacted.

On April 29, 1916, as part of the heavy and chemical industrialization policy, Prime Minister Okuma gave the following instructions at the first meeting of the Economic Research Council. “The benefits Japan has received from the Great Rebellion in Europe have been considerable. The greatest benefits was the order for munitions. If only Japan had the manufacturing capacity, or could easily obtain raw materials, it could supply three or five times what it does today.”²² The supply of these munitions will be of great benefit. To achieve this, he concluded, “I hope that the public and private sectors will work together to develop Japan’s postwar industry and economy.”²³

In the midst of the all-out war, Russia and other European countries, which could no

²⁰ For Japan’s arms exports to Russia during WWI, see Eduard Baruishoff, “‘Japan-Russia Arms Alliance’ and Business Relations between Japan and Russia during World War I: The Case of Brinell & Kuznetsov Trading Company” (Shimane Center for Northeast Asian Area Studies, ed. No. 23, March 2012) and “The Background of Japan-Russia Military Cooperation during World War I: Mitsui & Co.’s Trade Strategy with Russia” (No. 21, March 2011).

²¹ See “On Investigating the Financial, Economic, and Social Conditions of European Countries” (Kobun Zasshoshu, [National Archives of Japan], Taisho 5, Imperial Diet, Vol. 2, 24).

²² History of Commerce and Industry Policy, Vol. 4, 1961, p. 141, edited by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry.

²³ Ibid., p. 144.

longer continue the war with their own weapons production alone, requested that Japan export arms. In response, the Japanese government proposed to the Imperial Diet to increase the working capital of the Tokyo and Osaka artillery arsenals to increase their production capacity. On December 22, 1915, the then Minister of War Ichinosuke Oka, who was in charge of explaining the purpose of the bill, said, “In response to the demand for arms during the recent war in Europe and North America, the demand for such arms is very great, so we will order Japan to increase the working capital. We have not even considered the quantity that we have dreamed of. We cannot possibly meet this large demand.” He further stated the reality of the situation in a blunt manner.²⁴ Russia’s orders for arms were enormous, with the volume of orders far exceeding Japan’s arms production capacity during the period in question.²⁵ The total value of Japan’s exports to Russia during the war reached 189.61 million yen.²⁶

Meanwhile, the navy was also active in arms exports during the period under review. In this connection, on March 4, 1917, at the 40th meeting of the House of Representatives Accounts Committee, Hisatsuna Furuya, a member of the House of Representatives, asked, “Did the Navy sell the total amount of weapons to the Allied Powers?” He also stated, “In the relationship between the Ministry of the Navy and ally, the transfer was made and received, and an intermediary was inserted between the two.”²⁷ The amount of 26 million yen is considerable, but this implies that no arms export trading company such as Taihei Kumiai was involved in the army. In other words, the Navy itself was responsible for exporting arms, rather than relying on arms export trading companies. Furthermore, he stated that unlike in the army, the proceeds of the sale were paid to the national treasury.

As symbolized by Russia’s arms orders, the enhancement of the domestic munitions industry was strongly demanded by the military officers dispatched to the main battlefields in Europe to prepare for the all-out warfare that had become evident in WWI. WWI required war resources that far exceeded those of previous wars. The countries involved in the war saw this as the beginning of a full-scale form of warfare called total war; thus, they began to work on the thorough recognition of total war and the establishment of a total war system.²⁸ As part of this effort, Japan hurried to develop legislation, including the

²⁴ In Proceedings of the Imperial Diet, National Diet Library (“37th Session of the Imperial Diet, House of Representatives,” Class V, No. 1, Minutes of the Committee for the Draft Law Concerning the Increase of Stationary Operating Capital of the Tokyo Artillery Arsenal and Osaka Infantry Arsenal, 2nd Session, December 22, 1915, p. 9).

²⁵ According to the Akutagawa article, Japan’s arms exports to Britain, France, and Russia during the war took three forms: sales of arms, consignment manufacture of arms, and free gifts of arms, amounting to 11.24 million yen in sales proceeds, 39.76 million yen in total manufacturing costs, and approximately 1.085 million yen in free gifts of arms (Akutagawa, Tetsushi, “Arms Export Genealogy [continued] Arms Exports during World War I” (Military History, Vol. 22, No. 4, March 1987, p. 33). Furthermore, the actual amount of arms exports to China during the period from November 1917 to November 1918 totaled 17 million yen (Tetsushi Akutagawa, “Arms Exports to China during World War I” (Military History, Vol. 28, No. 2, September 1992, p. 71).

²⁶ Minister of War Kenichi Oshima answered a question from Representative Buntaro Kashiwabara at a meeting of the House of Representatives Accounts Committee on March 4, 1918: “(The amount of arms exported to Russia) was 180 million yen, starting on December 23, 1914, and for the next four years and for the last two years, it was more than 105 million yen. The amount for the last two years is 105 million yen, and the amount for the next five and six years is 189.61 million yen” (Imperial Diet Proceedings, 40th Session of the Imperial Diet, House of Representatives, Class II, No. 1, Minutes of the Accounts Committee, 6th Session, March 4, 1918, p. 48, National Diet Library).

²⁷ Ibid. p. 49

²⁸ KOKETSU has long been engaged in the study of the total war system, the first of which was “Total War System Study: The National Mobilization Concept of the Japanese Army” (Sanichi Shobo, 1991), which was later reprinted by Shakai Hyoronsha in 2010 and again by the company in 2018. In addition, the political process of the establishment of the total war system in prewar Japan was published in Issue 6 of this journal (September 2017) as “Total War and Japan: Reality and Limitation of the Establishment of the Japanese Total War System.

privatization of its munitions industry, which could respond to domestic and foreign arms orders.²⁹

The military industrial mobilization system was to be based on a production and supply system centered on military arsenals and a requisition order (enacted in August 1882) for existing materials and personnel, and the establishment of an industrial mobilization system capable of mass production of military supplies during both peace and war. Therefore, the military industrial mobilization system was to be constructed not only by the army, navy, and business community but also by the bureaucracy, political parties, academia, and other forces as a whole. In this sense, WWI had a major impact on the expansion of the munitions industry and the state of postwar economic management. The government, business community, bureaucracy, political parties, and so on joined together and became keenly aware of the common task of preparing for the coming all-out war.

More specifically, the advent of modern weapons such as aircrafts, submarines, tanks, and poison gas, and the enormous consumption of ammunition and fuel led the domestic industry to move toward heavy and chemical industries. However, the business community was not aggressive in expanding the military industry from the beginning. Although the business community intended to enter the Asian market in the future while competing with Europe and the United States in the heavy and chemical industry sector, they did not necessarily have a clear idea of what kind of profits they could secure by doing so.

While the land, navy, and business worlds were in competition and confrontation over the military industrial mobilization policy in the process, the establishment of a military industrial mobilization system that could respond to the total war phase was a goal that could be shared and achieved. Finally, coordination between the land and naval forces was sought, and a relationship based on cooperation was established. From the end of the war, a considerable degree of consensus was formed between the military and the business communities, with the enactment of the Munitions Industrial Mobilization Law as one culmination. In other words, the military and the business world were forced to enter into a mutually complementary or cooperative relationship over the mobilization of the munitions industry, even though both sides had their own agendas.³⁰

Total War System” in Issue 6 of this journal (September 2017).

²⁹ When asked about the army’s efforts to ease the manufacture of weapons in the private sector at the 37th session of the House of Representatives of the Imperial Diet, the “Committee on the Draft Law Concerning the Increase of Installed Operating Capital at the Tokyo Artillery Arsenal and Osaka Infantry Arsenal,” Minister of War Oka said, “The government has not prohibited weapons manufacturing in any particular way (omitted). There is no law prohibiting the manufacture of weapons; that is the fact, but if there are people who can do it, they will do it, and I have just told you about it today and in the future.” The 37th Imperial Diet Session, House of Representatives, No. 5, No. 1, Minutes of the Committee for the Draft Law Concerning the Increase of Installed Operating Capital for the Tokyo Artillery Arsenal and Osaka Infantry Arsenal, 2nd Session, December 22, 1915, p. 9), implying that preparations were underway within the army for the consignment of munitions industry to the private sector.

³⁰ For example, Tatsudo (pen name) wrote, “Industrial mobilization has given a kind of benefit to our industrialists” (“Kogyo kinzoku kinin mobilization no michi to hikaku,” *Kogyo Zasshi*, Vol. 48, No. 626, April 20, 1918, p. 411). Other articles of a similar nature include “Kogyo Sensen ni taisuru Nihon no Kanten (Japan’s Position on the Industrial War)” by Raita Tomiyama (President of the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry) (*Jitsugyo no Nihon*, Vol. 21, No. 18, September 1918), “The Defects of Private Steel Industry and its Promotion Measures” by Kaichiro Imaizumi (Chairman of the Japan Iron and Steel Association) (*Zaisei Jiho*, Vol. 3, No. 5, May 1916), and “Kogyo Senso no Kikan ni taisuru Nihon no Kanten” by Ginjiro Fujiwara (President of Oji Paper Co. Fujiwara Ginjiro (President of Oji Paper Co., Ltd.), “Wartime Industry and Protection and Encouragement” (*Kokusan Jiho*, May 1918). In addition to those from the business world, there are also Eimitsu Kurakawa (Director, Industry Division, Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce), “Discussion on the Trends of Industry in Wartime” (*Shoko Jiho*, Vol. 5, No. 4, April 1919); Chikara Katsuta (Minister of Finance), “The European War and Our Finances” (*Jiyu Hyoron*, Vol. 5, No. 12); Tatsuo Morito (Assistant Professor, Faculty of Economics, Tokyo Imperial University), “Economic Nationalism and Economic Life” (*Keizai Mochiron*, Vol. 1, April 1919).

The army's urgent task during the general war phase was to establish a munition production system that could withstand the massive consumption of munitions (ammunition, gunpowder, weapons, military provisions, military clothing, etc.). The army had learned from its research and study of the wartime economic and political systems of the participating countries that this was an essential condition for victory in a total war. On December 27, 1915, the year after the outbreak of the war, the army established a temporary military investigation committee (chairman: Shoichi Kanno) within the Ministry of War to investigate and research the wartime domestic mobilization systems of the European countries involved in the war and to ascertain the actual status of Japan's domestic munitions production capacity.³¹

(2) “Weapons Independence” and “Public-Private Partnership”

The concept of the army's munitions industrial mobilization system for the period under review, on the basis of the results of various research organizations, is summarized in the “Industrial Mobilization Outline” prepared by the Provisional Military Research Committee. The fifth item in the outline stated that “in order to achieve complete weapons independence throughout the war, it is essential to secure basic raw materials, especially iron and coal, and to study and disseminate measures for joint government-private sector self-sufficiency.”³² The Japanese army and navy have been highly dependent on foreign weapons, from warships to rifles, and this has been a consistent concern. This is because it was thought that “weapons independence,” or independence in arms production, was an indispensable condition for becoming a completely “weapons independent” country and therefore a matter of course. At the same time, securing weapons production technology through “weapons independence” was an issue directly related to the realization of military expansion. In this sense, the industrial mobilization was also an attempt to militarize the Japanese economy, that is, to transform it into an economic structure with national defense at its core (i.e., a national defense economy); to establish centralized control of each administrative agency under the command and order of the Supreme Command; to make arms production independent; to prepare for joint public-private self-sufficiency measures aimed at securing resources, among others; and to promote the military. The government and private sector will work together to prepare for self-sufficiency measures aimed at securing resources and to establish centralized control of each administrative agency under the command and direction of the Supreme Commander.

This concept was to be accomplished not only by the army but literally by the entire nation. Therefore, the army actively sought the support and cooperation of other organizations and forces. In January 1918, the army established an ad hoc military investigation committee to further investigate and grasp the level of munition production capacity as a practical task for the time being.

An indispensable issue in the development of the munitions industry mobilization system was the expansion of the base of the munitions production sector. Until the end of WWII, the munitions industry was based in government-owned factories, mainly army and navy arsenals, and production was outsourced to private factories and companies in extremely

(Keizai Mochiron, Vol. 1, No. 2, February 1917), and Kakutaro Miyake (Major in the Army), “The First Lesson of Our People Learned from the European War” (Dai Nihon, Vol. 5, No. 8, August 1918).

³¹ For more information on the Temporary Military Investigation Commission, see Koketsu, “Temporary Military Investigation Commission's Duties,” in “Seiji Keizai Shigaku,” No. 174 (February 1980).

³² Temporary Military Investigation Commission, “Temporary Military Investigation Commissioners' Second Annual Report” [Defense Agency Defense Training Collection] (January 20, 1918, p. 267).

small quantities. The possible reasons for this include the low level of civilian industry and technology in the munitions industry and the difficulty of transferring weapons manufacturing technology. However, the lessons of the Great War suggested the urgent need for the development of production technology for more advanced weapons and ammunition on a national scale, and the mass production and stockpiling of these weapons and ammunition. The army and navy were fully aware of the importance of a joint public-private all-out war system based on surveys and studies of the mobilization of munition industries in the countries that participated in the war.

On March 26, 1917, Colonel Toyohiko Yoshida gave the speech “Hopes for the Instrumental Industry from a Military Perspective” at a meeting of the Cabinet Economic Research Division’s Special Committee on Industrial Proposal No. 2. I believe that it is essential for both the public and private sectors to devote all their energies to conducting in-depth research on how to find a point of harmony between defense and industry or, to put it another way, how to find a correlation between the military and civilian industries, and how to adapt to military requirements. I believe that it is most necessary for both the public and private sectors to devote all their energies to this task and carry out thorough research.³³ He also called for a “correlation between military industry and civilian industry.” The reason for this was the recognition that total warfare would force the mass production and stockpiling of weapons.³⁴

A year later, Yoshida wrote, “The difficulties in the manufacture of weapons, and the difference in demand between peacetime and wartime, is so great that it is difficult to imagine in peacetime, which is why I have heard of the promotion of privatization of weapons.” The promotion of arms privatization was a countermeasure to the total war that was expected to erupt in the future, and he stressed the need for collaboration, technical cooperation, joint development, and research between private and government factories, even in peacetime, to improve Japan’s industrial production capacity level.

Army Artillery Major Yoshikazu Suzumura, who was in the Ordnance Bureau of the Ministry of the Army, also shared Yoshida’s view, stating that “the first and foremost requirement for industrial mobilization is to regulate the relationship between private factories and the government.”³⁵ He believed that to implement a wide range of military industrial mobilization, it was necessary to improve the munition production capacity of private factories. In doing so, the government should establish a system of production management, control, and requisitioning of civilian factories under the authority of the government as a precondition. This was directly reflected in the Military Industrial Mobilization Law. From this point of view, it became clear that the main issue after the enactment of the law was the establishment of a system aimed at realizing a joint public-private partnership.³⁶

For example, during the general war phase, Army Artillery Lieutenant Colonel Hyosaburo

³³ Documents of the Committee for Various Investigations [Speeches], *National Archives of Japan*, Vol. 36, p. 5.

³⁴ Toyohiko Yoshida, “Hopes for Japanese Industrialists,” *European War Facts*, No. 99, May 25, 1917, p. 67.

³⁵ Yoshikazu Suzumura, “Kogyo Kinkinoku (Industrial Mobilization),” *Kaiyosha Kibo*, No. 524, Supplement, March 1918, p. 18.

³⁶ Hyosaburo Kondo, “Kogyo kinkinoku kinkinoku no seidan no kyoryoku ni okeru kanryo ni tsuite (On the cooperation between the public and private sectors from the viewpoint of preparing for industrial mobilization in peacetime)” (same right, No. 537, Supplement, May 1919, p. 6). In addition, Kusuzo Tsujimura (Chief of Army Accounting), “Operation of the Industrial Mobilization Law and the Munitions Industry,” wrote about the intent behind the enactment of the law: “It is based on the spirit of prompt and smooth implementation of the supply of munitions (goods) through united government and private sector cooperation” (*Kinyu Keizai Jiho*, Vol. 5, No. 4, April 1918, p. 30).

Kondo stated that “it is the most urgent time to privatize a part of the weaponry in peacetime.” To overcome the low level of weapons production technology in private factories, which had been a concern when privatizing weapons, he advocated the secondment of engineers from the army and navy. This clearly showed that technological cooperation between the military and the private sector was indispensable for the mobilization of the munitions industry.

The navy, on the other hand, was also strongly interested in joint public-private partnerships and the privatization of weapons production.³⁷ For example, Lieutenant General Takeda Hideo, Commander of the Naval Agency, emphasized the creation of a public-private cooperative system, stating that “no matter how complete the mobilization laws are, they will never reach their great purpose unless the public and private sectors open their hearts to each other and believe in each other and work together in the cause of national defense”. In the same vein, Kageyama Noboru (Director of Kogyo no Dainippon Sha) stated that “it is necessary to open up the private sector to the private sector and manage it.”³⁸ There were many influential figures who advocated the improvement of civilian weapons production technology and the establishment of a production system during peacetime.

The momentum for the privatization of weapons as part of the public-private partnership was strong not only among the military and financial sectors but also among scholars who served on government committees as planners for the expansion of the iron and steel industry.³⁹ For example, Masatoshi Okochi, a professor at the Tokyo Imperial University of Technology (in charge of the first course in military engineering) and a member of the Committee on Steel Industry Research, stated that “we must realize that the privatization of weapons is a serious national defense problem that concerns the very survival and safety of the nation itself, which now touches the lives of the people.” The business community’s argument was that the promotion of the heavy and chemical industries was the catalyst for the privatization of weapons” and that it was necessary to place the enhancement of national defense as the fundamental factor in the privatization of weapons production.

It was the view that the goal and content of arms privatization should be defined by national and military considerations, such as the enhancement of national defense, and not by the primary pursuit of capitalist profit. Kakichi Uchida, Vice Minister of Communications, stated that “since this is a war of the people, the people should take the responsibility of manufacturing and supplying the necessary munitions themselves.”⁴⁰

In the process of establishing the military industrial mobilization system, the issues of self-sufficiency, resources, and the joint public-private sector, which were to become points of contention between the military and business, were defined by the political and economic structures of Japan during that period, but there was a great possibility that the military, business, and government would find a point of agreement on all these issues. The enactment of the Military Industrial Mobilization Law was indeed a legal expression of this.⁴¹ The historical background for the establishment of the munitions industrial system,

³⁷ Hideo Takeda, “Impressions on Military Mobilization,” *Dainippon*, Vol. 5, No. 11, November 1918, p. 22.

³⁸ Noboru Kageyama, “Guns and Munitions Industrial Mobilization Bill” (*Kogyo no Dainippon*, Vol. 15, No. 4, April 1, 1918, p. 2).

³⁹ Masatoshi Okochi, “Arms Privatization Aiding Theory,” *Jiji Shinpo*, No. 11629, January 4, 1916.

⁴⁰ Yoshikichi Uchida, “On the Military Industrial Mobilization Law” (*Jitsugyo no Sekai*, Vol. 15, No. 7, April 1, 1918, p. 12).

⁴¹ Masatoshi Okochi proposed the establishment of a Ministry of Industry, independent of both sides, as an organization that would coordinate and unify the production of munitions, with both military and financial sectors working together. See Okochi, “Preparations for Industrial Mobilization: The Greatest Urgent Need to

which was based on a variety of arguments, was, above all, the urgent domestic and international situation in which the production and export of arms had become an urgent policy issue since WWI.

3. Arms Export Issues Before and After WWI: The Role of Taiheiyo Kumiai

(1) Response to Arms Exports

The same situation had already emerged after the Russo-Japanese War, which preceded WWI, when Prime Minister Okuma was concerned about responding to “orders for military supplies.” During that period, especially around the time of the Xinhai Revolution, China was attracting attention as a market for arms exports, and the Japanese government was also boldly working to establish a framework for arms exports. Therefore, on June 4, 1908 (Meiji 41), three years after the end of the Russo-Japanese War, Masatake Terauchi, then Minister of War, ordered the establishment of the Taihei Kumiai, a joint venture of Takata Shokai, Okura-gumi, and Mitsui & Co. The company was to take charge of the arms export business. During the Russo-Japanese War, Japan’s arms production was financed by expanding the scale of its military arsenals in Tokyo, Osaka, and other cities. However, the end of the war left Japan with a saturated arms production and stockpile, and the country was looking to China and Thailand as its main arms export markets to maintain its weapons production and stockpile, and to secure working capital for its artillery arsenals.

As an indication of this, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ historical document “Taiheiyo Kumiai ni Kansuru Koto” (April 1, 1925, Morishima) clearly states that it was established “for the purpose of exporting arms to other countries.”⁴² The association was then repeatedly extended for three more terms until the end of the Taisho era. Each contract was concluded in accordance with the terms and conditions of the orders of the Minister of War, indicating that the Taiheiyo Kumiai was in effect the “Imperial Retirement Organization” of the Japanese Army itself. This means that Japan’s arms export business was placed under the control of the Japanese army. The document also stated that “from the end of 1917 to the spring of 1919, about 30 million yen in arms were supplied”⁴³ against the backdrop of the Terauchi Cabinet’s aid policy to the Duan Qirui regime in China, especially during the second contract. After WWI, a decrease in arms exports became apparent. At the time, the Terauchi Cabinet’s policy of supporting the Duan Qirui administration was manifested in the form of an increase in arms exports. In this sense, the increase or decrease in the amount of arms exports visualizes the actual state of diplomatic relations with the target country, and this, in itself, is an important approach to the study of the history of arms transfers.

In the Showa period (1926–1989), there was continuous communication between the army and the Taihei Kumiai regarding the continuation of the union. For example, in the “Regarding the Continuation of the Taihei Kumiai” (Mikiretsu No. 408, received June 18, 1930), an “application”⁴⁴ was submitted to the War Ministry under the joint names of

Establish the Ministry of Industry and Trade and Other Urgent Needs” (*Taiyo*, Vol. 24, No. 1, p. 109).

⁴² Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (hereafter, JACAR): Reference Code (Ref) B03030302100 REEL No. 1-0089 (“Records of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Prewar Period,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives), p. 491. The number of pages at the end was added by JACAR for organizational purposes. The reference code beginning with B indicates that the item is owned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, while C indicates that it is owned by the National Institute for Defense Studies, Ministry of Defense.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 492

⁴⁴ Same as that on the right, Ref. C01003813900 (in the collection of the National Institute for Defense

Morinosuke Mitsui, President and Representative Director of Mitsui & Co. The request for the continuation of Taihei Kumiai was made under circumstances in which the number of trading companies that participated in the association was not expected to increase, perhaps owing to the decline in the total amount of arms exports since the start of the Showa period. Although the letter is in the form of a “request” from Taiheiyo Kumiai, it cannot be taken at face value. Needless to say, the army’s desire to advance its arms export policy was in the background. A material to prove this is entitled “Opinion”⁴⁵ in the “Reorganization of the Taiping Union,” which was presented by the Ordnance Bureau of the Army Ministry on the same day. There was a statement indicating a strong sense of crisis about the current state of Taiheiyo Kumiai. This was at a time when party politics was gaining momentum, criticism of the military was developing, and momentum for disarmament was being fostered in public opinion. At this point, to break through the current situation, the establishment of a new organization to replace Taiheiyo Kumiai was beginning to be considered within the army, centering on the Ordnance Bureau. In addition, the text of the letter indicated a will to require a more thorough control by the army as a measure to leverage arms export trading companies.

Behind the call for the establishment of the new organization was the dissatisfaction of the army authorities with Taiheiyo Kumiai. This can be seen from the fact that while the reason for the dissatisfaction was due to the way weapons from foreign countries were ordered, it was also pointed out that “most orders from the union were not completed within one year of receipt, but many took several years” (“Reference for Explanation of Reorganization of Taiheiyo Kumiai”).⁴⁶ As an example of this, the report states that it took one year four months from the start of the order to the completion of delivery of type 3 infantry rifles and bayonets, “weapons to be paid for by China.” In Thailand, it took four years from the start of the order to the completion of delivery for the export of standard rifles and packets. From the perspective of arms export competition with other countries, these delays were considered a serious problem by the army authorities.

However, the situation was not conducive to proceeding at once to the establishment of a new organization. In a letter dated June 21, 1930, from the Vice Minister of the Army to the Director General of the Army Arsenal, with the subject “Concerning the Continuation of the Taiheiyo Kumiai,” it was stated that the association would be continued for one year from the expiration date of the letter. The letter stated that the continuation of the union would be approved within one year of the expiration date. The document titled “Concerning the Sale of Weapons to Foreign Countries” (June 19, 1930, Firearms Division)⁴⁷ gives six reasons for the continuation. The content of the document was to confirm once again where the role of arms-exporting trading companies lies. It stated that arms-exporting countries, particularly Britain and France, are increasingly moving to export arms to China and that to keep up with them, it is essential to enhance arms export policies; for this reason, it is hoped that more trading companies will join Taiheiyo Kumiai.⁴⁸

Studies, Ministry of Defense: “Secret University Diary” of the Ministry of the Army, 1928, Vol. 3, p. 1426).

⁴⁵ Ibid. pp. 1428-2429

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 1430

⁴⁷ Ibid. pp. 1452-1453

⁴⁸ In “The Army and Weapons Production after the Russo-Japanese War,” Noritaka Ikeda argued that “it can be said that the Taiheikumiai eliminated competition among domestic trading companies over the sale of weapons, unified the sales organization, and created a system to compete with German trading companies by bringing together the public (military) and private sectors” (*The Land System Historical Society*, Vol. 29, No. 2 [Vol. 114, No. 2], January 1987, p. 41), emphasizing that this was a measure to deal with export competition with German trading companies.

The document, which was presented the year before the outbreak of the Manchurian Incident, shows that while public opinion called for disarmament during the period in question, policies were being pushed forward to achieve results in arms exports. The document reveals the intention of trying to penetrate China's influence through arms exports and to strengthen the domestic arms production system, as if in defiance of public opinion for disarmament. In particular, it is thought that the Japanese army was accumulating a backlash against the anti-military stance of the Minsei Cabinet, encouraged by public opinion toward disarmament, which led to the Manchurian Incident, which could be described as a coup d'état abroad. This arms export policy was being leveraged as a measure to steer the country toward a course of military expansion.

Next, an overview of the actual situation of arms exports by major countries is given in the "Arms Export Prohibition Issue," prepared by the Second Division of the Research Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in January 1935.⁴⁹ The figures are quoted from the "Arms Export Prohibition Issue," prepared by the Second Division of the Research Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in January 1935. In 1930, the top 10 countries, led by the United Kingdom, accounted for 90% of the total world munition industrial output, and the top 10 countries accounted for 90% of total world exports. The following table shows the ranking and share. The rankings and percentages of shares are shown below: first place, the United Kingdom at 30.8%; second place, France at 12.9%; third place, the United States at 11.7%; fourth place, the Czech Republic at 9.6%; fifth place, Sweden at 7.8%; sixth place, Italy at 6.8%; seventh place, the Netherlands at 5.4%; eighth place, Belgium at 4.4%; ninth place, Denmark at 1.9%; tenth place, Japan at 1.9%. It is clear here that Japan's share of the world's tenth position was less than 2% of the world's total. This indicates the low level of Japan's munitions industry production capacity. It is assumed that this was the reason why the Japanese army in particular was keenly aware of the need to increase arms exports to revitalize the munitions industry.

(2) Arms Imports by the Japanese Navy Before and After the Manchurian Incident

In the course of summarizing the issue of arms imports and exports before and after the Manchurian Incident, we first introduce the actual state of arms imports by the Imperial Japanese Navy, a topic that has rarely been addressed in previous studies. To know what kind of arms imports Japan was carrying out during the relevant period, the document "Regarding the Prohibition of Arms Exports to the United States" (dated March 13, 1933, Navy Warship Administration Headquarters, General Affairs Department, Section 2)⁵⁰ is a good source of reference. The actual number of arms imports made by the Imperial Japanese Navy is listed in various versions of the document, some of which are quoted below.

First, the countries from which arms were imported and the amounts purchased for 1930, 1931, and 1932 are shown below. The following is the total import value, the top three countries, and the number of cases and value handled for each fiscal year. The figures in parentheses indicate the number of cases. and the value for each fiscal year: in FY1930, the total value was 2,412,670 yen, with the United Kingdom (22) accounting for 2,273,963 yen; Switzerland (3), for 35,918 yen; and Germany (4), for 21,999 yen. In FY1931, the total value was 2,246,656 yen, with England (18) accounting for 1,226,637 yen; France (6),

⁴⁹ Same as above, Ref. B1007038030 (Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Issue of the Arms Export Ban," prepared by the Research Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [Chou No. 21/1935, pp. 017-018]).

⁵⁰ Ibid. Ref. C05022716800 (Department of the Navy, "Official Remarks," 1933, p. 0170).

for 820,794 yen; and the United States (9), for 87,484 yen. In 1932, the total was 7,104,041 yen, with France (11) accounting for 3,090,869 yen; England (16), for 2,310,728 yen; and Germany (11), for 1,139,204 yen.

After the Manchurian Incident, the figures showed a sharp increase in imports in proportion to the increased use of arms and ammunition as the warfront expanded. The main import partners were the United Kingdom and France. The fact that France exceeded the United Kingdom in import value in the year following the Manchurian Incident can be interpreted to mean that the attitude toward Japan, which caused the Manchurian Incident, was also reflected in the import value. In other words, both countries, represented by the United Kingdom and France, which are permanent members of the League of Nations, took a tough stance toward the Manchurian Incident. Although the report of the so-called Lytton Inquiry, led by Lord Lytton of the United Kingdom, was conciliatory toward Japan, the United Kingdom was more cautious toward Japan than France, which also resulted in the following: This is also the reason why France ranked highest in terms of arms imports and exports. This point also shows that arms imports and exports were influenced by political relations with the countries to which the arms were exported during the relevant period.

Next, we introduce examples of arms import items. The following is a list of the types of weapons imported from the United Kingdom for use by the Imperial Japanese Navy in FY1931. (The numbers in parentheses are quantities, and the numbers below are prices in yen.)⁵¹

Ru-type 7.7-mm machine gun (3 guns)	5, 418
Ru-type 7.7-mm swivel machine gun (107 guns)	14,746.5
Aviation paanja machine gun (2 guns)	3, 358
Ru-type 7.7-mm machine gun (70 guns)	136, 293
Ordinary ammunition packets for the same (3,508,000)	174,519
Towing ammunition packet for the same use (402,000)	49,771
Ru-type 12.0-mm machine gun (23 guns)	169, 605
Ordinary ammunition packets for the same use (55,000 pieces)	20,600
Towing ammunition packets for the same use (5,000 pieces)	4,039
Ditto 40.0-mm machine gun (10 guns)	22, 346
Ordinary ammunition packets for the same (6,500 pieces)	7,023
Towing ammunition packets for the same use (3,500 pieces)	31,293
Projectile guns (shoulder-mounted) (35 guns)	8,081
Cardenroid light tanks (6 units)	61, 468
Ru-type C · T · A 10-mm copper plate (40 tons)	51, 634
High-voice telephone (9 pieces)	947
Lauderhoofon (a pair)	1, 034

The total amount of the items was 1,226,657 yen. From the contents of these arms, we can see how the Japanese Imperial Navy at that time focused on arms imports. These arms imports were ordered by the Imperial Japanese Navy, and it is unlikely that Taiheiyo Kumiai or Showa Tsusho were involved. This point will be discussed later.

Other historical data are quoted from the same document. From “Foreign Arms in Fiscal Year 1931,” the following are listed in order of import value by country: the United Kingdom (1,253,713 yen), followed by France (822,881 yen), the United States (209,245

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 0110

yen), Germany (101,021 yen), Sweden (53,839 yen), Italy (28,000 yen), and Switzerland (5,626 yen). The total amount was 2,474,325 yen. Although the figures are slightly different from those in the aforementioned historical records, they are almost the same. It is safe to conclude that the amount of arms imports generally represents the actual situation.

The weapons included gun machine and machine-gun ammunition, pistols and pistol bullets, instruments, and airplane parts.⁵² The types and values of the weapons for FY1930 are as follows: guns and machine gun ammunition, around 1,050,000 yen; main gun bullets, 500,000 yen; mines, 270,000 yen; aircraft parts and instruments, 400,000 yen; and others, 580,000 yen, for a total of around 2,800,000 yen.⁵³ Looking at imports alone, the position of the United Kingdom up to the outbreak of the Manchurian Incident was extremely large. The United Kingdom was the world's largest exporter of arms during that period, and by strengthening its economic and military relations with partner countries through its arms exports, it thoroughly promoted its hegemony and positioned itself as the leader of the international order. Arms exports were, in this sense, a visible political act that demonstrated the will and direction of the nation.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs compiled "Miscellaneous Matters Related to Arms Export Control in Each Country on the Occasion of the Manchurian Incident"⁵⁴ to explain such Western attitudes. For example, the section entitled "Lifting of the Arms Embargo on Arms Exports to Japan and China," states that "When the British government announced on February 27 that it would lift the arms embargo on arms exports to Japan and China, some British newspapers expressed their approval of the government's measures, but many others stated that the measures were ineffective and that it was unfair that Japan and China were treated equally." However, many newspapers published criticisms against the government's measures on the grounds that they were ineffective and that it was unfair to treat both Japan and China equally. The main ones are as follows⁵⁵: *The London Times* (February 28, 1932), *The Daily Express* (February 28, 1932), *The Morning Post* (February 28, 1932), *The Manchester Guardian* (February 28, 1932), *The Daily Telegraph* (March 3, 1932), *The Evening Standard* (March 3, 1932), and the *Daily Mail* (March 4).

The London Times, for example, introduced an argument that it was irrational to be complicit with one of the warring parties, saying, "It would be unfair to treat the victim, China, in the same way as Japan, but it is quite reasonable for the British Foreign Minister, who is now acting alone on this point, to admonish that it is difficult in practice to make a distinction between the belligerents. *The Daily Express* also introduced an argument that explained the irrationality of being complicit with one of the warring parties. It (February 28) also stated that "We are not a people who are averse to war, but we do not believe that an arms embargo will end the war. No matter what kind of arms embargo agreement is reached, it will not stop the conflict between Japan and China. The only effect of the government's embargo policy will be to further increase the number of unemployed people in the U.K." The argument against the embargo policy from the perspective of its effect on the economic life of the British people was that it would ultimately result in an increase in unemployment. The media in the United Kingdom were highly critical of the arms export ban adopted by the British government, with some arguing that it would have a negative

⁵² Ibid. p. 0111

⁵³ Ibid. p. 0137

⁵⁴ Same as above, Ref. B04010625000 (Records of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Prewar Period, Military Section 9, Arms, Ammunition, Aircraft, Supplies, Arms Export Control in Countries on the Occasion of the Manchurian Incident, unpagged).

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 0368

impact on friendly relations between the United Kingdom and Japan.

Perhaps in response to these developments in British public opinion, the British government adopted a conciliatory attitude toward the arms transfer issue. The same explanation is given in the same Ministry of Foreign Affairs document 2.⁵⁶ In short, the British government stated that the temporary arms export ban was a kind of “gesture” in response to the anti-arms export movement and that its true intention was “not to damage friendly relations between Japan and China, and under no circumstances to get involved in the middle of a conflict, to the extent of avoiding it.” In short, it was a decision to avoid getting involved in conflicts, which would be beneficial both for securing profits from arms exports and for preventing unemployment.

4. The Role of Showa Trade and the Japanese Army

(1) Establishment of Showa Trading Co.

During WWI, the Taiheiyo Kumiai exported more than 10 million rifles to the United Kingdom and Russia. However, when a downward trend in arms exports became apparent, Takata Shokai left the association and was replaced by Mitsubishi Shoji, which had Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, a manufacturer of aircraft and armored vehicles, under its umbrella. Takata Shokai took this opportunity to change its name to Showa Tsusho. Showa Tsusho (formally known as Showa Trading Co., Ltd.) was established on April 20, 1939, at the behest of Colonel Gao Iwakabe, Director of the Military Affairs Division of the Ministry of War. Unlike Taihei Kumiai, the Ministry of War took control of all aspects of the company’s operations, including the authority to direct and supervise operations and personnel affairs, further strengthening its character as an arms export trading company under the direct control of the Ministry of War.

According to “Showa Tsusho Kabushiki Kaisha ni Kansuru Koto,” the army issued a notice encouraging the aggressive export of arms overseas to thoroughly promote the role of Showa Tsusho. For example, Minister of the Army Seishiro Itagaki issued the “Instruction to the Showa Trading Corporation” on July 27, 1939, to all units concerned.⁵⁷ The letter clearly stated the purpose of establishing Showa Shoji: “In view of the current situation, we will aggressively develop the market for Japanese-made weapons overseas, so that we can maintain and achieve sound development of this type of heavy industry.” This difference may be due to the difference in the period from the 1930s to the 1940s. The Taipei Kumiai were clearly aware that it was essential to secure a sustainable supply of arms exports to ensure the stable operation of the heavy industries that supported the munitions industry.

The “Memorandum of Understanding” included in this document provided a detailed description of Showa Tsusho’s business activities. The memorandum listed as “the scope of business of the Company” (1) export of weapons, weapons parts, and munitions; (2) the import of the same; and (3) the import and export of special raw materials and machinery.⁵⁸ What is noteworthy here is the item, “3. To develop sales channels for weapons and raw materials, the Army shall, to the extent that circumstances permit, not only actively decline to pay for superior products but shall also, to the extent that circumstances permit, provide

⁵⁶ Ibid. pp. 0369-0372.

⁵⁷ Same as above, Ref. C01007723900 (Ministry of the Army, “Land Secretarial Grand Diary,” 1939, Book 2, p. 0641).

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 0649

cooperation in the manufacture of non-standard products if the other country so wishes.”⁵⁹ The army’s extremely aggressive and even offensive stance on arms exports is blatantly obvious. In short, it is not only waiting for orders for weapons purchase opportunities but also dispatching instructors to sell weapons and to use them. The difference from Taiheiyo Kumiai is highlighted here.

(2) Arms Exports to China and Thailand

First, I examined historical documents that provided examples of arms exports to China. For example, in the “Cabinet Secretariat Confidential No. 1364, Concerning Export of Aerial Weapons” (approved by the Supreme Court on June 5, 1935), the following observations were made in light of the fact that China and other countries have expressed interest in purchasing aircrafts. Three items that are considered particularly important are as follows:

1. We have recently received requests from the Republic of China and other countries to purchase military aircraft, as described in exhibits 1 and 2.
2. In Japan, demand for airplanes is almost exclusively limited to the military. If there is no demand for airplanes in Japan, let alone overseas, there will be great concern about maintaining industrial strength. In addition, it is a major cause of the high unit cost of aircrafts and a major hindrance to the progress of aircraft production technology. To eliminate these disadvantages, it is necessary to seek overseas sales channels for airplanes as soon as possible.
3. In view of the fact that all countries are trying to sell airplanes to the Republic of China, it is necessary to make a first move in this day and age when there are signs of a turnaround in Japan-China diplomacy.⁶⁰

At this point, the government was also clear in its judgment that the reason for exporting air weapons was to seek overseas sales channels to revitalize the aircraft industry, which would also facilitate the execution of wartime mobilization plans and improve aircraft development technology. In addition, China had become a competing destination for exports from other countries, and the government recognized that an arms export policy was indispensable from the perspective of securing influence through aircraft exports to China.

On October 31, 1940, Showa Trading Co., Ltd. drafted a document titled “Concerning Export of Aircraft Weapons,”⁶¹ which includes the following examples of aircraft exports to Thailand. First, an “Application for Permission to Export Aircraft Weapons” (dated October 19, 1930) was submitted to the Minister of War, Hideki Tojo, in the name of Mitsuya Hori, Executive Managing Director of Showa Trading Co. The contents of the application are as follows:

- Complete equipment for Type 97 light bombers (not including armament): with required equipment for all aircraft 24 units
- Type 89 fixed machine guns 24 guns

⁵⁹ Ibid. pp. 0650-065

⁶⁰ Same as above, Ref. C05034160500 (Department of the Navy, “Official Remarks,” June 6, 1935, p. 0100).

⁶¹ Same as above, Ref. C01002443600 (Ministry of the Army, “Dai Nikki [Army Ministry of the Army Large Diary],” Second Series, Class 2, 1940, Weapons, No. 3, p. 1066).

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|---|-----------------|
| · Twenty-four type 89 swinging machine guns | 24 guns |
| · Type 89 swivel fixed machine gun, with type 92 incendiary ammunition inserts and a paper box containing 100,000 bullets and type 89 swivel fixed machine gun, with type 92 incendiary ammunition inserts and a cardboard box containing | 300,000 bullets |
| · Type 89 fixed machine gun with pieces of ammunition | 25,000 bullets |
| · 50-kilogram drop bomb | 2,000 bombs |

We would like to export to the government of the Kingdom of Thailand in the following manner and would appreciate your permission to do so.

In response to this “request,” a letter was sent to the Showa Shoji side in the name of the vice admiral on the same day of the same year, stating that permission had been granted. The vice admiral conveyed this to the chief of the Army Aviation Headquarters. Although this is an exchange of documents, it is a record of cooperation between the army and Showa Shoji.

Japan’s export of aircraft to Thailand, a neutral country, continued to a certain extent even after the outbreak of the war against the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Netherlands. For example, in “Regarding Assistance in Assembly of Aircraft to be Transferred to Thailand,” drafted by the Second Department of the Army Aviation Headquarters on April 9, 1942, the vice minister of the army sent a telegram to the chief of the general staff of the Southern Command, stating, “Please contact Showa Tsusho Corporation (Banya Branch) for assistance in assembling nine Type 99 advanced training aircraft being transferred to Thailand (six of which were shipped on the morning of March 14 by Showa Maru, the remaining three to be shipped shortly). Please contact Showa Tsusho Corporation (Banya Branch) for assistance.”⁶²

It is clear from many records that the purpose of the arms exports, including aircrafts, was to stabilize the military production system during peacetime and to ensure the improvement of military technology. This historical document also shows this to be the case. The “Draftsman, Firearms Division, Ordnance Bureau, Concerning Sales of Weapons,” dated October 14, 1940, stated that “during the visit of the Thai goodwill delegation to the munitions industry, Minister Prom stated that the purchase of weapons would be dependent on the Imperial Government.” The article stated that Japan’s efforts to approach Minister Phrom, who was a powerful figure in Thailand, was successful and that the future of Japan’s arms exports was opened up.

In addition, “Concerning Weapons Export to Thailand” (October 8, 1940, received by the Air Headquarters), a coded telegram from the vice minister to the military attaché at the Thai legation stated that type 38 infantry guns, type 30 bayonets, type 96 light machine guns, 10 type 95 light tanks (with 37-mm guns), 40 type 94 light armored vehicles (with machine guns), and aircraft were to be exported to Thailand by air. The agreement also stated that aircrafts would be exported by air. The export price was to be “within the range indicated in the Showa Trade Agreement.”

As shown earlier, the Thai government was extremely proactive in importing arms from Japan, and this is indicated in a telegram (Secret Telegram No. 262) dated October 4, 1940,

⁶² Same as above, Ref. C01000204000 (Ministry of the Army, Aviation Headquarters, Second Department, “Rikuya Minkudai Nikki,” No. 12, 1942, p. 0740).

from the Director General of the General Affairs Department to the military attaché at the Thai legation, which stated, “Due to the urgent situation between Thailand and France and India, Thailand is currently working to strengthen its military equipment, and the Royal Thai Air Force is urgently in need of two thousand light bombers. The Thai Air Force is urgently in need of 24 or 50 kilograms of light bombers and 2,000 bombs. The Thai Air Force has immediately obtained 2,000 bombs of 24 or 50 kilograms for light bombers.”⁶³

The Thai government was under pressure from foreign powers, led by France, and its ability to remain neutral was in jeopardy. Therefore, to maintain neutrality on its own, it was forced to rely on arms aid from Japan, which also extended its influence to the Indochina Peninsula. The Thai government, under the orders of its leaders, Luang Pibulsonggram (หลวงพิบูลสงคราม) ⁶⁴, decided to import 50 light tanks from Japan as soon as possible.

In a telegram (No. 264) dated October 5, 1940, a military officer attached to the Thai legation addressed to the Director General of the General Affairs Department stated, “Piven has decided to ask Japan to supply all weapons used by the Thai army in the future, so that the Japanese side can take political considerations into account instead of commercial considerations.” He added, “In view of the changes in the international situation, the military tie-up between Japan and Thailand is steadily progressing. At this time, it is necessary for us to strategically consider the issue of arms sales.”⁶⁵

The following documents provide an overview of the role of Showa Trading Co. First, “Regarding the Use of Showa Trading Company,”⁶⁶ a letter dated January 13, 1941, from the Undersecretary of the Army to the military attaché at the Embassy of Thailand, clearly shows the role of Showa Trading Co. The most noteworthy part of the letter is the part that read as follows: “I. Weapons-like items for military use (including items for civilian use that are similar to those for military use) ordered from Thailand are to be ordered from Japan through trading companies other than Showa, but this is not in the best interest of control, so all handling of weapons and weapons-like items is to be done through Showa Trading.”

Although it is unclear whether the discussion here is limited to Thailand, it is indicated that the arms export trading companies would eventually be consolidated under the army’s Showa Trading Co., although other arms export trading companies also existed. Although it would seem reasonable to mobilize multiple trading companies to establish a broad arms export system and put the army’s intentions into practice, it was clearly stated that Showa Trading would be the sole trading company from the standpoint of control. The army focused on the export of aircraft through Showa Trading. The Japanese army was strongly aware of the existence of aircrafts as the next-generation main weapon. From the perspective of the advancement and mass production of aircrafts, the establishment of an export system was recognized as an urgent necessity for the enhancement and development of Japan’s aircraft industry.⁶⁷

⁶³ Same as above, Ref. C01004903700 (Ministry of the Army, “Secret University Diary,” Vol. 15, October 1940, pp. 2001-2001).

⁶⁴ Luang Pibulsonggram (July 14, 1897–June 11, 1964) was a Thai politician. He served twice as Prime Minister. He was a highly influential figure in Thai politics from the Constitutional Revolution to World War II and was nicknamed the “Prime Minister of Thailand” for many years.

⁶⁵ JACAR, Ref. C01004903700 (Ministry of the Army, “Secret University Diary,” Vol. 15, October 1940, pp. 2003-2004).

⁶⁶ Same right, Ref. C04122944100, p. 0670-0672 (Ministry of the Army, “Rikushi-Kakudai Nikki,” No. 18, January 21, 1941, pp. 0670-0672).

⁶⁷ For more information on the overall activities of Japanese trading companies toward Thailand in the prewar period, see Junko Kawabe, “Prewar Activities of Japanese Trading Companies in Thailand | The Case of Mitsui

The army was not limited to Thailand as a destination for arms exports but was also trying to extend its reach to Europe. For example, in a telegram dated February 7, 1940, the Military Affairs Bureau's Military Affairs Division received a message from the Undersecretary of the Army to the military officers stationed in Japan, stating, "In view of the international situation, we are going to refrain from exporting weapons that we are going to resupply to Scandinavia. Also, weapons for the Balkans should be traded directly."⁶⁸ While urging caution so that arms exports would not become an international problem, the letter also urged the government to be proactive in its arms export policy.

As an example of this, in the "Draft of the Military Affairs Division of the Military Affairs Bureau Regarding the Export of Munitions," dated January 19, 1940,⁶⁹ the Military Affairs Division of the War Ministry sent a telegram (Rikumiten) to military officers stationed in Italy, Germany, France, England, the United States, the Soviet Union, Poland, Finland, Turkey, Latvia, Romania, Iran, Thailand, Brazil, Mexico, and other countries, stating, "Weapons and ammunitions to be exported are those that we can afford to export, especially those listed on the left. We can afford to export the following weapons, in particular ammunition. If weapons such as aircraft and tanks were added to this, a considerable amount of arms exports were made."⁷⁰ The "left weapons" shown here refer to type 88 anti-aircraft guns, type 94 anti-tank guns, heavy grenades, light grenades, ammunition, hand grenades, and various types of bombs.

Incidentally, the national budget for FY1940 was 10,982.75 million yen, and direct military spending was 7,947.19 million yen.⁷¹ Although we must avoid making an immediate judgment, it is clear that arms exports amounting to 100 million yen (1.26% of direct military expenditures) were being carried out behind the scenes of Japan's war activities in the prewar period. The arms exports were carried out simultaneously with the war effort. This is one proof that the act of war normalizes arms transfers, that is, arms proliferation.

5. Conclusion and Remaining Issues

Following the issue set out at the beginning of this paper, we summarize our conclusions based on the discussion. First, Japan's arms production problems, which began in the early Meiji period, were not fully addressed by the Japanese government and the army and navy, especially during WWI, when Russia and other countries requested arms exports, which made the Japanese government and the army and navy keenly aware of the need to establish a military industrial mobilization system. This became a joint public-private sector effort to address the arms production problem and a policy issue.

Second, the privatization of the munitions industry, which ensured the independence of arms production and weaponry, was pushed forward, which also stimulated Japan's arms exports in the prewar period. The Taiheiyo Kumiai and Showa Trading companies were established under the control of the Japanese army as the direct players in this process and

& Co., Ltd.'s Bangkok Branch" (Josai University Management Bulletin, No. 4, March 2008).

⁶⁸ JACAR, Ref. C01004879200 (War Department, "Secret University Diary," February 1940, p. 0289).

⁶⁹ Same right, Ref. C01004878900 (Ministry of War "Secret University Diary," Vol. 15, January-February 1940, p. 0275).

⁷⁰ On Japan's arms exports in the prewar period, Koketsu published "Prewar Japan's Arms Exports: The Military's Intentions and Specialized Trading Companies" (Sekai, No. 1, August 2018).

⁷¹ Akira Fujiwara, *Military History*, Toyo Keizai Shimpō, 1961, p. 272.

continued to be responsible for Japan's arms export system until Japan's defeat in WWII.

Third, although they were placed under the control of the Japanese army, it is undeniable that the autonomy of private trading companies was valued, and their activities were expected. This was because the military recognized, on the basis of the lessons learned from WWI, that if the military took the initiative, it would not be sufficient to respond to the new total war. However, in the international movement for disarmament in the 1920s, the military was forced to adopt a military-led expansion policy, and it is believed that this led to a demand for military leadership in arms production issues.

Fourth, the issue of arms imports, which has been rarely mentioned in previous studies, reveals the content of imported items, which proves the relatively low level of Japanese arms production technology. The arms imports shows Japan's efforts to acquire and develop production technology and to improve production through.

Finally, I would like to touch on the remaining issues. Showa Trading was literally guaranteed a "profit structure for arms exports" by its line of integration with the military, and no other options existed. Unlike the civilian arms industry in Europe and the United States, Japan's international arms export network from the 1930s onward was fragile, and there was a fundamental gap that was difficult to fill with the arms export trading companies in Europe and the United States, which developed independent arms export operations.

However, it is also true that Japan's war partner in the 1930s was basically China; therefore, its intention to produce and export weapons on par with those of the West was not necessarily strong. In other words, on the Chinese front, which was judged inferior to Japan in terms of weapons standards, emphasis was placed on infantry combat power, and there was not necessarily a high demand for tanks, artillery, and other weapons with enhanced firepower and mobility. However, this decision resulted in the defeat of the Japanese forces in the Zhang Gufeng Incident (1938) and Nomonhan Incident (1939). Furthermore, in the 1940s, with the prospect of war against the United Kingdom and United States, which possessed advanced weapons production technology, there was a rapid demand for more advanced military technology, including the lessons learned from the previous war against the Soviet Union.

In addition, we found no evidence at this time that the Japanese Imperial Navy, which, like the Japanese army, had embarked on arms imports and exports, had its own arms trading company comparable with Taiheiyo Kumiai or Showa Tsusho. The navy's official position, as quoted, is that there were no "intermediaries." This paper cites historical documents that show part of the actual situation of arms imports, but we intend to clarify the actual situation of arms imports by the Japanese Imperial Navy, especially from the 1920s onward, and who was responsible for such imports through further research of historical documents.

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