

Katsura Tarō's Experiences in Germany and Kido Takayoshi's Ideas on a Constitution

Katō Yōko

This chapter investigates the relationship between the experiences of the politician and army general Katsura Tarō (1848–1913) in Germany at the beginning of the Meiji era (1868–1912) and the development of constitutional government in Japan. Katsura's ideas were especially influential due to his close ties with Kido Takayoshi (1833–1877), an important advocate of constitutional government. During his time in Germany Katsura was particularly impressed by the significant role the military played in government. This study first examines Katsura's early military and political career and his strong links to Kido, one of the leaders of the Chōshū faction in Japanese politics.¹ It will then look at how Katsura's sojourn in Germany came to shape his views and discuss how these views also impacted Kido's ideas on constitutional government in Japan.

Katsura Tarō (fig. 4.1) was born in the city of Hagi in the feudal domain of Nagato (often called Chōshū; present-day Yamaguchi Prefecture), the son of a relatively high-ranking samurai. Chōshū samurai, together with supporters from Satsuma (present-day Kagoshima Prefecture), Tosa (present-day Kōchi Prefecture), and Hizen (present-day Saga Prefecture), were crucial in bringing about the Meiji Restoration (1868) and the establishment of a new government legitimized by the Japanese emperor. Under the tutelage of his mentor Yamagata Aritomo (1838–1922), Katsura became one of the founders of the Imperial Japanese Army and eventually one of the most authoritative military officers in Japan. He was also a crucial figure in the new government, serving as prime minister three times (1901–1906, 1908–1911, 1912–1913)—still the record for the longest-serving prime minister.

Katsura could have seamlessly ended his political career following his prominent role in government during the early 1900s (Suetake 1998; Sakurai 1997). However, toward the end of the Meiji period and at the beginning of the Taishō period (1912–1926), Katsura broke with Yamagata and the old-style politics of the “elder statesmen” (*genrō*) and attempted to reform Japan's

1 On the importance of the feudal domain of Chōshū and the later Chōshū clique in modern Japan, see Craig 1961 and Hackett 1971.



FIGURE 4.1
*Katsura Tarō (1848–1913). Japanese
 postcard, ca. 1910.*

foreign policy and state finances. After being appointed prime minister a third time in December 1912, Katsura created a political party, the Rikken Dōshikai (Constitutional Society of Comrades), to increase his support base.

At this time, Yamagata and the other members of the Chōshū clique had moved to oppose Katsura by attempting to install the Governor General of Korea, General Terauchi Masatake (1852–1919), as prime minister. When it was decided that Katsura would form his third cabinet, Tanaka Giichi (1864–1929), another Yamagata protégé, labeled Katsura “a little schemer with a weak will who eventually will lead the country into ruin,”² and Yamagata stated that Katsura had gone “crazy” (Hara and Hayashi 2000, entry August 14, 1914). Katsura’s third term as prime minister witnessed strong opposition

2 Letter from Tanaka Giichi to Terauchi Masatake, December 12, 1912, National Diet Library, Modern Japanese Political History Materials Room, Papers relating to Terauchi Masatake (Kokuritsu Kokkai Toshokan, Kensei Shiryōshitsu, Terauchi Masataka Monjo).

from the Kokumintō (National Party) under Inukai Tsuyoshi (1855–1932) and Ozaki Yukio (1858–1954) as well as from the political party Rikken Seiyūkai (Constitutional Association of Political Friends). Faced with the “Movement to Protect Constitutional Government” (*goken undō*), he was forced to resign after less than two months in power.

Katsura's political moves nevertheless furthered the establishment of the bureaucracy, the political parties, and the military as new independent political actors, separate from the elder statesmen (*genrō*) and the old feudal cliques (*hanbatsu*) that had controlled politics during the Meiji period. For instance, Katsura's appointment of Kigoshi Yasutsuna (1854–1932) from Ishikawa Prefecture as the Army Minister of his cabinet, infuriated the *genrō* around Yamagata. Katsura also even considered abolishing the regulation that military ministers had to be officers on active duty (*gunbu daijin gen'eki bukansei*)—a regulation that was considered responsible for the strong influence of the Imperial Army in Japanese politics.³

Katsura sought to make a clean break from the “elder statesmen politics” of the leaders of the first generation after the Meiji Restoration, such as Yamagata Aritomo and Matsukata Masayoshi (1835–1924). Together with Prince Saionji Kinmochi (1849–1940), president of the political party Seiyūkai, and Admiral Yamamoto Gonbei (1852–1933) from Satsuma, he became the leader of a group of the second generation of political leaders of modern Japan.

What was behind Katsura's innovative policies? In the following sections I will identify and elaborate on two main episodes in Katsura's life that formed the basis and origin of his new style of politics. First, in the early Meiji period, Katsura was a protégé of Kido Takayoshi, also from the Chōshū feudal domain, and became a member of the Kido faction, where he matured as a politician. Secondly, during his stay in Germany (1870–1873), Katsura observed the system of government there. He became strongly convinced of the inseparability of federalism and the military, notwithstanding the trend to construct a centralized state in Meiji Japan at the time.

Katsura, the Chōshū Clique, and Germany

Katsura's First Stay in Germany (1870–1873)

In May 1869, the Chōshū-born Minister of Military Affairs, Ōmura Masujirō (1825–1869) (fig. 4.2), later known as the father of modern Japan's conscription

3 This regulation was abolished under the cabinet following the Katsura government, the first cabinet of Yamamoto Gonbei (Feb. 1913–April 1914).



大村益次郎先生肖像

FIGURE 4.2 *Ōmura Masujirō (1825–1869)*. From *Kinsei meishi shashin*, vol. 2, Osaka: *Kinsei Meishi Shashin Hanpukai*, 1935.

system, opened the Yokohama Language Institute (Yokohama Gogakusho). The facility was intended to be a place where officer cadets, with the support of the government, would prepare for studying military affairs in Europe for a period of six years (Horiuchi 1905: 56). At that time, Ōmura recommended that the young Katsura, who was eager to study abroad, enter the language school.⁴ However, Katsura's chances for travel abroad were diminished in September 1869 when Ōmura was assassinated, and he was delivered a further blow in

4 Katsura was involved in the fighting at the time of the Second Punitive Expedition of the Tokugawa shogunate against the Chōshū feudal domain in 1864, during which time he served under Ōmura.

May 1870 when the Yokohama Language Institute was merged with the Osaka Imperial Army Academy (Ōsaka Heigakuryō).

Fortunately for Katsura, Kido Takayoshi and other members of the Chōshū clique took him under their wings after Ōmura's death. Katsura then entered the Yokohama Language Institute in October 1869 and began to learn French. However, in July 1870, shortly after the Yokohama Language Institute's merger with the Osaka Imperial Army Academy, Katsura left the academy and began planning to go to Europe at his own expense. On August 25, 1870, Katsura visited Kido to announce his decision. This is recorded in Kido's diary, where he wrote: "Katsura Tarō, Shizuma Kōnosuke, and others who will go to Europe came to say farewell today" (Nihon Shiseki Kyōkai 1967, vol. 1, entry August 25, 1870). Katsura departed Yokohama on a cross-Pacific journey that eventually took him to London. However, in the meantime Katsura had learned of France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), and he therefore decided to change his destination to Berlin.

Katsura in Berlin

Once in Berlin, Katsura reported to Kido about the French defeat, his living situation during his stay, and about him being able to rely on his seniors, Shinagawa Yajirō (1843–1900) and Aoki Shūzō (1844–1914), both from Yamaguchi (Chōshū), in a letter dated October 6, 1870:

Shinagawa and others have likely already reported on the outcome of the Franco-Prussian War, and thus you must know by now that France lost this conflict decisively. In fact, it lost every single battle, even after Napoleon III had surrendered, and it is now in a quite pitiful state. Aoki is here [in Berlin], and therefore I am consulting him in various matters. I am sorry to have given you [Kido] so much trouble regarding a place for me to stay [during my visit], but I am happy to report that I have finally solved this issue. (Kido Takayoshi Kankei Monjo Kenkyūkai 2008, vol. 3: 59)

Although Katsura's possibilities for study were limited as a private student without financial support from the government, he still managed to have some transformative experiences. For example, he was able to study the German language, and while living at the residence of a Prussian reserve officer, was also instructed in Prussian military science. Katsura also witnessed the celebrations at the coronation of the Prussian King Wilhelm I as Emperor of the Germans in the Palace of Versailles on January 18, 1871, following the German victory in the Franco-Prussian War. In addition, after touring the autopsy chamber at



FIGURE 4.3 *Kido Takayoshi (1833–1877). Japanese postcard, ca. 1910.*

Berlin University with Satō Susumu (1845–1921), who was studying medicine in Berlin at the same time, Katsura is said to have remarked that “[everything about] Germany is truly scientific. [Everything] has to be analytical and practical. My own field is a different one, but I will also practice military science analytically, systematically, and practically” (Tokutomi 1917, vol. 1: 316).

*Kido Takayoshi and Aoki Shūzō*⁵

Kido Takayoshi (fig. 4.3) was a central figure in the founding of the new Meiji government, abolishing the old feudal system, and creating a centralized and unified state. These objectives were achieved when fiefs were returned to the emperor in 1869, and feudal domains were abolished and replaced with

5 On Aoki's role in early Meiji Japan, see Inuzuka 2005.

prefectures in 1871. He also cooperated with Ōkubo Toshimichi (1830–1878) from Kagoshima (former feudal domain of Satsuma), another prominent figure in the early Meiji government. Yet, the two statesmen disagreed on how military forces for the central government should be established. On this point, Kido was in favor of continuing the process of introducing a military system as initiated by Ōmura Masujirō, who advocated “making no distinction between the feudal domains (*han*) in the formation of military forces.” In other words, in Ōmura and Kido believed that the central government should maintain a unified standing army, rather than having an army composed of separate units from the feudal domains (Ōshima 2008: 5). Kido feared that the latter might develop into a highly politicized organization, and he was particularly opposed to members of the former samurai class (the *shizoku*) from Kagoshima being allowed to wield a strong influence in politics.

The centralizing power that took place with the return of the feudal fiefs to the emperor in 1869 (*hanseki hōkan*) also set in motion the creation of an army for the central government. Although Kido insisted on the creation of a national conscript army, he was outmaneuvered by Ōkubo, who proposed a standing army in Tokyo based on “conscription” from the three former feudal domains of Satsuma, Chōshū, and Tosa (Hōya 2006: 303). Since the beginning of his tenure as a councilor (*sangi*), Kido had led a group of reformers within the Ministry of Finance, the Foreign Ministry, and the Ministry of Public Works. Kido and his faction, which at the time included Ōkuma Shigenobu (1838–1922), Inoue Kaoru (1836–1915), and Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909), proposed some of the most radical ideas for state reform since the centralization of power in 1871 (Takahashi 1992; Nishikawa 2005; Banno 1996).

In the meantime, Aoki Shūzō (fig. 4.4) had been studying German medicine in Prussia since 1868 on behalf of the Chōshū feudal domain (Sakane 1970: 21). Aoki also trained in politics and economics at Berlin University. When Aoki graduated in 1873, Kido recommended him for the position as the First Secretary at the Japanese Legation in Berlin. A year later, he was named the first regular Japanese Envoy to Germany. During his time in Berlin, Aoki wrote a great many letters to Kido, which today are regarded as important historical sources regarding the Chōshū clique's image of Germany. It might be useful here to highlight the contents of certain letters that are particularly relevant to this study:

- Letters dated June/July 1871: Aoki comments that Japan's military buildup based on the French military system is ill advised. “We will not be able to reach our national objectives if we retain the present Imperial Guards (Go-Shinpei) and the system of feudal domains and prefectures (*fu-han-ken*).



FIGURE 4.4 *Aoki Shūzō (1844–1914). Carte de visite, ca. 1880.*

In Prussia, obstacles to conscription in terms of social class and property have been completely removed.” (Kido Takayoshi *Kankei Monjo Kenkyūkai* 2005, vol. 1: 15)

- October 20, 1872: Aoki recommends that Katsura Tarō, Shizuma Kōnosuke, and others from the Chōshū clique receive support from the government to train in Germany rather than studying as privately funded students. He also writes in another letter dated November 1, 1872 that “among the students [studying abroad], those from Chōshū are the poorest.” (Kido Takayoshi *Kankei Monjo Kenkyūkai* 2005, vol. 1: 21)
- June 24, 1872: “Shinagawa Yajirō and Katsura Tarō continue to study hard.” (Kido Takayoshi *Kankei Monjo Kenkyūkai* 2005, vol. 1: 27)
- 1872 (probably August 3): “The nation ... providing the most reliable model for Japan to follow is Germany. Great Britain and France are in conflict,

Russia continues to be a violent threat [to Japan], and what the United States and others do can hardly be imitated by us." (Kido Takayoshi Kankei Monjo Kenkyūkai 2005, vol. 1: 28)

- May 5, 1872: "The Japanese should familiarize themselves with Prussia and Germany, not with Great Britain, France or the United States. It is the 'poor Prussia' that we must learn from." (Kido Takayoshi Kankei Monjo Kenkyūkai 2005, vol. 1: 32)

As the first source reveals, Aoki emphasized the introduction of universal conscription (*kokumin kaiheishugi*) as a means to achieve the unification of national politics (*kokusei*). It is also noteworthy that Aoki, although being strongly Germanophile, advocates the introduction of universal conscription without differences in terms of social class and that he saw this as equally important in achieving the centralization of power. As with another letter from the same period, in which the Kido faction proposed the reform of the Dajōkan system of government (Nishikawa 2005), this is a valuable historical document. The second and third sources also reveal Aoki's concern for Katsura's financial situation and is evidence that Aoki petitioned the government to offer better support of Japanese pupils studying abroad. The last two letters indicate Aoki's high esteem for German diplomacy and his praise for Germany having developed from a weak state into a major power.

Kido's Image of Germany and His Advocacy of a Constitution

On March 9, 1873, the Iwakura Mission arrived in Berlin, and two days later the delegation was received by Emperor Wilhelm I. On the following day, they met Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898) and German Field Marshal Helmuth Karl Bernhard Graf von Moltke (1800–1891) (Tanaka 2002). Katsura accompanied the delegation as an interpreter, and this provided the opportunity for a happy reunion between Kido, Katsura, and Aoki (Tokutomi 1917, vol. 1: 322). Kido wrote about his impressions of Berlin during the trip in a letter to the Chōshū army general, Miura Gorō (1846–1926), dated March 20, 1873:

The Prussian military system is highly superior to that of other European countries.... Surely it took time for Prussia to gain such an upper hand in military matters. Furthermore, it is also clear that the success of state affairs depends on more than simply excelling in a single field alone. (Tanaka 2002: 152)

Kido believed that Germany was not only superior to other countries in military matters, but also in state affairs. The Iwakura mission only stayed in Germany

for thirty-three days, a short period when compared with their time in other European countries and the United States. For example, the delegation spent 205 days in the U.S., 122 days in Great Britain, and 70 days in France (Tanaka 2002: 160). Nonetheless, in that short time, Germany made a strong impression on some of the members, including Kido, as can be seen in his above letter to Miura. After his return to Japan, Kido presented a “Proposal to Establish a Constitution” in November 1873, in which he outlined his ideas on the further development of the central government. In fact, Aoki had written the draft for this proposal, and it was the Prussian Constitution that was foremost in his mind when he was writing it (Tanaka 2002: 222).

It is highly significant (and rather unexpected) that the progressive reformer Kido, who advocated the swift introduction of a constitutional system of politics, was so profoundly influenced by Germany in his political thinking. In his “Proposal to Establish a Constitution,” Kido wrote that the “most pressing current issue is the introduction of a constitution.” However, he also maintained that the enactment of any constitution should still place ultimate authority under the “rule” (*dokusai*) of the emperor. Kido’s submission of his “Proposal” to the government coincided with the beginning of a political struggle among high-ranking politicians regarding what form the central government should take. On the one side stood politicians who, with the military backing of the Konoe-*hei* (Imperial Guards), controlled national politics while members of the Iwakura Mission, including Kido, had been away. Central figures in the group of politicians remaining behind in Tokyo were the former Satsuma domain leader, Saigō Takamori (1828–1877), and the Tosa domain (Kōchi) leader, Itagaki Taisuke (1837–1919). In the summer of 1873, this group of politicians began to advocate for the dispatch of military forces to Korea, and this triggered the *Seikanron* (Debate on the Invasion of Korea) (Ōshima 2001; 2008). Kido and Ōkubo opposed military engagement in Korea. The two were also brought together by Kido’s idea of “Constitution Plus Conscription,” and their ideas would eventually prevail in the *Seikanron*. This victory led to Kido and Ōkubo establishing unrivaled control of the central government and the downfall of Saigō and Itagaki.

Military Science and Governance

Katsura’s Second Stay in Germany (1875–1878)

The tensions in the central government resulted in Katsura being ordered back to Japan in October 1873; Aoki arrived back in March 1874 (Tokutomi 1917, vol. 1: 326). Katsura’s return to Japan may also have been hastened by his lack of funds. Both Katsura and Aoki went again to Germany shortly thereafter: Aoki

in October 1874 as Japan's Minister Plenipotentiary to Germany, and Katsura as the military attaché at the legation in Berlin in June 1875. During this period, the Kido faction was able to solidify its base by suppressing a samurai uprising in Saga and resolving the Taiwan issue with China through negotiations. En route to Germany, Aoki wrote to Kido that "even with a budget of eight million *yen*, without the establishment of a standing army of at least 25,000 men, the enactment of a constitution and the abolishment of stipends for the warrior class (*chitsuroku shobun*) will not be possible" (Kido Takayoshi Kankei Monjo Kenkyūkai 2005, vol. 1: 78).

The Japanese legation in Berlin requested permission for Katsura to study for a further two and a half years. He was assigned to learn about German military administration by observing the Staff Unit of the German Third Army (Tokutomi 1917, vol. 1: 353; Kido Takayoshi Kankei Monjo Kenkyūkai 2008, vol. 3: 65). The Staff Unit was tasked with executing the military orders of the central government and controlling military affairs in the regions. This experience equipped Katsura with an understanding of how the central and regional administrations functioned. One of the books Katsura read during his training was Lorenz von Stein's *Die Lehre vom Heerwesen als Theil der Staatswissenschaft* (The Teaching of Military Affairs as a Part of State Science, 1872), which he and Aoki studied together. This was among the earliest examples of the reception of Stein in Japanese politics.

Katsura's Ideas on the Army and Military

After taking up his position on August 25, 1875, Katsura wrote a lengthy letter to Kido in which he expressed his pleasure over the political changes that had taken place in April of that year, such as the introduction of a conference of regional representatives (Kido Takayoshi Kankei Monjo Kenkyūkai 2008, vol. 3: 63). Katsura then explained that the main objective of his studies was to find a way to ensure better a mutual understanding between the government and the army in Japan regarding the role of the two institutions. In another letter dated September 24, 1876, he reiterated that it would not be enough for him to study military affairs only:

Army and politics form two parts of the government. Thus, studying only the army is like looking at a body without arms and legs. Ignoring civilian politics and how civilian bodies and the military can effectively and harmoniously conduct political affairs will result in disorder ... Therefore, if civil (politics) and the military are separated, there will be disarray in politics, and administrative tasks and finances will be conducted inefficiently. (Kido Takayoshi Kankei Monjo Kenkyūkai 2008, vol. 3: 70)

The above indicates that Katsura stressed the mutual reliance of military and civilian politics, and the importance of an active role of the military in government. Katsura's close relationship with the Kido faction can be seen to have influenced Kido's visions of the future of the state and the idea of "Constitution Plus Conscription." This would have also lent support to the Kido faction's opposition to the views of Saigo, Itagaki, and Ōkubo.

Conclusion

It was not my intent to make a direct link to Katsura's activities in the early Meiji period to those of Taishō. Earlier research has positioned Katsura as the primary force behind the introduction of the independence of the Supreme Command of the Military (*tōsui ken no dokuritsu*) and the establishment of the General Staff (*sanbō honbu*) following the German model. However, the sources introduced in this chapter suggest that Katsura's studies in Germany can also be seen from a different perspective. In particular, it is clear from the above that the ideas of Katsura and Aoki evolved during their sojourns in Germany, leading to their combining the idea of a constitution with conscription and an emphasis on the mutual reliance of military and politics. Furthermore, it was due to the information provided by them that the constitutionalist-reformist Kido faction developed its design of the future of the state.

(translated by Sven Saaler)

References

- Banno Junji (1996): *Kindai Nihon no kokka kōsō*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Craig, Albert M. (1961): *Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hackett, Roger F. (1971): *Yamagata Aritomo in the Rise of Modern Japan, 1838–1922*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hara Keiichirō and Hayashi Shigeru (eds.) (2000): *Hara Kei nikki*. Tokyo: Fukumura Shuppan.
- Horiuchi Bunjirō et al. (eds.) (1905): *Rikugunshō enkaku shi*. Tokyo: Rikugunshō.
- Hōya Tōru et al. (eds.) (2006): *Nihon gunji shi*. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan.
- Inuzuka Takaaki (ed.) (2005): *Meiji kokka no seisaku to shisō*. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan.

- Kido Takayoshi Kankei Monjo Kenkyūkai (ed.) (2005): *Kido Takayoshi kankei monjo, dai-ikkan*. Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai.
- Kido Takayoshi Kankei Monjo Kenkyūkai (ed.) (2008): *Kido Takayoshi kankei monjo, dai-nikan*. Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai.
- Nihon Shiseki Kyōkai (ed.) (1967): *Kido Takayoshi nikki*. Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai.
- Nishikawa Makoto (2005): "Haihan chicken go no dajōkan sei kaikaku," in Toriumi Yasushi et al. (eds.), *Nihon rikken seiji no keisei to henshitsu*. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan.
- Ōshima Akiko (2001): "Haihan chicken go no heisei mondai to chindai hei," in Kurosawa Fumitaka et al. (eds.), *Kokusai kankyō no naka no kindai Nihon*. Tokyo: Fuyō Shobō.
- Ōshima Akiko (2008): "1873 nen no shibirian kontorōl," *Shigaku zasshi* 117/7, pp. 1219–52.
- Sakane Yoshihisa (ed.) (1970): *Aoki Shūzō den*. Tokyo: Heibonsha.
- Sakurai Yoshiki (1997): *Taishō seiji shi no shuppatsu*. Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha.
- Suetake Yoshiya (1998): *Taishō ki no seiji kōsō*. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan.
- Takahashi Hidenao (1992): "Haihan seifu ron," *Nihonshi kenkyū* 356, pp. 71–95.
- Tanaka Akira (2002): *Iwakura shisetsudan "Bei-ō kairan jikki"*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Tokutomi Iichirō (ed.) (1917): *Kōshaku Katsura Tarō den*. Tokyo: Ko-Katsura Kōshaku Kinen Jigyōkai.