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INDIAN MUTINY IN SINGAPORE (1915) AT A TURNING POINT OF ASIAN HISTORY

Sho Kuwajima

アジア史の転換期におけるインド兵の反乱 (1915)

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本稿は、第10回国際アジア歴史家会議（1986年10月27-31日、シンガポール）で報告するために準備されたものである。

シンガポールにおけるインド兵の反乱（1915）については、すでに本学報第69号（1985）に発表しており、その英文による要約をも兼ねている。ここでは、より広い歴史的視野のなかでとらえるための枠組をも示そうとした。

On February 15, 1915, Indian soldiers of the Fifth Light Infantry rose in revolt in Singapore. Though the Mutiny itself was suppressed by the British and their allied forces within a few days, it shook the foundation of British rule in Singapore. The Mutiny forced them to reconsider their strategy in this area of Asia. Also it caused unexpected but serious repercussions in a part of the Japanese public opinion.

So far, some research works have been written about the Mutiny in Singapore and Malaysia, starting from an unpublished but pioneering work by Mosbergen in the first half of 1950's. In India, a few studies in the movement of the Ghadar Party gave one chapter to Singapore Mutiny, and the writings on the Indian revolutionary movement spared a few pages to it. Harper and Miller's work recently published in Singapore, claims to be 'perhaps the first detailed account of the Mutiny.' But, in spite of the fact that we can now follow the detail of 'the impact of the outbreak on the relatively small British community on the island' through their lucid expression, the intention of this book was not to probe into the inner feelings of Indian soldiers who were forced to revolt. It also lacked in the analysis of the international situation surrounding the Mutiny. It seems that almost all works so far written on the Mutiny mainly depended on British official records, and so their views did not much depart from the framework

of logic prepared by the Court of Enquiry which submitted its report in May 1915.

(1) Causes of the Mutiny

In this paper it is not my purpose to trace in detail the process of the Indian Mutiny. Here, I just want to point out that anti-war feelings of the Indian officers and men and their aspiration for freedom were real causes of the Mutiny. In this connection the words of a mutineering soldier which Harper and Miller cited, are very suggestive.

“Why should we fight for England and be killed in Europe when we are paid half a coolie’s wage and our wives and children are left to starve on two or three rupees a month?”

On the other hand, the Court of Enquiry mentioned as the primary causes, ‘the very unsatisfactory state of discipline which had prevailed in the Fifth Light Infantry apparently for some time,’ and specially referred to the personal character and ability or inability of the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Edward Victor Martin. But it was outside the sphere of its enquiry to consider what the war meant to Indian officers and men.

During the First World War, people of Singapore sharply reacted to the economic impact of the war, but there was some sense of distance in their attitudes towards the ‘European War’. Since September 1914, the news of the appearance of a German cruiser, **The Emden** in unexpected places and at unexpected moments shocked comparatively calm atmosphere of Singapore, but people did not still have strong hostile feelings towards Germany. They even received Über Lieutenant Lauterbach of **The Emden** with ‘almost a hero’s welcome’ when he was brought to Singapore. It may be supposed that their sense of distance towards the war delicately affected the morale of the Indian officers and men who were stationed in Singapore. Furthermore, the entry of Turkey into the war against Britain in November 1914 made them conceive doubt about the latter’s war aim and definitely accelerated the reluctance of Indian Muslim soldiers of the Infantry to go to the war front.

It is still the work to be done in future to examine what kind of place Singapore had occupied in the movement of the Ghadar Party, an Indian revolutionary group which appeared in America in 1913, but it is needless to say that Indian residents and regiments in Singapore and Malaya attracted their attention. Since the beginning of the war, many Ghadarites passed through Singapore on their way to India for the purpose of the revolt in their homeland. Some activists made approaches to the Indian regiments in Singapore and Penang, calling out soldiers for revolt. The accumulative effects which the ships of Ghadarites made on the Indian soldiers and residents must have been pervasive.

Already, in December 1914, the Malay States Guides refused to serve in East Africa. Its Commander Lees judged that their refusal to go on service proceeded from fear and not from any seditious wish to embarrass the Government. When the first stage of their 'enthusiasm' towards the war had passed, Indian soldiers felt it difficult to find the persuasive reason for their participation in the war. This was nothing but the growth of anti-war feelings which took the form of 'fear'. Sir Arthur Young, Governor of Straits Settlements, commenting on the Report of the Court of Enquiry, had to admit that the action of the Malay States Guides in December 1914 had had a 'pernicious effect' upon the morale of the Fifth Light Infantry.

Nevertheless, there is paucity of materials to find out how Indian soldiers were thinking about the First World War though we can trace some pronouncements of so-called 'ring leaders' like Jamadar Chisti Khan. This sphere of study must be explored in future for the purpose of understanding what the war meant to the people of Asia who were not responsible to the causes of it.

(2) The Mutiny and the Japanese

Around 9.30 p.m. on February 15, 1915, the Japanese Consul in Singapore, Fujii got his information about the Mutiny from the British authorities and at 11.00 p.m. he had a telephone directly from the Governor, Sir Arthur Young who requested the Consul of the recruitment of Japanese Special Constables and also advised Mr. and Mrs. Fujii to take shelter with him. While the Consul went to the Governor's House for a further information, more than twenty leading Japanese got together in a room of the Consulate of Japan. One of them was a Military Attaché, Lieutenant Commander Araki. Finally, the Japanese community in Singapore decided to grant the British request for the Special Constables under the following conditions. In Japanese, Special Constables whom the British wanted, were named Giyū-tai, that is, Volunteer Corps.

1. Volunteer Corps will be under the command of a Japanese Reserved Army Officer.
2. Their duty will come to end when the Japanese warships have arrived at Singapore.
3. In case volunteers have been killed or wounded the same treatment will be given to them as to British volunteers.
4. Daily meals and other necessary expenses will be borne by the Government of Straits Settlements.

Also, it was confirmed that the duty of Japanese Volunteers would be limited to the defence of city areas and that they would not be sent to the front. 186 Volunteers were selected

as a result of the recruitments, and Yoshimasa Wada, a manager of the Nisshin Gomu (=Nisshin Rubber) and a reserved Lieutenant, assumed the post of a Commander. At the first stage of their operations, General Officer Commanding the Troops, Brigadier-General Dudley Howard Ridout proposed to send the Japanese Volunteers to the war front of Pasir Panjang to make up the weakness of British forces. This was not included in the agreement between both sides, and was withdrawn by the protest of Fujii. According to the later Report of the Consul Fujii, Japanese Volunteers guarded the city, and drove back the mutineers who attacked the General Hospital. They captured more than ten mutineers and were 'deeply thanked' by the people, especially, staffs and patients of the Hospital.

Meanwhile, at 11.30 p.m. on the 16 th, the Third Squadron of the Japanese Navy knew the request for its help by the Naval Commander-in-Chief Far East, Vice Admiral Jerram through telegram. It was dispatched by Araki via Ma-Kung (main base of the Squadron) in the Formosa Straits. The delay of its reply irritated Jerram. The Squadron sent two cruisers to Singapore. **The Otowa** reached Singapore at 6.00 p.m. on the 17 th and **The Tsushima** arrived at 11.11 a.m. on the 19 th. Another cruiser, **The Akashi** sailed for Hong Kong to meet the probable response of the Indian regiment there. **The Otowa's** land battle force co-operated with the British force in recovering the Alexandra Barracks from the Indian mutineers.

According to the Census taken in March 1911, the total of Japanese residents in Singapore Municipality was 1, 377, consisting of males 486 and females 891, an inverse man-woman ratio in comparison with that of Chinese and Indian communities. This may indicate that the city was a place for earning their living by Japanese women.

However, the situation changed after the beginning of the war. Takeshirō Nishimura, who had been practicing medicine in Beach Road since 1903, writes in his memoir that the European War was a heaven-gifted chance for the leap of Japan (or Japanese economy). The increase in the number of branches of Japanese firms was notable including the opening of a branch of Yokohama Shōkin Ginkō (now Bank of Tokyo) in September 1916. During the First World War the rush of Japanese firms proceeded on a larger scale than the 'common man' type of immigration. So, on the one hand, 're-establishment of public morality' among the Japanese residents became imminent even for the expansion of economic interests of Japan. The removal of Japanese brothels was logical results of her 'economic development' and in 1913, pinpu or parasitic men on these houses were removed out of Singapore.

The involvement of Japan in the Mutiny took place at this turning point of her history. Japanese society in Singapore was not yet united. But the Mutiny provided an unexpected but the best chance to foster their feelings of national unity and also to demonstrate it before

other communities in Singapore. This was in line with the demands of the growing Japanese economy.

The Consulate of Japan and the leading circle of Japanese residents agreed to accept the request of Britain under the condition of the Third Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1911). However, the Consul Fujii and the Commanding Officer of the Third Squadron Mitsukane Tsuchiya hesitated to co-operate with the British on a full scale as they thought they had to face Indian mutineers against whom there was no reason for Japan to fight.

The Consul ordered Volunteers in secret through the Commander Wada that they should not kill or wound mutineers unnecessarily but capture them alive.

This hesitation was stronger in case of the Japanese Navy which considered the international complication of her involvement.

Kōji Tsukuda, a Japanese journalist who was working in Singapore at that time, writes that Rear-Admiral Tsuchiya was asked to land immediately after he arrived at the port, but he declined to do so. According to Tsukuda, the reason for his refusal was this:

“A signatory of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance should not intervene in the internal affairs of the other country. Once, when the indigenous people of Taiwan mutineered against Japan, a certain British ship anchored at Chilung refused to help Japan, didn't it? If Japanese residents are in danger in Singapore, it is another matter. In that case we must make every effort to rescue them. Otherwise, we should not interfere in the Mutiny of the Indian soldiers who are subjects of the British Empire. If Britain wants our help by all means, we should also attach collateral conditions.”

Tsukuda says that Tsuchiya approved Britain's requirement as a result of the Governor's earnest request. He could not conclude that this story was true, but believed that it actually happened.

We can not conclude that it actually happened. Also it must be kept in mind that the Commanding ship, **The Tsushima** reached the port later than **The Otowa**. However, at least, we may say that there was some kind of hesitation on the side of the Japanese Navy in intervening in the 'internal affairs' of Britain. There was military 'realism' in their response unlike the prompt reaction of the Japanese residents though this 'realism' was closely connected with the defence of her colonial interests.

The Report of the Consul Fujii tells us another cautious attitude of Tsuchiya.

“The Commanding Officer Tsuchiya gave a special advice and a secret order to his land battle forces, saying that, as we have no enmity towards Indian soldiers, we should not kill or wound them intentionally but advise their surrender. Fortunately, the men were neither

killed nor wounded on both sides, and about twenty mutineers surrendered to our forces without any anxiety. But we are told that, when they were handed over to British soldiers, all of them were unexpectedly shocked and had a hatred for the British.”

So far, Indian nationalists had been encouraged by the victory of Japan, an Asian ‘small power’ over Russia, a European ‘big power’ in the war of 1904-05. In those days most of them could not grasp correctly the nature of the Russo-Japanese War that was fought on the land of China and at the sacrifice of Korea. On the other hand, the second Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1905 which was the product of the War, enlarged its area of application. While Britain recognized Japan’s ‘special interests’ in Korea, the former expected Japan’s commitment to British rule in India. The effect of this revision soon appeared. The Japanese police watched the political activities of Indian nationalists who came to Japan with some expectation. In spite of these tendencies, the longing for Japanese ‘nationalism’ remained for some time because of the shock which the Russo-Japanese War gave to the world. These feelings may have infiltrated even in the minds of the Indian soldiers who revolted in Singapore. But their ‘unexpected’ reaction on the occasion of being handed over to the British by the Japanese force, meant the collapse of the ‘trust’ in Japanese ‘nationalism’ which Indian nationalists had been conceiving since 1905.

(3) The Mutiny and Public Opinion in Japan

Generally speaking, in Japan, there were two different, but mutually related response towards the Mutiny.

One view laid positive stress of Japan’s part in the suppression of the Mutiny in order to raise or rebuild the status of Japan under the existing Anglo-Japanese friction in connection with her interests in China after her occupation of Tsintao.

For instance, soon after the Mutiny, **The Yamato Shimbun** observed that, if the Japanese military strength was below today’s level, peace in the East could not be safely kept, and reminded its readers of the experiences in Singapore.

Shigenobu Okuma, who was Prime Minister from April 1914 to October 1916, and also President of the Indo-Japanese Association, belonged to this group.

The second view represents critical and reflective attitudes which feared that Japan’s involvement in the suppression of the Mutiny was nothing but her unnecessary interference in the internal affairs of Britain and that it obstructed the growth of the Indian national movement. Later this reflective mood was promoted by the protest of Indian revolutionaries in

Japan against the deportation order of the Japanese Government to two Indians, Rash Bihari Bose and H. L. Gupta in November 1915. But, this standpoint shared the same view concerning the Anglo-Japanes relations in China.

Shūmei Ohkawa, an influential rightist ideologue, thought that the Indian regiment in Singapore swiftly responded to the appeal of a Revolutionary Party for the freedom of India. He further wrote that Indian people were so far convinced that there was no other way for them than to depend on the support of Japan 'to develop Indian civilisation and to revive the glory of her past,' and they never imagined that Japan would obstruct Indian struggle for freedom. Therefore, mutineers were astonished and disappointed at the appearance of 'the most unexpected strong enemy.'

Apart from his own interpretation of Indian nationalism-though it is also worthwhile to be examined-, he criticized the role of Japanese volunteers and bluejackets in quelling the Mutiny. To that extent, Singapore Mutiny provided to Japanese political leaders and public opinion a precious chance to reconsider their attitudes towards Asian people, and from 1915 to 1916 there were some opinion leaders who could observe her involvement in the suppression of the Indian Mutiny with their critical eyes in spite of their limited scope. In a sense, the revolt of the Indian officers and men of the Fifth Light Infantry was one of crucial factors that moved many Japanese to safeguard two Indian revolutionaries from the execution of the deportation order of the Japanese Government in November 1915.

However, even this reconsideration of Japanese policy towards Britain and India did not lead smoothly to the change of their attitudes towards East Asia and South East Asia. Those opinion leaders who criticized Japan's involvement in the Indian Mutiny, could not realize that the Mutiny occurred in the atmosphere of the growth of anti-Japanese feelings among the Chinese community in South East Asia. The 'sympathy' towards Indian nationalism and the justification of Japanese colonial interests in East Asia, and later, in South East Asia could co-exist in the minds of both political and opinion leaders of Japan.

(4) Anti-Japanese Boycott Movement in Singapore

It is known that the anti-Japanese boycott movement of 1915 was not a mass nationalist movement, but was mainly directed by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce.

Also, Singapore was under the Martial Law during the period of anti-Japanese movement which protested against Japan's 21 Point Demands to China. Therefore, the Japanese community in Singapore was not fatally affected despite its furious atmosphere of protest.

The movement of protest against Japanese policy towards China had already started before the Mutiny, proceeded in parallel with it, and reached the peak a few months after the end of the Mutiny. Japan's demands to China in the form of 21 Points were handed over on January 18, 1915 and Yuan Shih Kai Government gave its assent to her on May 9.

Tsukuda, a Japanese journalist in Singapore, referred to the connection between the Mutiny and the anti-Japanese boycott movement on the side of the suppressors:

“Voluntary efforts of the Japanese were remunerated soon. In May 1915, anti-Japanese movement of the Chinese caused by Sino-Japanese negotiations took a furious character in Nanyo (=Nanyang) too. In Nanyo, a land of paradise for the business of Chinese people, Japanese cannot stand it if they face a gigantic resistance from the former. Particularly, it was in the days when the condition of the Japanese community was not so flourishing as today, and so, some of them fell into difficulties in their daily living in the country part of the Peninsular. Japanese Imperial authorities came into contact with the Governor's House in connection with urgent steps to be taken. The latter immediately issued a strict order to all local officers even in the remote area. Indian policemen protected the life and property of the Japanese at the point of the bayonets under the direction of British inspectors. Soon the movement withered. I was choked with tears, observing this situation. The British took a strong action to save our Japanese just as we organized our Volunteer Corps from among our residents and saved British people from their difficulties with our arms. This is manifestation of the deepest goodwill and sympathy. Ah! One good turn deserves another. Sympathy is a virtue that will be amply rewarded.”

The Martial Law which was successful in quelling the Mutiny, was also effective in controlling the growth of anti-Japanese boycott movement in 1915.

The **Straits Times** dated March 17, 1915 started its editorial with following two sentences:

“We are all under martial law at present. Any man may be taken before a court martial, tried, and ordered to be shot.”

The regime of Martial Law was directed towards the whole of Asian communities in Singapore.

In answer to the request of the Japanese Consul Fujii, the Government of Straits Settlements called editors of every newspaper and ordered them not to carry any article or editorial on anti-Japanese boycott, while exercising strict control over meetings and so on with the help of the police and army. Fujii reported to Tokyo:

“After that, on the 15 th (March), British authorities here are supposed to have warned

every newspaper press not to carry any sort of article or editorial, even in the form of an editorial which is just defensive or issues warnings, in connection with imminent problems between Japan and China, so that the general public of Chinese may completely forget them.....”

However, the Governor's House was not the only office with which the Japanese Consul came into contact.

The Consul General of China in Singapore, after receiving an order from the Chinese Government, published in Chinese newspapers a notification dated March 12, 1915 addressed to the Chinese community. It appealed to them to act unitedly to meet this crisis and not to resort to useless conduct in excitement. They were asked to observe the law in Singapore.

After a while, the Japanese Consul Fujii who confirmed the usefulness of the notification, negotiated with the Consul General, Hu Wei-hsien and printed five thousand copies of it at the expense of the latter, and took measures to distribute them among the Chinese who were connected with Japanese merchants with the co-operation of a branch of Mitsui.

It may be concluded here that these careful worked-out measures of the Japanese Government were decisive in preventing anti-Japanese feelings from coming to the surface on a mass scale. And, this aspect of the situation in Singapore of 1915 was outside the scope of Japanese opinion leaders who were critical of Japan's involvement in the Indian Mutiny.

Conclusion

It is generally agreed that Indian mutineers in Singapore had not definite programmes and objectives of the revolt prepared by their revolutionary leadership. They expressed their naive feelings of anti-war in the form of the Mutiny on the day before they were going to be sent to Hong Kong.

Their approach to German prisoners of war, and not to Asian communities in Singapore narrowed the scope of the success of the Mutiny. Ghadar Party had had in their original idea the thought of solidarity of the enslaved nations.

Indian Mutiny and anti-Japanese boycott movement do not seem to have produced direct consonance each other, but it can not be denied that the Mutiny opened the way to protest against the existing political, economic and military order of Singapore. It also had serious impact in Japan on the movement to safeguard two Indian revolutionaries in the end of 1915. This is a noteworthy aspect of international repercussions caused by the Mutiny.

On the other hand, there was international co-operation among British, French, Russian

and Japanese forces in the suppression of the Mutiny. This may be compared with Boxers' Rebellion in China quelled by allied forces of eight countries including Japan in the beginning of the twentieth century. In this sense, the suppression of the Mutiny was an important step for Japan to her rule in South East Asia in later years.

During the First World War, Japanese community in Singapore was in the process of reorganization because of the rush of many commercial firms, but it was not yet united. The Mutiny provided it the best chance to develop their feelings of unity and to demonstrate them before other Asian communities. Simultaneously they had to face anti-Japanese boycott by the Chinese, and in this aspect depended on the support of Britain despite the difference of their opinions concerning their colonial interests in China.

Japan showed some 'sympathy' towards Indian nationalism which made the Japanese Government and Navy to hesitate to co-operate with the British on a full scale, but she devised forceful measures to contain anti-Japanese boycott movement among the Chinese in Singapore. This basic policy of Japan was applied more intensively in Singapore during the Second World War.

There were some political or opinion leaders in Japan who could criticize Japan's involvement in the Mutiny, but they failed to understand the structural connection between the Indian Mutiny and the anti-Japanese boycott movement. In 1915, there were an abortive 'Ghadar' Mutiny of Lahore in South Asia, Indian Mutiny in Singapore, anti-Japanese boycott movement in East Asia and South East Asia, and the movement to save two Indian revolutionaries in Japan. Singapore Mutiny was not an isolated incident.

Tanzan Ishibashi, a leading journalist up to the Second World War and later Prime Minister of Japan for two months from 1956 to 1957, was one of a few writers who were critical of Japan's expansionist policy in China. In his editorial, 'We should never occupy Tsintao' in *The Toyo Keizai Shimpo* (The Oriental Economist) in November 1914, he feared that the occupation would only incur the increase of military burden on the Japanese people, boycott by the Chinese and the doubt of European powers.

Later, this journalist wrote in his editorial of the same journal dated June 25, 1915, placing special stress on the necessity of the independent spirit of the Japanese:

"It is all right that we should become guards of the East, but Japan must be a guard of the East for her own interests, not for British interests. This resolution of mind is most indispensable for us."

It is not clear whether the editor had in his mind Singapore Mutiny or not. Japan was 'a guard of the East for her own interests' too in Singapore of 1915. However, she began to pur-

sue her 'independent' policy in the sense that Ishibashi perhaps did not expect.

P.S. This is a paper to be read at the 10 th Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia (Singapore, 27-31 October 1986).

For the reference of this paper,

- cf. 1. Sho Kuwajima, "The First World War and Asia - Indian Mutiny in Singapore, 1915"
(in Japanese), *Journal of Osaka University of Foreign Studies*, No. 69, 1985.
2. Its enlarged English manuscript under the same title, unpublished.