Many people in the West associate the Imperial Japanese Army with blind obedience to authority. Notorious for following superiors to certain death, Japanese soldiers in the Pacific War evoked among their enemies unsavory images such as “cattle”, “herd” or “beehive.” And yet, the imperial Japanese army was arguably one of the most disobedient armed forces in modern history. Japanese officers repeatedly staged coup d’êats, violent insurrections and political assassinations, phenomena which peaked in the 1870s and in the 1930s. Between these two periods, other officers incessantly resisted orders given by both government and high command. In the lecture, we shall examine the many faces of Japanese military disobedience and its dynamics, feeding from basic structural flaws in the modern Japanese polity. Finally, we shall discuss whether military disobedience, in its multiple forms, helped to drive Japan into the Second-Sino Japanese War and the Pacific War.

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