

## Food supply problem in Leyte, Philippines, during the Japanese Occupation (1942–44)

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*This article analyses the problem of food supply in Leyte, Philippines, during the Japanese occupation, which has not been studied in depth so far. It focuses on the interaction that took place among the Japanese occupying forces, anti-Japanese guerrilla groups, the Filipino collaborators, and the local residents over the procurement of foodstuffs. It also aims at clarifying the factors contributing to the disruption of the policy formulated by the Japanese and the Filipinos on the island. It is apparent in this study that the political and social characteristics in the province as well as the agricultural depression inherited from the American colonisation period brought about an outcome, which was different from the policy implemented in Manila.*

This paper discusses how the Japanese military forces and the local Filipino government in Leyte, Philippines, implemented a food procurement policy during the Japanese occupation of the Philippine Islands during the Second World War. It aims to highlight the problems, the contributing factors and dynamics between the Japanese occupying forces, and the Filipino government officials and organisations of Leyte that led to the failure of the policy. It thus provides a rare opportunity to examine and clarify the situation during the Japanese occupation in provincial areas that have not been widely studied before.

To analyse the real situation in the outlying provinces, an extensive study, with on-location interviews and archival research, has been conducted to sample and document the first-hand experiences of the people involved, who are still alive to share their stories about how the policy had affected them personally and why the policy failed in provincial areas. A thorough analysis of the situation in Leyte offers insights into the experiences of both sides, the Japanese as well as Filipino. Moreover, this paper is compiled from very rare and limited sources available only in Japan and the Philippines. It is also supplemented with relevant personal interviews in these

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countries. Therefore, the evolution of the food procurement policy in the provincial area can be traced to examine the extent of success and how it was finally disrupted.

As shown in Japanese military documents, the procurement of food supplies for the Japanese forces in the occupied local areas during the Second World War was officially carried out according to one of its formal principles of occupation: a controlled economy. This mandated that the food supply for the Japanese occupying forces would be based on a self-subsistence system and would be established only in the occupied areas.<sup>1</sup> The pursuit of this policy to the letter was quite cruel to the local residents. As some literary works have pointed out in the past, the Japanese authorities were able to procure food supplies informally by means of pillaging from the local population.<sup>2</sup>

Recent detailed studies reveal that the problem of food procurement already existed even during American colonisation before the war.<sup>3</sup> Similar studies conducted by Ricardo T. Jose, a Filipino historian, corroborated this fact and showed an institutional problem affecting the establishment of the Japanese military administration and the Filipino government with regards to the procurement of food supplies during the occupation. Jose's research shows that this policy was implemented in partnership with the Filipino government by means of a controlled economy. Jose's work further clarifies how the Japanese authorities and the Filipino government dealt with the situation of food shortages and how these efforts ended in failure.<sup>4</sup> However, his analysis focused only on the situation in Manila or the outskirts of the city, but the situation there did not relate to that in the provincial areas.

The logistics policy for the procurement of food supplies for the Japanese military forces in the occupied regions was formulated in Tokyo as part of the occupation strategy. It was designed to alleviate any logistical delays, interruptions and hardships that resulted from the ongoing Allied interdiction on the Japanese merchant shipping resupplying the occupying forces in the vast expanse of the Pacific and Southeast Asia. The interdiction meant transport having to traverse vast distances to deliver regular food supplies from the Japanese homeland to the occupying forces. Moreover, it was designed to supplement the government-provided food supplies rather than replace them.

From the beginning, this policy was applied equally to all occupied areas regardless of any regional differences. The evolution of this food procurement policy in each occupied area varied according to the local economic and social structures as well as the local political situations. Therefore, in essence, what worked in Manila might not

1 'Nanpo Senryochi Gyousei Jisshi Yoryo' [Outline for implementation of administrative policy in southern occupied area], 20 Nov. 1941, in *Shiryoshu Nanpo no Gunsei* [Documents of military administration in southern area] (Tokyo: Asagumo Shimbunsha, 1985), pp. 91–3.

2 See Shohei Ooka, *Leyte Senki* [War Record in Leyte] vol. 3 (Tokyo: Chuokoron Bunko, 1996), 17<sup>th</sup> edition, p. 297. Also, chapter 11, 'Of rice and papaya leaves' in *The fateful years: Japan's adventure in the Philippines, 1941–45*, Teodoro Agoncillo, 2 vols. (Quezon City: R. P. Garcia Publishing Company, 1965): 513–91.

3 *Food supplies and the Japanese occupation in South-East Asia*, ed. Paul H. Kratoska (London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1998).

4 Ricardo T. Jose, 'Food production and food distribution programmes in the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation,' in *ibid.*, pp. 67–100.

necessarily have worked in the other areas. This paper seeks to address two questions: How did the measurement of the food procurement policy evolve in the provincial areas that are quite distant from Manila? How effective was the controlled economy that the Japanese authorities adopted?

### **Case study: Leyte Island**

For the purpose of this paper, the example shown here is the implementation of the policy in Leyte, an island in the Visayas region of the Philippines. This island is historic in a sense that it was here that the Allied Forces, led by the American General, Douglas MacArthur, invaded the Philippines on 20 October 1944 to regain control of this former colony and Commonwealth of the Philippines. Being located at the centre of the Philippine archipelago, Leyte Island was a vital logistics location for both the Allied and Japanese military forces.

There have been some academic research and literary works produced on the Japanese occupation of Leyte Island. Elmer Lear, an American historian, undertook one such work. He laid emphasis on the social and economic aspects of the occupation that affected the ordinary lives of the local residents. Much of the research on the period was based on a political viewpoint, particularly that of Manila. These works also made some analyses of the guerrilla movement on the island in the period, and of the political and economic situation after the war. In Lear's publications, the situation regarding food supplies and the food procurement policy of the Japanese forces are fragmentarily mentioned in the context of the guerrillas.<sup>5</sup>

As the characteristics of the food procurement policy of the Japanese forces and the Leyte local government have not been adequately studied before in the earlier work of Lear, it shall be thoroughly examined here. Moreover, it is important to note that on Leyte Island, at any given point of time, there were three major groups competing for the meagre food supplies that the island's population could produce: the local residents, the Japanese occupying forces and the United States Armed Forces of the Far East (USAFFE) guerrilla forces. Among the three groups, the local people led by the town leader, particularly the local mayor, were disadvantaged in the sense that they did not possess the military firepower that the other groups commanded. Thus, they were at the mercy of whoever had the guns.

### **Controlled economy in Leyte**

In January 1942, when the Japanese troops invaded Manila, the province of Leyte was still under the control of the Commonwealth government led by President Manuel

5 Elmer Lear, *The Japanese Occupation in the Philippines, Leyte: 1941–45* (Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program, Department of Far Eastern Studies, Cornell University, 1961), p. 8; 'Collaboration, resistance, and liberation: A study of society and education in Leyte, Philippines, under Japanese Occupation' (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1951), pp. 70–105; 'Agriculture and food during Leyte's liberation,' *Leyte-Samar Studies*, 12, 2 (1978): 332–40; 'Education in liberated Leyte,' *Leyte-Samar Studies*, 12, 2 (1978): 1–9; 'Leyte's civilians in a time of transition,' *Leyte-Samar Studies*, 13, 1 (1979): 57–61; 'Leyte's collaborationists: Their fate,' *Leyte-Samar Studies*, 13, 2 (1979): 154–68; 'Property control in a guerrilla-dominated community,' *Indian Sociological Bulletin*, 7, 2 (1970): 113–23; 'The western Leyte guerrilla warfare forces: A case study in the non-legitimation of a guerrilla organization,' *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 9, 1 (1968): 69–94.

L. Quezon. The rice storage capacity of Leyte during the Japanese occupation was not sufficient for the needs of both the Japanese occupying forces and the Filipino civilians. Therefore, a comprehensive food production plan had to be formulated as soon as possible. The 14<sup>th</sup> Army, the operational Japanese army in the Philippines, drafted measures for the establishment of military logistics in the occupied areas. As noted earlier, the most important purpose in implementing the policy was to obtain military commodities and goods for waging war, and to establish a self-subsistence system in the logistics for the military forces.<sup>6</sup> Hence, the policy reflected a preference towards Japanese authorities such that they could control their own procurement, which meant that the food supplies were not for the Filipinos but for the occupying Japanese forces alone.

The Japanese military authorities and the Philippine Executive Commission (PEC) drafted a plan to increase the food production and to control prices of daily commodities and foods for a proper distribution. The 14<sup>th</sup> Army tried to establish a sound system of logistics and to search for cultivated farms and supply routes for their food supplies. Ideally, with these measures implemented by the Japanese military and supported by the Philippine government, the controlled economy should have flourished.<sup>7</sup>

However, it is important to note that a controlled economy could have functioned well if the occupied areas were fully under the control of the Japanese forces. The situation in Leyte during that time was not quite so simple because the Japanese military was not in total control of security, resulting in difficulty to procure enough food supplies for both the regular troops and the local residents. Three other major factors that contributed to the difficulty in implementing a controlled economy are considered below.

#### *Agricultural failure*

Although the island of Leyte normally has an annual average rainfall of more than 2.54 inches,<sup>8</sup> the agricultural situation in Leyte had been quite poor since the American colonisation before the war. According to the agricultural statistics of 1938, published before the Japanese invasion of the Philippines, the proportion of cultivated land in the whole area of highlands and lowlands in the province was less than 30 per cent compared to that in Luzon Island (70 to 80 per cent) and Panay Island (60 to 79 per cent), also within the Visayan Islands group. Furthermore, the statistics of agricultural crops in Leyte of the same year show that rice production in relation to the amount of overall agricultural crops was only 25 per cent as opposed to more than 90 per cent in Nueva Ecija and Bulacan, provinces in Central Luzon.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Government-sponsored distribution administration*

Even before the war started, there were government-sponsored distribution and administration organisations to handle rice production and distribution issues. The

6 'Outline for implementation of administrative policy in southern occupied area.'

7 Jose, 'Food production and food distribution programmes', pp. 69–71.

8 Francisco S. Tantuico, Jr., *Leyte: The historic islands* (Tacloban city: The Leyte publishing corporation, 1964), p. 16.

9 Commission of the Census, *Census of the Philippines: 1939* (Bureau of Printing: Manila, 1940), pp. 1022 and 1026.

National Rice and Corn Corporation (NARIC) was created by the pre-war Commonwealth Philippine President Manuel L. Quezon for the purpose of nationalising the rice industry by guaranteeing profits to farmers and setting prices that would be reasonable for consumers.<sup>10</sup> To centralise control of rice procurement and distribution, and to make sure the Japanese army got its share of rice, the 14<sup>th</sup> Army headquartered in Manila placed NARIC under direct army management, and gave it responsibility for all transactions involving rice, including milling, buying and selling, transportation, storage and distribution.<sup>11</sup> In Leyte, however, NARIC was meaningless and ineffective.

The failure of NARIC was aptly documented by casual military observers. Lieutenant Himeno, a Japanese military officer assigned to the Tacloban branch of the Japanese Military Administration of Visayas, noted in his diary in October 1942, 'NARIC in the province here does not function completely because the residents here distrust the organisation. The reason for their distrust is that NARIC has no money'. Himeno also pointed out: 'I really regret that NARIC is not able to function well. As this is lack of enough budget, we cannot do anything to deal with the problem'.<sup>12</sup> As he mentioned in his diary, the food supplies procurement and distribution based on the controlled economy mainly conducted in Manila by the 14<sup>th</sup> Army, could not be fully implemented in Leyte.

Furthermore, the Neighbourhood Association (NA or *tonarigumi* in Japanese) was not effective in Leyte. This administrative organisation was created in September 1942<sup>13</sup> by Executive Order No. 77 of PEC for control over the people and for rationing and distributing food and prime commodities. Supporting the procurement activities of NARIC, NA was supposed to play a key role in implementing rice distribution among the Filipinos in Leyte. However, NA in the island was unable to create a sound system of jurisdiction in each municipality that most residents could understand<sup>14</sup> until the landing of the US forces in October 1944. As correspondence by the President of NA in the municipality of Kawayan in February 1944 shows, the food distribution carried out by NA's system subjected the residents to severe hunger.<sup>15</sup>

10 Jose, 'Food production and food distribution programmes', p. 68.

11 Mutsuo Sumeragi, 'Firipin no Nihon Gunsei' [Japanese military administration in the Philippines] in *Shuroku Luzon* [Documents about Luzon], ed. Yoshinori Sato, 53 (1991): 73; Jose, 'Food production and food distribution programmes', p. 72.

12 *Hito Gunsei Kanbu Visaya shibu Tacloban Shutchojo Jinchu Nisshi* [Military diary of Tacloban office of Visayas branch of military administration in the Philippines], 16 Oct. 1942, call number 492 in the library of the National Institute for Defence Studies (NIDS), Tokyo.

13 *Leyte Shimbun*, 26 Sept. 1942.

14 Satoshi's interview on 2 June 1995 with Paulo Ballermo, a local resident in Tabango, Leyte. Paulo still remembers the Japanese word, *tonarigumi*, from the Japanese occupation. He said he thought the system would extend plenty of food to the people but Paulo did not understand the function of the organisation at that time.

15 Francisco T. Victorioso (President of NA in Kawayan) to the Provincial Governor of Leyte, 7 Feb. 1944, in the criminal proceedings against Pastor Salazar (People's Court Records, hereafter PCR), Archives section, Main Library at the University of the Philippines.

### Security and instability

Ubiquitous anti-Japanese guerrilla groups hindered the consolidation of a controlled economy in Leyte by the Japanese military authorities. Immediately after the fall of Corregidor Island, the guerrilla units in Leyte organised themselves under the command of United States Air Forces Far East (USAFFE). These units were composed mostly of elements of regular USAFFE and newly recruited local civilian residents. They initially did not follow the surrender order declared by General Sharp in the Visayas in May 1942. However, upon the end of the Battle of Corregidor Island, with the order of surrender by General Wainwright, they instigated the beginning of anti-Japanese guerrilla activities in the province.<sup>16</sup> By the time the Japanese had invaded and occupied Leyte in May 1942, almost 90 per cent of Leyte was under guerrilla control.

Mainly based in the mountainous areas, they harassed and frequently attacked the Japanese garrisons in the lowlands. Their attacks against the Japanese had been fierce since October 1943, when many Japanese detachments of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division were concentrated in Leyte. Anti-Japanese guerrilla activities, especially during the harvest season in the island, became frequent, leading to the belief that the attacks were associated with the guerrillas' food procurement efforts for themselves. These events are well-documented in Japanese military records, as illustrated in the accompanying table, which shows that the number of battles and skirmishes between the Japanese troops and anti-Japanese guerrilla forces were quite numerous especially in January, February, March and April. This competition between the Japanese military and the guerrilla groups for access to the harvested rice and staple corn crops made the security situation untenable and affected the life of the local residents as well as the Japanese forces.

Making the situation worse for the Japanese forces, the guerrilla groups created their own characteristic societies in which 'emergency notes' (emergency monetary currency authorised by President Quezon right after the attack on 7 December as legal tender for the general populace and guerrilla use) were printed and circulated and their special economic subsistence systems were established to procure food supplies and to distribute them among their members.<sup>17</sup> This created an economic power in favour of the guerrillas that gave rise to a market demand for supplies including rice and corn in exchange for the emergency notes. Some municipal mayors, collaborating with the Japanese, took part in such food circulation systems mostly for their own survival. Some of them were caught between collaborating with the Japanese forces and cooperating with the guerrilla leaders, thus seemingly serving two masters. According to Catalino Hermosilla, as related by his son, Jose Hermosilla, it was 'like walking a tight rope – you die if you fall off either side of the rope'. The Filipino government officials in Ormoc had the difficult task of keeping the peace by preventing the occupying forces from molesting and/or harming the civilian populace, and saving lives, while at the same time assisting the local guerrilla movements, which were

16 Walter F. Bell, *The Philippines in World War II, 1941–1945: A chronology and select annotated bibliography of books and articles in English* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 26.

17 See the overall discussion by Lear in part 2 of chapter 3, 'The resistance movement in Leyte' in Lear, *The Japanese Occupation in the Philippines*, pp. 111–69.

**Table: Worsening situation of peace and order in Leyte, 1943–44**

| Number of guerilla encounters and disciplinary actions against guerilla groups |                      |        |
|--|----------------------|--------|
| Time Period  | Nature               | Number |
| Apr. 1943 (the first half)   | Guerilla encounters  | 5      |
|  | Disciplinary actions | 13     |
| Apr. 1943 (the second half)  | Guerilla encounters  | 4      |
|  | Disciplinary actions | 18     |
| Jan. 1944 (the whole year)   | Guerilla encounters  | 45     |
|  | Disciplinary actions | 470    |
| Feb. 1944 (the whole year)   | Guerilla encounters  | 93     |
|  | Disciplinary actions | 571    |
| Mar. 1944 (the whole year)   | Guerilla encounters  | 18     |
|  | Disciplinary actions | 114    |
| Apr. 1944 (the whole year)   | Guerilla encounters  | 68     |
|  | Disciplinary actions | 226    |
| Aug. 1944 (the first half)   | Guerilla encounters  | 10     |
| Aug. 1944 (the second half)  | Guerilla encounters  | 14     |
| Sept. 1944 (the first half)  | Guerilla encounters  | 16     |
| Sept. 1944 (the second half)   | Guerilla encounters  | 47     |

*Source:* The data in 1943 is derived from 'Keibi Junpo 16-go' [Garrison Report No. 16] in *Dokuritsu Shubi Hohei Dai-36 Daitai Jinchu Nisshi* [War diary of 36<sup>th</sup> Independent Infantry Garrison Battalion]. The data in 1944 was derived from each military report filed in *Dai Juroku Shidan Joho Kiroku Tsuzuri* [Intelligence Reports for the 16<sup>th</sup> Division].

actively operating in the area.<sup>18</sup> These factors prevented the Japanese authorities from fully implementing the controlled economy in the island.

### **Situation of self-subsistence and food production campaign of the Nagano detachment**

As part of the occupying forces, some Japanese military detachments were stationed in Leyte to function both as a security force and to oversee the procurement of food supplies for the military forces. These were the Nagano detachment and the Omori unit. Each had only a couple of battalions (between 300–1,000 soldiers in a battalion, a grand total of 600–2,000 soldiers overall) primarily to garrison Leyte Island (land area of 7,214 square kilometres of rugged mountainous terrain and thick jungles) as well as oversee the food procurement measures. That amounted to a total of 3.67 square kilometres assigned to each soldier. Just from their minimal numbers alone, it can be seen how difficult it was for the Japanese military units to perform the assigned duties. Each Japanese unit, however, had a different experience in the implementation of the food procurement policy for the occupying forces.

18 Personal narrative of Jose L. Hermosilla through e-mail from his nephew, Mario Y. Hermosilla to Satoshi (6 May 2006). Mario is the grandson of the wartime Mayor of Ormoc, Leyte, Catalino Hermosilla.

The Nagano Detachment (mainly composed of hardened veterans of the Luzon invasion a couple of months earlier and mainly drawn from the 62<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment of the Japanese Army) arrived in Leyte in May 1942<sup>19</sup> and stayed on station until October 1942. With their hands full performing military operations against the guerrilla movement, their foodstuff procurement efforts took a back seat and became a secondary mission. The constant attacks mounted by the guerrilla forces made security their prime mission. The task of thoroughly implementing the controlled economy for their procurement of foods was deemed by the Japanese forces as not so urgent.

The Nagano detachment in Tacloban was able to obtain enough rice, corn and money from the Chinese community collaborating with the Japanese. The Japanese authorities in Tacloban maintained a good relationship with the prestigious local Chinese business persons and *hacenderos*, or local prominent landlords.<sup>20</sup> Local Chinese contributed a lot of money<sup>21</sup> and *hacenderos* gave plenty of rice and corn to the Japanese military authorities in Leyte.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, the Nagano Detachment relinquished the task of administering the controlled economy in the island to the Filipino provincial government in Tacloban.<sup>23</sup>

In the early part of the Japanese occupation in Leyte in 1942, the Nagano Detachment forces carried out an Ormoc cultivation plan under the supervision of the local Japanese Military Administration of Cebu. It designed a large-scale food production programme in which the Ormoc Sugar Refinery Company, set up by Daido Trading Company in Tacloban, played a main role. It produced refined sugar and alcohol in the factory. However, several factors led to the shutdown of the sugar refinery. Ammonium sulphate, necessary for processing refined sugar, was scarce. Additionally, the decreasing population in Ormoc led to the decline of labour forces in the town. Finally, the constant guerrilla attacks made the security situation unpredictable and brought about the closure of the sugar factory in September 1942. The closure of the factory in Ormoc created unemployment causing deterioration in law and order in the town.<sup>24</sup>

Nationally, PEC and the 14<sup>th</sup> Army in Manila took various measures to effectively enforce the policy of the controlled economy. However, the Japanese occupying forces and the Filipino government in Leyte took only a few and limited steps to solve the

19 The invasion of Japanese Army to Leyte was carried out based on the 14<sup>th</sup> Army's strategy, so-called 'The second phase operations plan in Visayas and Mindanao'. The Nagano detachment consisted of components from the 62<sup>nd</sup> Army Infantry Regiment, 21<sup>st</sup> Engineer Regiment, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion in the 51<sup>st</sup> Artillery Infantry. The landing point of Nagano detachment was Capooacan, located at northern part of Leyte Island. This detachment garrisoned Leyte Island until it was taken over by the Omori unit in October 1943. See *Hito Koryaku Sakusen* [Philippine conquest operation] (Tokyo: Asagumo Shimbunsha, 1966), p. 544. The author tried without success to determine the full name of the commander of the detachment.

20 Lear, *The Japanese Occupation*, p. 116.

21 Antonio S. Tan, *The Chinese in the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation: 1942–45* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1981), p. 55.

22 *Hito Gunsei Kanbu Visaya shibu Tacloban Shuchojo Jinchu Nisshi*, 11 Oct. 1942.

23 Shohei Ooka, *Leyte Senki* [War record in Leyte] vol. 1, pp. 34–5.

24 *Gunsei Kanbu Visaya shibu Tacloban Shuchojo Jinchu Nisshi*.



problem of implementing it, even though the black market was rampant and the prices of commodities were increasing.<sup>25</sup>

In October 1942, Lieutenant Himeno from the Tacloban office of the Japanese Military Administration in Visayas wrote in his diary about the organisation of food control system in Leyte, lamenting:

The most ideal way to organise such a system is that the provincial government creates something like a production cooperative in collaboration with municipal mayors in order to collect any kind of local product, then entrusting the provincial cooperative to sell the products.<sup>26</sup>

This proposal could not, however, be adopted as law and order in Leyte was so unstable that such a system could never have been organised.

### **Self-subsistence and food production campaign of the Omori Unit**

Starting a new policy, the Omori Unit (36<sup>th</sup> Independence Infantry Garrison Battalion, led by Colonel Yoshitsugu Omori) took over the garrison duties from the Nagano Detachment from October 1942–October 1943. The Omori Unit forces immediately began to search for food supplies in the island. However, the task was not so easy. The difficulties in implementing the controlled economy in Leyte planned by the 14<sup>th</sup> Army resulted in inefficiency in the procurement of food supplies in the province. At first, to overcome the difficulties, the Omori Unit officer in command made a personal appeal to the residents on the food problem. In March 1943, Colonel Omori, then Commander of the unit, strongly emphasised the importance of food production saying:

With respect to the food problem, I say that all of us have to make some personal sacrifices. This is the consequence of war. It is not only you who suffer from want of food. Everybody including America, England, Japan, China and all other nations engaged in war suffers from food shortage. Germany lost in the last war because of food shortage. Germany is winning today because she has learned a lesson about making herself a self-sufficient nation. Let us not depend upon Gandara [a rice-producing municipality in Samar] for rice. Even when the Japanese go there, they are not sure whether or not there is rice. Nobody knows when this war will end. Let us plant our own rice. This constitutes one of our moral disciplines. Sky-high price [*sic*] of commodities is an American philosophy. Price [*sic*] should be controlled by the government. But the government cannot do this work alone. All of us have to work together. As long as the war lasts, there will be problem of food.<sup>27</sup>

The Omori Unit developed self-subsistence in food supplies with the local Japanese Military Administration. They saw Santa Fe, an interior town in the northern part of Leyte, as one of the most important areas for the procurement of rice and corn.<sup>28</sup> Besides

25 Lear, *The Japanese Occupation in the Philippines*, p. 8.

26 See *Hito Gunsei Kanbu Visaya shibu Tacloban Shutchojo Jinchu Nisshi*.

27 Speech delivered by Colonel Omori during the conference of provincial officials and employees at the capital building on 19 Mar. 1943, in the criminal proceedings against Pastor Salazar, PCR.

28 See 'Keibi Junpo 18-go' [Garrison Report No. 18] in *Dokuritsu Shubi Hohei*.

Santa Fe, Ormoc was regarded by the Omori Unit as the most important area for the procurement of food supplies in the province. Ormoc had the largest cultivated lands in the island, where rice, corn and sugar had been abundant since before the war. The 1939 statistics show that the gross area of cultivated land in Ormoc was the largest, reaching 23,837.86 hectares, exceeding that in Tacloban, the provincial capital of Leyte, by 3,965.45 hectares.<sup>29</sup> The rice crop in Ormoc was the largest among all those in the other towns of the island. According to the statistics of 1938, the rice crop in Ormoc was 78,758 *cavan* (1 *cavan* = 44 kilogrammes), exceeding that in Tacloban by only 8,805 *cavan*. Besides these rice crops, the sugar industry of Ormoc, seen as one of the most important crops since the colonisation of American period, was also quite large. The area of sugar crops in Ormoc in 1938 reached 1,233.25 hectares – large enough to exceed any crops in other towns.<sup>30</sup> Hence, the Omori Unit also conducted a comprehensive procurement of sugar, besides rice.<sup>31</sup>

Given the abundant agricultural yields, the Omori Unit activated their food production campaign for the local inhabitants in Ormoc, and founded the ‘Farmer Volunteer Unit’ (*Nomin Kinro Hoshitai*) that consisted of fewer than two hundred farmers engaged in cultivation of farms about three times a week. In order to solve the problem of unemployment from the closure of the sugar refinery factory mentioned above, it was suggested that the unemployed should be compensated by a project of roads and bridges. This plan was, however, not carried out because of the frequent attacks of USAFFE guerrillas in Ormoc.<sup>32</sup>

Additionally, the Omori Unit forces implemented a policy to conduct their occupation in a less stringent, more lenient, manner so as not to raise enmity and antagonism from the residents against the Japanese troops – thus maintaining law and order in the island – so that it was stable enough for them to conduct food procurement measures. This simply meant that the Japanese troops avoided implementing the controlled economy in Leyte by violent means. Thus, the situation of self-efficiency and self-subsistence in food supply during the Omori Unit tenure was considered not very critical. Even though the guerrilla activities made the law and order situation worse, the Japanese troops did not assess security as urgent at the time and managed to conduct some food procurement efforts. Furthermore, the Omori Unit commander felt they had the necessary manpower to be able to conduct both operations effectively.<sup>33</sup>

### **Problem of peace and order and food procurement**

Despite the Unit trying to perform its policy in Ormoc, the attacks of guerrilla groups hampered their food production campaign in the town. According to a report of Omori Unit entitled, ‘Keibi Junpo Dai 16-go’ (Garrison Report No. 16) in April 1943, attacks of guerrilla groups in Ormoc area from January to March were considered to come from ‘the groups in small flocks’ and it also mentioned that

29 Bureau of Census, *Census of the Philippines*: 1939, p. 972.

30 Bureau of Census, *Census of the Philippines*: 1939, pp. 995–97.

31 See each mention written by Lieutenant Himeno in his diary, *Hito Gunsei Kanbu Visaya shibu Tacloban Shutchojo Jinchu Nisshi*.

32 See ‘Keibi Junpo 16-go’ [Garrison Report No. 16] in *Dokuritsu Shubi Hohei Daitai Jinchu Nisshi* [War Diary of the 36<sup>th</sup> Independent Infantry Garrison Battalion]; call number 304 in the library of NIDS.

33 ‘Keibi Junpo 16-go’ [Garrison Report No. 16].

‘guerrillas did not target our guard unit. Their activities are not active so far’. In this report in which the Ormoc area was mentioned, the anti-Japanese guerrilla groups are said to have burnt some vacant houses. It mentioned that ‘some shooting incidents from a long distance [sniper attacks] took place. But they are no longer active’.<sup>34</sup>

Meanwhile, the descriptions of the food procurement policy as viewed by the alleged Filipino collaborators were quite different. On 4 December 1942, Pastor Salazar, then Acting Governor of Leyte, reported on the situation in Ormoc:

Lt. Bras Miranda of USAFFE, with not less than 400 men, armed with 100 rifles and bolos [traditional knife of the Philippines] is operating in the municipality of Ormoc and Albuera. He is responsible for the burning of the house, worth 25,000 pesos of Representative Dominador M. Tan and other houses, and of the assassination of some prominent *Hacenderos*.<sup>35</sup>

Catalino Hermosilla, then Mayor of Ormoc, allegedly collaborating with the Japanese military authorities in 1943, also wrote several times to Bernardo Torres, then the Leyte provincial governor in Tacloban, that USAFFE guerrillas led by Blas Miranda, fiercely attacked the central part of Ormoc and they struggled to procure and loot much food, which could lead to a severe food shortage in the town.<sup>36</sup> It is clear from these records that the guerrilla activities truly made the political situation in Ormoc so much worse that the food procurement activities undertaken by the Omori Unit were frequently hampered.

As time went by, the law and order situation was a constant hindrance that drained manpower for various reasons. The guerrilla activities forced the closure of the sugar industry in September 1942 as mentioned earlier, which made unemployment rampant. Additionally, the decreased population in Ormoc led to the decline of labour forces in the town.<sup>37</sup>

The Omori Unit tried to solve these problems by means of proper food distribution not only for the military of the Japanese authorities but also for the local inhabitants.<sup>38</sup> These counter measures would have been effective if a proper controlled economy were implemented in the occupied area. In reality, the Omori Unit was not large enough to carry out a proper food distribution among the inhabitants as a prerequisite for the implementation of a controlled economy.

### **Harnessing food production: Concentrating Japanese troops in Leyte**

Immediately after Colonel Ruperto Kangleon, a prominent anti-Japanese guerrilla leader in Leyte, was recognised by General Douglas MacArthur – the Commander of Southwest Pacific Area allied forces – as the legitimate leader of guerrilla organisation,

34 ‘Keibi Junpo 16-go’ [Garrison Report No. 16].

35 Report by Pastor Salazar on 4 Dec. 1942, PCR.

36 Letters of Mayor Hermosilla to Provincial Governor of Leyte, 16 Feb. 1943; 3 Mar. 1943; and 16 Mar. 1943, criminal proceedings against Catalino Hermocilla, Criminal No. 486, PCR.

37 *Gunsei Kanbu Visaya shibu Tacloban Shuchojo Jinchu Nisshi*.

38 ‘Keibi Junpo-16-go’ [Guard Report No. 16] in *Dokuritsu Shubi Hohei Dai-36 Daitai Jinchu Nisshi*.

the guerrilla activities on the island became fierce.<sup>39</sup> By this time, the war situation had deteriorated, against Japan's favour. In September 1943, the US forces led by General MacArthur, invaded Papua New Guinea and slowly approached the Philippines.

For dealing with the war situation, *Daihon-ei* [Japan's Imperial Headquarters] in Tokyo had been studying a new policy since January 1943. In September of the same year, the *Zettai Kokubo Ken* [Absolute National Defence Line] as one of the major principles of military strategy, was implemented in order to set aside sufficient resources for waging war, identifying areas and territories which would be quite significant to the military strategy of Japan. Reacting to the new strategy of the Japanese military authorities, the guerrilla forces in Leyte became hyperactive. In September 1943, the situation in Leyte forced the 14<sup>th</sup> Army in Manila to issue to the 16<sup>th</sup> Division 'the order of mopping-up operation in Leyte'. Then, in October, part of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division – the 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment – was moved to Leyte, Samar, and Negros under the command of the Independent Mixed 33<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, led by Major General Gohachiro Kenjo. Thus, all the Visayas Islands were garrisoned. In the following year, in April 1944, the main force of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division was concentrated in Leyte in order to beef up the counter measure and defence of the island against the approaching US forces.<sup>40</sup>

As mentioned above, the Omori Unit underestimated the guerrilla organisation in Leyte saying, 'their activities are quite passive'. This did not mean that the guerrilla forces were not active at the time but that the Japanese forces in Leyte were not large enough in numbers to recognise them. Although some places where the Japanese garrisons were located were tranquil, which was the case in Ormoc, during the early period of the occupation, security was compromised and there were many towns and municipalities exposed to fierce attacks by the guerrilla groups.

Thus, in October 1943, right after the Japanese-sponsored Philippine Republic was formally inaugurated, the Japanese authorities in Leyte conducted a decisive mopping-up operation against the guerrillas in order to eliminate the threat. Conducting this operation made self subsistence of food supplies for strengthening the Japanese troops in Leyte an urgent necessity. In collaboration with the Filipino government of Leyte in Tacloban, the Japanese authorities planned a food production campaign for the military needs of the Japanese forces. Meanwhile, the guerrilla groups also fiercely endeavoured to obtain food supplies in the early part of January to April of 1944 during the time of harvest.<sup>41</sup>

The 16<sup>th</sup> Division record for January 1944 stated, 'Lack of rice and corn makes the people worry too much about the food situation. It becomes the main topic of the day

39 Lear, 'The western Leyte guerrilla warfare forces', pp. 69–94.

40 *Boeicho Boei Kenkyujo Senshi Soshō* [War history series by National Institute for Defense Studies], *Shōgō Rikugun Sakusen No. 1 Leyte Kessen* [Shō Army Operation No. 1 The decisive battle of Leyte], Tokyo: Asagumo Shinbunsha, 1970, pp. 20–25.

41 See Lear regarding the situation of the southern part of Leyte: Between the 1 Feb. 1944, and mid-Apr., while the company CP (command post) was still in the hills, ambushes and snipings were limited to the Abuyog-Baybay road. It was harvest time in mid-Apr. when orders to proceed to the plain were received. The reason was obvious: the rice crop should not go to the enemy, and the harvesters must therefore be protected. On the plains, the order was successfully carried to the letter. For sheer abundance of the rice crops, however, plus the corresponding inability of armed guerrillas to defend it at the same time, not all could be harvested. Lear, *The Japanese Occupation in the Philippines, Leyte*, pp. 87–8.

among the residents here'. It also pointed out the failure of NARIC in Leyte and emphasised the proper provision and the establishment of distribution of foods among the residents.<sup>42</sup> In other records, the 16<sup>th</sup> Division recognised that resolving the food crisis was strongly associated with the establishment of peace and order and noted that the controlling organisation for proper distribution could not really cope with the food crisis.<sup>43</sup>

### Consolidating plan for food production

When the main body of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division was concentrated in Leyte, the food production campaign had become concrete and was to be carried out by force. On 3 January 1944, Jose P. Laurel, the President of the Philippine Republic, issued Proclamation Number 10, calling for cooperation in the food production campaign from all students, and members of *Kalibapi* (*Kapisanan sa Paglilingkod sa Bagong Pilipinas*, Association for Service to the New Philippines, KALIBAPI), NA and various religious groups. On 23 February, President Laurel proclaimed forced labour for the food production campaign. After two days, on 25 February, the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources also released the administrative order that all healthy adults would be drafted by force into the campaign. Meanwhile, NARIC had been dissolved in January. Then, *Bigasang Bayan* (BIBA, the National Rice Granary) was established to take over the role of NARIC. As it was entirely managed by the Filipinos, the Japanese military authorities needed to make their routes of procurement of rice and corn more secure than before.<sup>44</sup>

The Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the Japanese authorities intensified the implementation of controlled economy by consolidating the system of its management for food production. The system formulated around January 1944 showed that the food production policy was conducted in such a way that the officer-in-charge gave instructions to each *Teniente del Barrio* (district lieutenant) in *barrio* under the control of each municipal mayor, and the *Teniente del Barrio* extended those instructions to the district of NA.<sup>45</sup>

In trying to implement the controlled economy by force in Leyte where quite a few Japanese troops were concentrated, the Japanese authorities created the Leyte Primary Foodstuffs Association (PRIMFA)<sup>46</sup> in January 1944, at the same time as NARIC was totally dissolved. On the surface, this organisation was created for obtaining and distributing food supplies under the direction of the Filipino government of Leyte and

42 'Kaki Joho Dai-ichigo' [Intelligence report for the 16<sup>th</sup> Division No. 1], 5 Jan. 1944 in *Dai Juroku Shidan Joho Kiroku Tsuzuri* [Intelligence reports for the 16<sup>th</sup> Division], call number 49 in the library of NIDS. The Japanese word, *Kaki*, is a code name of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division.

43 See *Dai Juroku Shidan Senji Geppo* [Monthly battle report for 16<sup>th</sup> Division], call number 51 in the library of NIDS.

44 Jose, 'Food production and food distribution programmes', p. 80.

45 See attached papers in criminal proceedings against Luis Ferrer, criminal case no. 3548, PCR. Luis Ferrer was then a provincial governor of Cavite. This file contains many papers about food production campaign implemented in the province.

46 This abbreviation is used in the dissertation of Lear. See Lear, 'Collaboration, resistance, and liberation', pp. 84–5. According to Lear, about the middle of 1943, Governor Torres organised the Leyte Corn and Rice Dealers Association (LECORDAS) to dispose of the problem of food supply in the province. In Jan. 1944, the association was dissolved to create PRIMFA. See also footnote 75.

the Japanese. However, it was really only for the military needs of the Japanese, as mentioned in the military document:

PRIMFA was created to obtain enough food supplies for the Japanese troops and the Japanese military institutions in the province of Leyte and also to meet without disruption the needs of the military based on the spirit of the Treaty of Alliance of Japan and the Philippines.

The outline of the military documents also shows the following:

1. The goal of compulsory delivery of rice and corn
  - a. About 1,500 tons of rice and corn shall be allocated for military needs.
  - b. The required quantities of abaca and copra in Leyte and Samar shall be stocked for all military personnel concerned.
  - c. The required quantities controlling supply and demand in Tacloban and Ormoc shall also be stocked. However, military needs shall be given preference.
2. The main compulsory delivery shall be rice, corn, sweet potatoes and cassava.
3. The organisation of purchase
  - a. Leyte Primary Foodstuffs Association, as an administrative sector, shall be the one that would purchase foodstuffs and deliver them to the military authority.
  - b. The quantities of delivery shall be divided equally among each municipal mayor calculating the payment for surplus. The municipal mayors shall be responsible for the compulsory delivery.
  - c. As required, the Japanese troops shall assist in the delivery of foodstuffs from the place of purchase to the place of collection.
  - d. The price of purchase shall be kept fair. The price paid on delivery to the military authority shall be the price of the produce plus the cost incurred in the purchase and delivery.<sup>47</sup>

Implementing this outline, from January 1944, the Japanese military authorities in Tacloban used PRIMFA for the efficient procurement of food supplies in Leyte. According to the articles of association of PRIMFA, the manager of the organisation was put under the instruction of the provincial governor. In this way, the manager could give orders to municipal mayors in the name of a governor.<sup>48</sup> Board of Control, created when LECORDAS was organised in 1943, consisted of several board members, such as the Provincial Governor of Leyte as chairman, some representatives of the Japanese Army and *Kempeitai* (Japanese Military Police), the Manager of PRIMFA, the Mayor of Tacloban and the Chief of the Philippine Constabulary (PC). The Manager of PRIMFA was more influential and powerful than a provincial governor in policy making for the procurement and distribution of food supplies. He was entitled to make policies for both the Japanese authorities and the provincial government and to give orders to municipal mayors.<sup>49</sup>

47 'Outline of compulsory delivery of foodstuffs and food production campaign in Leyte,' in *Dai-Juroku Shidan (Kaki) Sakumei Tsuzuri* [Files of orders by the 16<sup>th</sup> Division], call number 52 in the library of NIDS.

48 'Articles of Association of PRIMFA', criminal proceedings against Pastor Salazar, PCR.

49 Provincial governor of Leyte to the Manager of PRIMFA, dated 10 Feb. 1944, criminal proceedings against Pastor Salazar, PCR.

As can be seen, the 16<sup>th</sup> Division fully entrusted policy making for food supplies to the Filipino government in Tacloban to solve the problem of food shortage and to implement a thorough local procurement. To understand the background of the policy, the formulated principle of the Japanese military in the occupied area of Leyte after November 1943 when many Japanese troops were concentrated in the island, should be examined. The 16<sup>th</sup> Division emphasised in its military document of December 1943, entitled, ‘The outline of mopping-up operation in Samar-Leyte’, that the basic policy in the occupied area was ‘to win over the understanding of the residents as much as possible’. It also noted that it was necessary for soldiers of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division to implement this basic policy of winning over the understanding of the residents, and it emphasised that the policy of the Filipino government of Tacloban should not generate antagonism among the residents so that the Filipinos could voluntarily become involved in the establishment of a sound regime of local government collaborating with the Japanese troops in Leyte.<sup>50</sup>

Although the food procurement was to meet the military needs of the Japanese, it was necessary to make an appeal to the Filipino residents in Leyte and ensure that the Filipino government in Tacloban would play a significant role in the policy. In this way, the Japanese tried to suppress antagonism among the residents. This Japanese military policy was implied in the document entitled, ‘The outline of the foodstuffs procurement in Leyte’. All detachments in the island were required to keep close touch with the local officials of the Filipinos, such as a provincial governor or mayor, to make them cooperate with the Japanese regarding the food supplies policy. The document also emphasised that the detachments should strictly monitor their men in order not to hinder the voluntary action taken by the Filipino government in the policy so that its political establishment could not be affected or toppled.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, the local food supplies procurement of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division was conducted in accordance with the basic principle that laid emphasis on ‘respect for the Filipino government of Leyte’ and maintenance of the political regime in the island. It could be said that the background for consolidating empowerment of PRIMFA was found in such basic policies formulated by the occupying 16<sup>th</sup> Division in Leyte. The next section examines the procurement of food supplies by PRIMFA, how it was conducted and the outcome.

### **Failure and result of the policy of PRIMFA**

Even though the basic policy of PRIMFA was to meet the military needs of the Japanese troops stationed in Leyte, its ostensible objectives were sufficient procurements, observation of the procurement procedures and appropriate distribution for the local residents. As mentioned previously, the procurement of rice and corn was a major part of the policy. The PC conducted the procurement of *palay* (unmilled rice) by means of strict supervision. Ironically, this resulted in dishonesty and corruption among its soldiers, which came to the surface during the time of abundant harvest season in north-western Leyte in the first half of 1944.

50 ‘The outline of mopping-up operation in Samar-Leyte’ in *Dai-Juroku Shidan (Kaki) Sakumei Tsuzuri* [Files of orders by 16<sup>th</sup> Division].

51 See ‘Outline of compulsory delivery of foodstuffs and food production campaign in Leyte’.

The food production campaign of the Omori Unit and the Filipino government of Tacloban achieved success in the north-western part of Leyte, in Villaba, San Isidro and Biliran Island, areas that were not so much affected by the attacks from guerrilla groups. The military record of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division in April 1944 shows that these areas enjoyed the largest harvest in all of Leyte.<sup>52</sup> PRIMFA dispatched some detachments of the PC to Villaba, where the PC could procure food supplies under the direct control of the Japanese forces. However, the abusive actions of the PC in Villaba were counter-productive to the procurement efforts. According to the official report made by Vicente Veloso, then Mayor of Villaba, in correspondence to the governor's office in Tacloban on 10 June 1944, the morale of the members of the PC conducting procurement of food supplies was so low that they could not be controlled properly.<sup>53</sup> Although the Japanese authorities noticed the low morale of the PC, they still used them for the procurement of food supplies in remote areas of Leyte.<sup>54</sup> Veloso reported as follows:

Food control in this Municipality is doomed to failure since the constabulary soldiers, the only effective instrument to carry out our policy, are under the complete control and supervision of the Japanese garrison. The Japanese authorities did not allow the PC to go out of the *poblacion* [centre of the municipality]. Food supplies, especially corn, leaked out not within the *poblacion*, but from the *barrios*. Without them the services of the constabulary or any armed force, our control system, which I had well mapped out to gain effective results, will certainly be a failure.<sup>55</sup>

According to Veloso, in an interview with the author:

The scale of the Japanese forces supervising the activities of the PC in Villaba was quite small at the time. So, the Japanese could not conduct a complete observation of the corrupted soldiers of the PC, who took the food supplies for their own use. And, it seemed to me that the Japanese did not notice how corrupt they were. The shipment of food supplies going to Tacloban was not very large in quantity because of these corrupt situations of the PC.<sup>56</sup>

52 Letter written in Spanish from Kawazoe, the chief of staff of 16<sup>th</sup> Division, to Salazar, the acting governor of Leyte, on 22 Apr. 1944, criminal proceedings against Pastor Salazar, PCR.

53 The Japanese authorities also noticed that the local residents did not trust the PC in their responsibility. Since the time of the Commonwealth, the PC had engaged in the duty of maintenance of law and order. After the Japanese invaded the Philippines, some of the soldiers of the PC became involved in the anti-Japanese guerrilla activities. In Leyte, Arturo Reyes, a commander of the PC, led his forces consisting of 188 soldiers to collaborate with the Japanese to keep law and order in the province. According to the military record of the Japanese compiled by the 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division, a report in Dec. 1943 noted that 'The military training extended to the soldiers of the PC was so insufficient that they could not take proper action in the activities'. See 'The outline of mopping-up operation in Samar-Leyte'.

54 'Kaki-Joho Daiichigo' [Intelligence Report No. 1 for 16<sup>th</sup> Division], 5 Jan. 1944.

55 Official report made by Vicente Veloso to the provincial governor, Tacloban, 10 June 1944, in the criminal proceedings against Vicente Veloso, Criminal Case No. 5257, PCR.

56 Satoshi's telephone interview with Vicente Veloso on 1 June 1995. Veloso lived in the *poblacion* of Villaba in 1995.



During the interview, he also stressed that some of the soldiers of the PC pocketed their procured food supplies for personal needs and some of these could not be shipped properly to Tacloban.<sup>57</sup> In spite of this, a large quantity of rice and corn coming from the north-western part of Leyte could be procured. As a result, the north-western part of Leyte was the only area where the efficient procurement under the supervision of the PC could be conducted.<sup>58</sup>

The other shipments of food supplies to Tacloban coming from other municipalities were carried out through each municipal mayor voluntarily responding to the request of PRIMFA. However, as most of the island was affected by the influence of anti-Japanese guerrilla forces, the procurement conducted by the Japanese forces with the collaboration of municipal mayors in the interior areas did not make rapid progress. It is significantly pointed out that such mayors in remote and interior municipalities were burdened with ‘double procurement’ of food supplies for PRIMFA and for the anti-Japanese guerrilla groups. As mentioned by Vicente Veloso in the interview, he was also suffering from this ‘double procurement’ ordered by PRIMFA and by the guerrilla force led by Colonel Kangleon.<sup>59</sup> One year before this consolidating food production campaign in Leyte was formally promulgated, Colonel Kangleon had maintained that the Commonwealth government was totally separated from the Japanese occupation regime, and each mayor assumed administrative duty.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, the purchase and delivery mentioned in the Outline could not be carried out efficiently.

The food production campaign in the uncultivated lands of absentee landlords mentioned in the Outline was conducted in only a few areas. According to the research of Lear, especially in the area under the direct control of Blas Miranda, a prominent guerrilla leader of Ormoc, many farmers who evacuated to the interior mountains, mostly landless farmers, were engaged in the cultivation of the lands of absentee landlords in order to plant vegetables for the guerrilla soldiers and to sell in the public market at a high price.<sup>61</sup>

As also mentioned in point three of the ‘Outline’ regarding the price of purchase and delivery of rice and corn, the Japanese authorities could not keep its designated price because of the rampant black market throughout the island. Even though the detachment of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division in Tacloban proclaimed in February 1944, Provincial Ordinance Number Nine (an official order from the Japanese concerning the controlled economy in Leyte) the exposure to black market and ‘undesirable’ buying and selling activities, the mayors in the island could hardly observe this ordinance because most of their areas were directly affected by the influence of guerrilla groups.<sup>62</sup>

57 Satoshi’s telephone interview with Vicente Veloso.

58 According to Lear, Alejandro Reyes, then Mayor of San Isidro, adjacent to Villaba, played a significant role in procuring food supplies in the north-western Leyte for the Japanese Army. See Lear, ‘Leyte’s collaborationists: Their fate’, p. 158.

59 Satoshi’s interview with Vicente Veloso.

60 Lear, *The Japanese Occupation*, p. 74.

61 Lear, ‘The western Leyte guerrilla warfare forces’, p. 79.

62 ‘Leyte Provincial Ordinance No. 9’ and several correspondences forwarded to municipal mayors by Gerardo Villasin, then Manager of the PRIMFA, dated 18 Feb. 1944, criminal proceedings against Pastor Salazar, PCR.

While Provincial Ordinance No. 9 of Leyte emphasised the necessity for a crackdown on the black market and buying and selling activities, this ordinance was hardly observed in the province. Even before and after the ordinance was issued, profiteering, looting or abuses in food procurement were committed not only by guerrilla groups but also by local officials and ordinary residents of each town. The People's Court Records concerning the criminal proceedings against the alleged collaborator, Catalino Hermosilla, the Mayor of Ormoc, shows illegal stocking of rice and corn allegedly committed by the said mayor from 1942–43.<sup>63</sup> It also shows some connection between the mayor and guerrilla groups led by Miranda and Kangleon for the procurement of food to Ormoc.<sup>64</sup> In interior areas, for example, Alang-Alang, where the people were suffering from severe hunger, the *Kempeitai* frequently forced the residents to give information about guerrillas by using food as an incentive. On some occasions, Filipino informants or spies hired by the *Kempeitai* asked the poor residents for food; if they refused, the collaborating Filipinos imprisoned and tortured them.<sup>65</sup>

The Japanese authorities were also allegedly involved in the illegal procurement of food supplies in the second half of 1944. The minutes of an official meeting held in the provincial building in Tacloban on 3 June 1944, show that the *Kempeitai* in the town confiscated four sacks of rice, including *tiki-tiki* (hay for horses), owned by a businessman, which were supposed to be sent to Cebu via a *parao* (small sailboat). The *Kempeitai* claimed that the rice would be sent without a pass issued by the Governor. However, at the meeting, Pastor Salazar, by now sworn in as the Governor of Leyte, claimed that the *Kempeitai* intentionally did not honour the pass so that they could get the rice and hay.<sup>66</sup>

### Political rift between the Chinese and PRIMFA

A discord arose between the Chinese merchants and PRIMFA in Tacloban, where the detachment headquarters of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division was stationed. Even during the American colonial period, the Chinese merchants played a significant role in business activities throughout Leyte, particularly in Tacloban. As can be imagined, the Chinese maintained massive stores of rice and corn, money and goods. Confronted with the Japanese occupation of the island, they immediately started collaborating with the Japanese authorities and regularly made contributions of food supplies and money to

63 See various affidavits and the report written by Lieutenant Vacalso of Counter Intelligence Corp (CIC) in Tacloban, criminal proceedings against Catalino Hermosilla, PCR mentioned earlier. Mr Mario Y. Hermosilla, grandson of then Mayor Catalino Hermosilla, told me in his e-mail on 26 July 2006, that the mayor was taken into custody by the CIC at the end of the war and investigated on charges of collaboration and treason, but was found not guilty by CIC and released as a free man. On the day of his release, he was instructed to resume his position as Mayor the following day but he suffered a massive heart attack the night before and died. He was later honoured as a local hero and a major thoroughfare in Ormoc was named after him years later.

64 Emiliana Catingob's statement (Treasurer-Secretary, former school teacher in Ormoc) on 6 June 1945, criminal proceedings against Catalino Hermosilla, PCR.

65 Affidavit of Elias Mecina on 1 Feb. 1945, criminal proceedings against Jose Maraya; criminal case 282, PCR.

66 Salazar to Major Tanaka, Finance Department, Japanese Imperial Army, Tacloban, on 13 July 1944, criminal proceedings against Pastor Salazar, PCR.

the Japanese forces and *Kempeitai*<sup>67</sup> in order to protect their vested interests.<sup>68</sup> The conduct of the Chinese merchants on the island of Leyte was quite different from that of the Chinese merchants in Luzon or Manila, where they were involved in anti-Japanese activities. It was also different from the conduct of the alleged Filipino collaborators in the Leyte government of Tacloban, even though the Chinese were collaborating with the Japanese. The plan of smooth procurement and distribution of food supplies made by PRIMFA was brought to a halt because the Chinese, giving priority to the protection of their vested interests, were strongly opposed to consolidating the controlled economy.

On 22 February, Gerardo Villasin, Manager of PRIMFA, mentioned in his correspondence with Governor Torres that the Chinese illegally profited in buying and selling activities in opposition to the policy of controlled economy, which the Filipino government of Tacloban had tried to impose, and stressed that the government should take counter measures against such economic activities of the Chinese in the form of ‘an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth’. The authority of PRIMFA appealed to the office of the governor to prevent the Chinese from engaging in their trading activities, which disturbed the procurement of food supplies conducted by the authority. Villasin mentioned in correspondence dated 17 February that the Chinese had a large quantity of rice and corn that was said to have been sold at sky-high prices in the black markets. He appealed to the governor for help in issuing a search warrant to expose the ‘illegal storage’ of the Chinese. In response to the request of Villasin, Governor Torres authorised him to execute the search warrant against the Chinese to ‘strictly enforce the provisions of the said Provincial Ordinance No. 9.’<sup>69</sup>

Meanwhile, these measures formulated by PRIMFA repelled most of the Chinese merchants. Tan Tiah Suya, a leader of the Chinese community in Tacloban, wrote to Villasin saying:

It is sad to learn that a person of your talent should attribute to the Chinese communities an act that may have been committed by perhaps only a couple of Chinese and sadder still to contemplate that you should attribute to the Chinese community, racial prejudice, when in fact, it can be said with all sincerity that it is you who is guilty of race prejudice.<sup>70</sup>

The community of the Chinese merchants appealed to the office of *Kempeitai* in Tacloban to ease this measure of PRIMFA against the Chinese. They also opposed the organisation of *tonarigumi* which was supposed to be strictly imposed by Villasin in Tacloban for proper distribution of food supplies. Because of their defiant attitude toward the Filipino government of Tacloban regarding the policy, the scheme to organise NA failed in the town.<sup>71</sup>

67 See several references in the diary, *Hito Gunsei Kanbu Visaya shibu Tacloban Shutchojo Jinchu Nisshi*.  
68 Satoshi’s interview with Lee Tak Suk, a Filipino-Chinese residing in Tacloban, Leyte, at Star Asia Hotel on 1 June 1995.

69 See correspondence in criminal proceedings against Pastor Salazar, PCR: Villasin to Governor, 22 Feb. 1944; 17 Feb. 1944; 18 Feb. 1944.

70 Tan Tiah Suya to Villasin, 25 Feb. 1944, criminal proceedings against Pastor Salazar, PCR.

71 Villasin to Governor, 22 Feb. 1944, criminal proceedings against Pastor Salazar, PCR.

The Chinese in Tacloban may have exerted their strong influence on the executive sector of the provincial government. According to the correspondence of Villasin to the provincial governor, the Chinese merchants met PC Commander, Arturo Reyes, Governor Torres and the Commander of *Kempeitai* to lift the governor's order authorising PRIMFA's search warrant against the Chinese.<sup>72</sup> One elderly Chinese whom I interviewed in Tacloban said that the Chinese community at the time stopped the government from implementing the search warrant by means of offering large bribes to *Kempeitai* to which the prohibited emergency notes were given. He also said that to avoid political conflict with the Japanese authorities in Tacloban, they always made significant contributions of rice and corn to the headquarters of the Japanese garrison and *Kempeitai*.<sup>73</sup>

As a result, despite the strong political authority extended by the Japanese, the procurement of food supplies by PRIMFA was hindered by the corrupt PC, the 'unfavourable' attitude of the municipal mayors influenced by the anti-Japanese guerrilla forces and the strong opposition of the Chinese. This situation resulted in failure of the food distribution that was supposed to have been borne equally among the residents by PRIMFA. Drawing from limited sources, the real situation of the food distribution in the island is shown in the following paragraphs.

#### **Desperate situation and forced labour**

As of 1944, if the ordinary residents wanted to have an allocation of food supplies from PRIMFA, they had to first sell their stores of rice and corn to the provincial government through PRIMFA. Then, the allocation, consisting of two sacks of rice and corn for the producer and three for the non-producer, was given.<sup>74</sup> By the end of January 1944, the Japanese military officials, Chinese merchants and rich and prominent Filipinos, having large quantities of rice and corn, had registered the proportion of their stores of rice and corn that would be sold to PRIMFA. In return, they were given their allocation of food supplies.<sup>75</sup> However, this distribution was only for a limited group of people and excluded the ordinary poor residents as they had little food stored.

It meant that the food supply policy of PRIMFA in Leyte ended in the failure of proper allocation and distribution among the ordinary inhabitants. Despite this failure of the policy of PRIMFA, the 16<sup>th</sup> Division and the Filipino government of Tacloban still intensified the food production campaign and started to draft forced labour from the residents to construct some airfields in the eastern part of Leyte. Preparing for the expected landing of the US forces in Leyte, the coastal defences around Tacloban had to be strengthened. The construction of airfields in Burauen or Julita was launched in

72 Ibid.

73 Satoshi's interview with Lee Tak Suk.

74 PRIMFA to Tacloban Mayor on 25 Jan. 1944, in the case of Pastor Salazar, PCP.

75 See 'Prospective subscribers to the capital of the Leyte Primary Foodstuffs Association,' 27 Jan. 1944, and also see 'List of subscribers to the Leyte Primary Foodstuffs Association showing the numbers of shares subscribed, Receipts from the subscriptions of stockholder of the Leyte Corn and Rice Dealers Association (LECORDAS) whose shareholding will be transferred to the Leyte Primary Foodstuffs Association,' criminal proceedings against Pastor Salazar, PCR. The PRIMFA took over LECORDAS in Jan. 1944. LECORDAS was also managed by Gerardo Villasin.

April, when the main force of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division was concentrated in Leyte. With the concentration of the Japanese troops and building airfields, the food production campaign was intensified.

On 10 June, Pastor Salazar, then Governor of Leyte, issued Executive Order No. 4, ordering the government employees ‘to render voluntary labour together with the Provincial Officials and Employees, whole day of 17 June 1944’.<sup>76</sup> This order was given not only to government employees but also to the local residents, particularly in Tacloban. More than one thousand Filipino civilians were forced to engage in the construction of an airfield in Burauen on June 17.<sup>77</sup> The Japanese military authorities in Tacloban seemed too impatient to mobilise civilians in the food production campaign by means of forced labour, which was ostensibly considered voluntary labour. In August, the education authority in Tacloban ordered all principals and head teachers to have elementary school pupils plant *tangan-tangan* (castor beans) in the gardens of their homes.<sup>78</sup>

The situation surrounding Leyte was getting worse. Around the middle of September, American planes attacked Tacloban. On 22 September, President Laurel placed the Philippines under martial law. On 4 October, Governor Salazar issued the Instruction on Martial Law to strengthen the cooperation with the Japanese troops engaging in the construction of coastal defences. Concerning the procurement of food supplies, it still emphasised ‘the food production campaign shall be intensified to the maximum in order to make the province self-supporting and self-sufficient.’<sup>79</sup> Drafting forced labour for the construction of roads or airfields and the cultivation of food crops and livestock were strictly imposed on the residents regardless of age or sex. In a speech in September, Governor Salazar stated:

All able-bodied men and women must immediately engage themselves in food production. All kinds of food supplies and vegetables should be planted in all available lots and hog-raising and poultry must also be undertaken. If there is no person willing to cultivate a said vacant lot, the Mayor shall call the necessary number of persons between the ages of 16 and 60 years to do compulsory labour on the said lot.<sup>80</sup>

Of course, these efforts and measurement taken by the Japanese authorities and Filipino government of Leyte were in vain. According to the personal diary kept by General Shiro Makino, the Commander of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division of the Japanese Army, the average weight of his soldiers fell slightly compared to the previous year. They had to be patient and endure severe hunger on the construction site of the coastal area.<sup>81</sup> At

76 Executive Order No. 4, 10 June 1944, criminal proceedings against Pastor Salazar, PCR.

77 Shohei Ooka, *Leyte Senki*, vol. 1, p. 37.

78 Florentino Kapili, Acting Division Superintendent, Kawanihan ng Pagtuturo, Dibisyon ng Leyte, to Principals and Head Teachers, Tacloban, 18 May 1944, criminal proceedings against Florentino Kapili, PCR.

79 Instruction on Martial Law, on 4 Oct. 1944, criminal proceedings against Pastor Salazar, PCR.

80 Speech of the Honourable Provincial Governor of Leyte, Don Pastor Salazar, no date, criminal proceedings against Pastor Salazar, PCR. Reading the passage, this manuscript could have been drafted around the end of Sept. 1944.

81 The details are recorded in the diary kept by General Makino and are mentioned in Ooka, *Leyte Senki*, vol. 1, p. 28.

the same time, many requests from mayors on the island for food were forwarded to the manager of PRIMFA and the provincial governor. Of all municipalities in Leyte, the food situation in Inopacan, Bato, Palo, Babatngon, Kawayan and Malitbog was so desperate that they requested an emergency shipment and allocation.<sup>82</sup> PRIMFA could not, however, respond to these requests. Villasin resigned his managership in July 1944. The board of directors dissolved the association soon after his resignation. Taking over PRIMFA, the BIBA commenced business in Leyte on 1 August 1944. However, the general population in the province did not materially benefit from the operation of this new agency.<sup>83</sup> Faced with the miserable situation on the island, the local residents welcomed the landing of the US Forces in October 1944 with cheers.

### Conclusion

These details explain the reasons for the disruption of the food supply procurement policy by the occupying Japanese military forces and the Filipino government of Leyte. Two distinct areas caused the disruption: social and political factors on the Leyte Island, and functional or organisational factors found in procurement institutions such as PRIMFA or the PC.

First, let us look into the social and political factors on the island. The food supply policy owed its failure and disruption to the poor state of agriculture that had not been continuously developed since American colonisation. In addition to the agricultural factor, especially during the Japanese occupation, one of the most important points was that the implementation of the controlled economy for the procurement and the allocation of the food supplies could not function well. The reason for this was that almost all parts of the island, except the Japanese controlled areas, like Tacloban or Ormoc, were under the direct control of anti-Japanese guerrilla groups. In addition, as pointed out by Lear researching the Japanese occupation in Leyte, another social reason for the disruption should be examined. In general, Leyte Island had been politically conservative since the American colonial period, and little political unrest among the poor landless peasants had been observed before the war. During the Japanese occupation, although most of the big landlords, *hacenderos*, whose political positions were quite conservative, collaborated with the Japanese authorities, they strongly opposed the establishment of the controlled economy.<sup>84</sup>

Meanwhile, another political and strategic problem of the Japanese forces in the island should be examined. In the first half of the Japanese occupation from May 1942 to October 1943, the Japanese authorities in Manila could not deploy or station enough forces in the island to conduct counter measures against the attacks of the anti-Japanese guerrilla groups. This caused a deterioration of the policy for food supplies, procurement and distribution. As shown in Japanese military and Filipino records, there were some different views between the Japanese and Filipino in recognition of the

82 See official correspondence found in criminal proceedings against Pastor Salazar, PCR: Inopacan mayor to the provincial governor, 20 Jan. 1944; Palo mayor to the provincial governor, 21 Jan. 1944; President of Neighbourhood Association to the provincial governor, 7 Feb. 1944; Babatngon mayor to the provincial governor, 29 Feb. 1944; and Malitbog mayor to the provincial governor, 16 Mar. 1944.

83 Lear, 'Collaboration, resistance, and liberation', pp. 87–8.

84 Lear, *The Japanese Occupation*, p. 116.

size of guerrilla groups. This difference meant that the locally stationed Japanese forces did not have exact information regarding the ubiquitous guerrilla groups that were attacking them from the mountain areas and causing failure in consolidating the food production campaign carried out by the Japanese. In this situation, besides the strategic activities against the guerrilla insurgents in the island, what the Japanese Omori Unit accomplished at the time was at best only a propaganda campaign for the local residents. The guerrilla groups had their own distinctive system for procurement of food supplies, forcing local municipal mayors to contribute their allocation to the guerrilla groups. The Japanese forces were not completely familiar with this system.

Other dimensions in the food supply problem faced by the Japanese forces included the anti-Japanese guerrilla groups, the collaboration of the local municipal mayors, the political rift between the Leyte provincial government and the Chinese merchants. The latter were also collaborators and were a particularly conspicuous factor in the procurement of food supplies by the PRIMFA of 1944. As mentioned earlier, upon the Japanese invasion of the island, the Chinese community started immediately collaborating with the Japanese to protect their vested interests in business. Most of the Chinese merchants, especially in Tacloban, maintained a close relationship with the Japanese authorities. They had a large stock of rice and money, which were donated to the Japanese military officials. Opposed to the policy of the provincial government and PRIMFA to protect their rice stock, the Chinese did not behave in accordance with the formal procedure for the distribution of rice and corn. However, the discord between the Chinese merchants and the Filipinos on this matter could be attributed to the continuous political confrontation that had evolved since American colonisation.

Second, the organisational aspects of the procurement of the food supplies have to be taken into consideration. The implementation of the controlled economy became the basis of the policy formulated by the occupying Japanese forces. At first, the Japanese forces entrusted the procurement and delivery of rice and corn to the logistics division of its military organisation.<sup>85</sup> Later, this duty was taken over by NARIC under the observance of the Japanese Military Administration. However, NARIC could not function completely in Leyte. In addition, the NA (*tonarigumi*), created by the Philippine Executive Commission in 1942 for the proper distribution of food supplies, could not organise its association in each municipality in the island. This meant that the distribution of food supplies, even at the beginning of the Japanese occupation in Leyte, was not carried out efficiently.

The organisational defects in PRIMFA should also be discussed here. The range of procurement activities of PRIMFA starting from January 1944 was chiefly limited to the occupied areas, like Tacloban and Ormoc. Away from these occupied areas, as the example in Villaba shows, the PC was entrusted by the provincial government or the Japanese military authorities to carry out the procurement activities. This led to dishonesty and corruption inside the PC. Although having strong political power over the procurement, PRIMFA could not observe all the procedures of its policy. Its organisational weakness facilitated the corruption of the PC.

85 Mutsuo Sumeragi, 'Firipin no Nihon Gunsei,' p. 73.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the activities of PRIMFA in procuring the food supplies disrupted its distribution policy. Most of the food supplies procured by PRIMFA may have gone to a handful of Japanese military officials, a few rich Chinese merchants and prominent Filipino elites in Tacloban. The criminal proceedings against the Manager of PRIMFA, Gerardo Villasin, in the People's Court illustrates this point. Upon the landing of the US forces in Leyte in October 1944, he was arrested by the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) of the US Army on charges of treason. Then, he was interned in a concentration camp in Palo, on the outskirts of Tacloban, while being investigated by CIC. Eventually, since there was insufficient evidence, he was not indicted for treason. This decision enraged many residents of Tacloban and they pressed the office of CIC to know the reason. The notes of protest written by the residents of Tacloban in People's Court Records of Villasin, deposited with the University of the Philippines, show that most of the rice and corn procured by PRIMFA had chiefly been distributed among the Filipino privileged classes and the high-ranking Japanese military officials only.<sup>86</sup> Actually, whether the contents of these notes of protest are authentic or not remains a mystery, since it would be quite difficult to prove their authenticity now. Even the Chinese-Filipino I interviewed in Tacloban did not want to volunteer information contrary to what had been mentioned, although he may have maintained close relations with Villasin during the Japanese occupation. It is clear that PRIMFA was nothing but an institution for the procurement of food supplies to meet the military needs of the Japanese.

As proof, although the Japanese authorities extended considerable powers to the LPFA over the policy of food supplies, the latter did not quickly accommodate the requests submitted by municipal mayors on the island for the distribution of food. Another illustration can be cited to show the inefficiency of its policy. The low-ranking Japanese soldiers of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division, who should have been given enough allocation of food supplies, experienced severe hunger when they engaged in the shoreline defence operation on the eastern coast of Leyte at the time.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, it should be pointed out that the measures taken by PRIMFA were not wholly effective and quite a few Japanese soldiers in Leyte starved.

As shown in this paper, the food procurement policy of the Japanese and the Filipino government of Leyte owed its disruption to political and organisational factors, eventually bringing about severe hunger among the poor residents in Leyte. The outcome of the policy reveals that the deficiency of food supplies in the provincial areas, like Leyte, could not be attributed only to the forced procurement and pillage committed by the Japanese troops. As the problem of food supplies shows, the disruption or failure of each policy of the Japanese occupation and military administration was quite common an outcome. However, given the variables and the local social environments, the results were not uniform.

86 See the several notes of protest in criminal proceedings against Gerardo Villasin, PCR. Most of the files on Villasin are missing.

87 Interview with Ken-nosuke Nakajima, a former Japanese soldier in the 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division, featured in the NHK programme broadcast in Aug. 1994.