

Materiel Matters

The Japanese State's Evacuation of Elementary Schoolchildren During The Second World War

Abstract

When the Japanese state prepared for large-scale war with both China and, later, the United States, their belief that the ocean would protect the home islands from direct attack. Because of this, Japan stressed economic and mental preparation to its citizens and inculcated within them both a spirit of racial and ethnic superiority and an innate sense of duty and dedication to the state. However, when Allied bombers attacked Japan directly, the state chose to evacuate children to the countryside. Unfortunately, these evacuations were ill-prepared, underfunded, under-provisioned, and, worst of all, made the evacuees undesirable citizens who were not pulling their weight in the war effort. Still, through it all, the Japanese state thought of children as war materiel, and not as a part of a post-defeat future. In the end, the Japanese state used evacuated children to support its war efforts and cared little for their education or wellbeing.

Keywords: Japan, World War II, rural, children, evacuation

During the decade before conflict with the United States began, Japan spent a great deal of time and effort preparing for war. Its industrial might, economy, mass media, and educational system had all fallen under the control of a government preparing for regional conflict. Before the Second World War commenced, the Japanese state began to gear its elementary-level schooling system towards an inevitable conflict with the West. When the conflict finally began, the compulsory education system, as stipulated, was an efficient purveyor of the ultra-nationalistic and imperialistic values that Japan was using to justify its pan-regional expansion. Imperial Ordinance 148 (known as *Kokumin Gakkou-rei*, or the National School Ordinance), enacted on 1 March 1941, contained fifty-eight provisions designed to prepare the education system to provide for the state during a total war.¹ Article one clearly defined, once and for all, the policy that the education ministers had been alluding to all along: that "the school shall have the pupils practice the Imperial Way in all aspects of education and in particular deepen their faith in the national polity."² What the ordinance did not prepare educators or students for was the possibility that Japan would come under direct attack, particularly by enemy air forces. In this way, efforts to prepare its students for war was poorly- considered and, like many of the Japan's war preparations, incorrectly its resources, time, and effort into a futile effort to continue the war, even at the expense of its children. As a result, student evacuations were inefficient in execution, promoted hostilities between the evacuees, and, served children very little but to keep them alive to somehow continue the war effort, even to their severe detriments.

Realities of Evacuation

1. Richard Rubinger, "Education in Wartime Japan, 1937-1945," in *Education and the Second World War: Studies in Schooling and Social Change*, ed. Roy Lowe (London: The Falmer Press, 1992), 64.

2. Herbert Passin, *Society and Education in Japan* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1965), 266.

Evacuation programs began in October 1943 “on a voluntary basis so that children could remain with their parents.”³ But, by the middle of 1944, the Allies had captured islands close enough to Japan to launch bombing raids. Soon, the nearly wholesale destruction of Japan’s major urban centers prompted the state to announce the “Outline for Encouraging the Evacuation of Schoolchildren,” on 30 June 1944, which initially recommended evacuating children in grades three through six in order to spare children the horrors of the bombings and to ensure their injuries or deaths would not deplete resources.⁴ In August 1944, 360,000 children were evacuated from thirteen different cities, to 7,000 countryside locations. There, they joined 300,000 students who voluntarily evacuated within the previous year. Inns, temples, meeting halls, and resorts became the children’s new dormitories and schools.⁵ In March 1945, evacuation centers were expanded to accommodate 100,000 first and second graders.

The Japanese state’s mistake was expecting their resource-deprived population to devotedly accept evacuees simply because their state asked them to. Funds for the centers themselves came from the national coffers, but parents and guardians were expected to provide enough money to cover the expenses undertaken by personnel such as the innkeepers and cooks. Children were expected to aid in the procurement of food and fuel, while teachers helped with their daily upkeep.⁶

During the initial evacuations, families, or portions thereof, could evacuate to any location that they wished—although they were encouraged to go to rural locations to live with relatives. One boy who was evacuated in the first group remembered how suddenly the process began:

One day, three or four large trucks came and began loading up our household belongings. Mother was told she must arrange all our things into boxes they gave her, and just like that, acting in great haste, we left Tokyo for Shimozuma in Ibaragi prefecture.⁷

This boy was evacuated with his family, while his classmates later went to Nagano.

This system produced great inequalities in the distribution of people, and it would not be uncommon for some households to have two, three, or more families living under one roof. Often, every space available was used to house evacuees, including cottages, “storage sheds, wood sheds, and even in a night soil shed, where large vats of human excrement were stored uncovered.”⁸ One family, which had been burned out of its home in July 1945 was evacuated to a rural area and lived with ten other families “in the call office

3. Rubinger, 69 and Thomas R. H. Havens, *Valley of Darkness: The Japanese People and World War Two* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 158.

4. Rubinger, 70.

5. Ibid. and Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, *Japan’s Modern Educational System: A History of the First Hundred Years* (Tokyo: Printing Bureau, 1980), 206.

6. Rubinger, 70.

7. Sato Hideo, “Playing at War,” in *Japan at War: An Oral History*, ed. and trans. Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 233.

8. Aoki Kii, “Evacuees and Mean-Spirited Villagers,” in *Senso: The Japanese Remember the Pacific War*, ed. Frank Gibney and trans. Beth Cary (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 172.

of a geisha establishment.”⁹ Children relocated in the mass evacuations that began in mid-1944 would most often be moved and boarded as an entire class, usually along with their teacher. These children were housed together in larger buildings such as inns, officers, and community centers. One elementary school teacher from Nagoya evacuated her children—fifty third-grade boy—to a temple in Minami Kasuya on the Chita Peninsula.¹⁰ On 3 July 1945, 260 pupils of the Tateishi National Grade School were evacuated, and seventy-four of those fourth and fifth graders went to live in a judo gymnasium of a vocational school in Kagato, Okayama Prefecture.

There is a noticeable difference in how the children of the two different groups were treated. The children who had been voluntary evacuees often found themselves the recipients of locals’ bitterness. Studies of the relocations note that evacuees tended to have low morale, most likely brought on by their increasing sensitivity to the prospect of defeat, after seeing their cities targeted by bombers that could fly over with impunity.¹¹ This, of course, was in stark contrast to rural denizens who could still find much of the propaganda believable because they had weathered the war without seeing similar wholesale destruction. Even relatives who found themselves the hosts of the evacuees often resented them, and found that only their sense of duty to their kin made the situation bearable.¹² These feelings of ill will were generally no respecter of age. One child who tried to take a bath when urged to by his grandmother was rapped on the head by his uncle who said “don’t take a bath before the family does. You’re just a hanger-on.”¹³ On holidays, which were generally days of great sharing, local families often did not share items such as traditional holiday dumplings with the evacuees.¹⁴ Evacuees and their children would often hear comments from villagers such as “So, did you run away? Hmm, you’re weaklings.”¹⁵ Kii Aoki, a rural villager took pity on the evacuees for their cold welcome, writing that “they must have cried at the painful and coldhearted treatment they received.”¹⁶

Children relocated in the mass evacuations, beginning in mid-1944, often found that they were welcomed with more warmth than those who were part of families who volunteered. Historian Thomas Havens examined the circumstances surrounding the later evacuee children and speculated that “the host-refugee relationship was cordial not only because the evacuees were young and their numbers relatively manageable but also because the government made special effort, through entreaties and cash, to smooth hard feelings that might occur.”¹⁷ Childhood memories of the students evacuated en masse seem to confirm this. One Osaka fourth-grader, who, along with his class, was relocated to

9. Takezawa Shoji, “What About the Emperor’s Lunch?” in *Senso: The Japanese Remember the Pacific War*, ed. Frank Gibney and trans. Beth Cary (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 254.

10. Hayashi Masayuki, “Lamplight and a Dress,” in *Senso: The Japanese Remember the Pacific War*, ed. Frank Gibney and trans. Beth Cary (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 253.

11. Frederick S. Hulse, “Some Effects of the War Upon Japanese Society,” *Far Eastern Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (1947): 30.

12. *Ibid.*, 31.

13. Aoki, 172.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Yamamuro Reiko, “Sadness and Self-Reproach of an Evacuee,” in *Senso: The Japanese Remember the Pacific War*, ed. Frank Gibney and trans. Beth Cary (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 173.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Thomas R. H. Havens, *Valley of Darkness: The Japanese People and World War Two* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 163.

the Kawano national school in Ehime prefecture, wrote home that the children at his new school were “kind and strong. I think I’d like to become strong like that.” One of his classmates concurred, writing that he wanted “to become good friends with the kids in this village.”¹⁸ Students from Tokyo’s Ikenoue national school reported that they were welcomed warmly by their hosts in Nagano.¹⁹

Tension between the local children and evacuee children was exacerbated by the evacuee children’s perceived sense of superiority. Children from the cities had items such as aluminum lunch boxes, while their rustic counterparts used wooden ones.²⁰ One student remembered the vast dissimilarity between his clothing and that of his hosts. His uniform was “Keio-style, dark blue, double-breasted, with a white collar, modeled on the Keio University elementary school uniform, with short pants and high socks.”²¹ He noticed later that “during the cold winter, [I] wore stockings under my shorts... [and] my leather shoes had metal buckles.”²² His clothing was, in fact, handed down from an older brother, but compared to the kimonos or “rough” western clothing worn by the rural schoolchildren, they were still enough to confirm a feeling of superiority.²³

Interestingly, rural schoolchildren began to feel an increasing sense of superiority over the urban evacuees, as well. Before the war, villages had suffered heavily from a decline in crop prices, but after the war began, and the demand for food had gone up, rural farmers often found that they could gain more, and conduct a more lucrative black market trade than could city folk.²⁴ In addition, as a percentage, rural Japan provided more frontline fighting men than had the cities, which, when combined with the state’s indoctrination about courage, gave them a sense that they were suffering in greater proportion to the city dwellers, and thus were giving more of themselves to the war effort.²⁵ One of the most common physical manifestations of this sense of superiority was bullying. Some city children learned that they could avoid being bullied by learning the local dialect and, by flattering their aggressors, could often blend in with them.²⁶ Others could sometimes avoid bullying by promoting their superior social status by quoting passages from more advanced texts or writing more complicated Kanji, but this rarely worked. Those who could not manage the transformation were often subjected to harsh treatment. Typically, the smaller the city child, the more vulnerable he or she was.²⁷

Educating the Evacuees

The quality of education that elementary schoolchildren received at evacuation centers was initially comparable to the educations that they had received in their home cities. This was mainly because students were initially placed in rural schools that were already in session, or their teachers accompanied them in the later mass evacuations. As

18. Havens, 163-4.

19. Havens, 164.

20. Sato, 233-34.

21. Sato 234.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Hulse, 31.

25. Ibid.

26. Sato, 235 and Yamamuro, 173.

27. Sato, 234.

the war continued, however, the quality of teachers instructing the students began to decline. Since the bulk of teachers, even at the elementary level, were men, a large percentage of educators were eligible for military service. As the male teachers were called into frontline duty, they were often replaced by either women, who had, until that point, only taken care of the lower grades, or older, or infirm men, who were otherwise unfit for service. Recent high school graduates were another source of substitute teachers, used to fill the slots of draftees. Seventeen and eighteen-year-olds often found themselves as permanent substitute teachers, taking the place of an older teacher who had been sent off to a combat zone.²⁸ These teachers were also subject to the draft, and often prepared for that inevitability through mental and physical exercises designed to inculcate a sense of servitude for the emperor. One eighteen-year-old substitute teacher recognized that, after many of his fellow instructors had been called to service, he and the school's principal were the sole remaining men in the school.²⁹ He organized his "service bag and pledge[d] selfless devotion to [his] country,"³⁰ in anticipation of being called up for military duty. A student remembered a similar rotation of teachers: "After awhile, only female and elderly teachers remained."³¹ Clearly, as the war went on, it cut deeper and deeper into the evacuee children's hopes for any sort of pre-war normalcy.

Some of these teachers so disdained their rural postings and found such little inherent nobility in their situations that they constantly took out their anger upon their chargers. In one particularly egregious example, a teacher who had been sent to a rural village from a city, having, for whatever reason, escaped the draft. He demonstrated an exceptionally abusive attitude towards the children and local villagers and disparaged the former directly to them, saying that the villager children's parents were "only good at making children, just like stupid carp."³² When his food would get low, the teacher would demand more from the villagers, saying "[My] supply base is your village. Gather rice for me."³³ One girl later lamented that, even with the villagers' diligence, the teacher never even sent a postcard to express his thanks.³⁴

The high attrition rate of teachers was responsible for many of the inconsistencies in the education that evacuee schoolchildren received, but there was also a group of teachers and administrators who stridently continued their traditions of militaristic education—to an extreme level. As Japan's emotional involvement heightened during the final two years of the war, so, too, did the militaristic climate of some schools. Students were often required to stand at attention and salute teachers that they encountered outside of the classroom. Some were made to announce their presence in military fashion before entering a classroom, as in, "Sixth-grade pupil third class Sato Hideo has business for Teacher Yamada. May I enter?"³⁵ Schools that subscribed to the militaristic mentality

28. Shimizu Mitsuo, "Pupils' War Experience as Noted in my Diary," in *Senso: The Japanese Remember the Pacific War*, ed. Frank Gibney and trans. Beth Cary (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 187.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

31. Hashimoto Kumiko, "Hungry Maiden with an Appetite," in *Senso: The Japanese Remember the Pacific War*, ed. Frank Gibney and trans. Beth Cary (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 191.

32. Aoki, 172.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. Sato, 235.

often formed students into small groups, resembling squads, which were designed to inculcate military values with maximum efficiency. Their similarity to real military units even extended to punishments. If one member of a group made a mistake, group punishment would result. This was often done using group beatings. One half of the group would line up against one side of the hallway, the other half on the other side. On command, the children on one side of the hallway would strike the children on the other side, and then repeat the process for the first side. This would continue until they were told to stop.³⁶ Many teachers who were overly imbued with the martial spirit would beat their individual students—sometimes as corporal punishment, but sometimes, it seems, for sadistic pleasure. Strikes across the face were commonly delivered to students as disciplinary measures, and, often, more were applied if a student turned his head away at the last minute. One student remembered a specific situation where students were beaten for failing to raise the national flag in perfect time with the anthem.³⁷

Of course, since the state had taken nearly complete control of the compulsory education system's content, the ultra-nationalistic training that had preceded the evacuations continued after the children reached their evacuation areas. In many classrooms, large maps of the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere were displayed on a wall. Students were constantly pasting markers on the maps to indicate the location of the latest battle or territory taken by the Japanese.³⁸ Students were constantly bombarded with news of Japanese "victories," and pictures of the newest Japanese ships and planes were displayed with pride. Reverence toward the emperor was continuously emphasized—to the point that students were thinking about how to honor his likeness at all times. One student recalled the values in which he had been indoctrinated, writing that they should take care not to "wrap [their] lunch" in paper that bore the emperor's face "because juice might leak" on it or step on any document that contained the emperor's image.³⁹

Although much of the anti-Western sentiment that had been prevalent in state-issued textbooks remained, the lack of basic resources meant that the children's anti-Western indoctrination had to come from different sources. Most of this attitude was conveyed by the teachers themselves. One student remembered his instruction well:

Until then, American had been a nation of demons....Our teachers told us that Americans were monsters and lowly creatures....They told us of the gyokusai battles on Tinian and Guam, where it was said wounded Japanese soldiers were bound together and plowed under with bulldozers. The B-29s were coming from airfields built on their graves.⁴⁰

Beyond the nationalistic and militaristic training that the typical elementary-aged student received in school, most school administrators and teachers continued to instruct them in these values on an extracurricular or non-academic basis. As with classroom instruction, these activities stressed the war effort and sought to connect the children directly to the state's regional aims and the plight of the soldier in the field. In many schools, students

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., 236.

39. Ibid., 239.

40. Ibid.

would attend early morning prayers in order to adjure for victory. Many children would attend sponsored prayers on or around December 8, which was the date that the war started and when the rescript was issued.⁴¹ The students had to participate in assemblies frequently, often hearing admonitory lectures on the war effort.⁴² One student recalled how her entire school was assembled, often, and addressed by school officials, to ensure that the children's support of the war effort remained high. She wrote that, one day during morning assembly when all students were lined up at attention, the principal asked, "Let's say an American flag is placed here. You are all walking toward it. What would you do?" In response, she and the rest of the student body shouted in concert, "Trample on it as we pass by."⁴³ Furthermore, in order to ensure that the children maintained a personal connection with the war, and the servicemen fighting in it, students were often encouraged to write letters to soldiers in the field, and they would often see soldiers off as they were leaving for the front.⁴⁴

Although a great deal of the children's impressions of the war came from their teachers, they were also exposed to rudimentary forms of mass media propaganda, which was supplied almost entirely in the form of children's magazines, newspapers, or picture books. One pupil remembered, clearly, the appearance and the effects of this style of education. He wrote that "what really sank in were the war painting, like the works of Fujita Tsuguji, colored double-spreads, which appears in newspapers and magazines aimed at children. In the paintings of Fujita, the fearfulness of war was given immediacy through the visible cruelty of the American forces."⁴⁵ This was particularly tangible to the students, the vast majority of them never having known an American and had only seen their depictions in other forms of media become more horrific and devilish as the war continued on.

The Children's Health and Hygiene

The one thing that the children could not escape from when they were relocated was the scarcity of food. Although it may have been possible for them to find more food in urban black markets than their allotted rations, there was little surplus available to them in the countryside. Additionally, it was not uncommon for farming families to hold back part of their crops, which, in essence, meant that they had the upper hand in the black market distribution of foodstuffs. It appears, however, that although meals were scarce, the majority of children only lost weight and suffered through bouts of malnutrition, and stayed relatively healthy throughout the war.⁴⁶

Although the children's health may not have been severely affected, the scarcity of food was one of the largest contributors to the discord between the evacuees and their rural hosts since most of the latter "felt that additional mouths complicated the situation, while the evacuees felt that they had as much right as anyone to eat."⁴⁷ Children had to subsist on

41. Shimizu, 187.

42. Ibid.

43. Nakamura Kyoko, "Bow Deeply to the Enemy Flag," in *Senso: The Japanese Remember the Pacific War*, ed. Frank Gibney and trans. Beth Cary (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 189.

44. Shimizu, 187.

45. Sato, 239.

46. Havens, 165.

47. Hulse, 31.

the food they were given, while farming children often ate food that their families had set aside from their harvest. One student remembered that his “lunch was full of barley and other rice substitutes,” while local children commonly dined on “pure white, shining rice,” known as “silver rice.”⁴⁸ Villagers would often only bring leftover bits of vegetables for children staying at places such as inns and temples.⁴⁹

In the final months of the war, children were forced to survive on even smaller quantities of food. Hosts and teachers did the best they could to stretch every morsel and distribute evenly, but empty stomachs had little room for illusions about aiding the war effort. One teacher from Tokyo’s Daizawa national school, which had relocated to Asama hot springs in Nagano, lamented that it was “pitiful...to see the children lament when they took off the covers of their lunch boxes, to find them only half full.”⁵⁰ One student remembered finding a western cookbook on the shelves of a farmhouse to which she had been evacuated. The book had pictures of “roast beef, Spanish omelet, Scotch egg. It became my secret pastime to stare at the beautifully taken photos and read the book over and over.”⁵¹ Many schoolchildren, in fact, were reduced to eating only watery gruel.⁵²

For the unfortunate students who were forced to fend for themselves or under the care of less compassionate minders, the culinary selection became quite primitive. Many students were reduced to eating non-poisonous weeds, bracken, ferns, and “potato sprouts thinned by farmers.”⁵³ One sixth grader was instructed to catch frogs and dry them “for food in preparation for the decisive battle on the mainland.”⁵⁴ The scarcity of food was partially rivaled by the lack of proper and adequate physical and mental health care and concern for hygiene. The quality of health care greatly depended on several factors—and most importantly, the evacuees’ location, which dictated the number of physicians available, the quality of healthcare, and climate factors which would affect the amount of time a child could spend in fresh air and the harshness of the weather.

Although many evacuee groups did suffer varying levels of maladies, most children came through the war in relatively good physical health. Many groups had no major outbreaks of contagious diseases such as the students from the Minamizakura national school in Tokyo, who had relocated to the Kinugawa hot springs in Tochigi prefecture, reported only experiencing colds.⁵⁵ Students from Daizawa national school in Tokyo fared somewhat worse, as they, with nearly 2,000 other schoolchildren, shared a single physician along with local residents in Asama. Children in groups where hygiene was either not stressed or not enforced could contract group-related illnesses. One child in such a group remembered that bathing was rare and when, combined with malnutrition, caused these children to develop “small pink spots...which was filthy with grime. It was a skin infection

48. Sato, 233.

49. Aoki, 172.

50. Havens, 165.

51. Hashimoto, 191.

52. Hashimoto, 191.

53. Havens, 165.

54. Takezawa, 254-5.

55. Havens, 165.

called scabies.”⁵⁶ However, it was reported that those children fell ill more frequently from improperly administered diphtheria inoculations than from an actual disease.⁵⁷

One form of widespread mental trauma was homesickness, which was written about often by teachers and school administrators, who seemed to be at a loss to treat it. Even at the beginning of evacuations, symptoms of homesickness immediately manifested. For about a month, a fifth-grade teacher had to deal with boys crying that they wanted to go home, at night, while others wet their beds. It took about a month to get used for them to their living arrangements.⁵⁸ Some administrators tried to ignore homesickness, such as one with the Minamizajura group, who wrote that “as food conditions worsened, their bodies naturally declined....but psychologically they were all fine.” Anecdotal evidence suggests that most children, owing largely to their homesickness, suffered from depression. Records from Ochanomizu National School in Tokyo indicate that all twenty-two of their pupils lost weight between April and August 1945, during their evacuation to Nagano prefecture, which officials attributed to depression.

Homesickness became such an epidemic that school administrators from the Daizawa national group, which had located to Asama hot springs, began to monitor their students’ letters in order to ascertain their state of mind. In addition, they disallowed visitors for two months, in late 1944.⁵⁹ In August 1944, one sixth-grader wrote:

Mother, please listen to Mitsuko’s on great request. Mother, as soon as this letter arrives, please come to see me that very day. Please, mother.

Mother, every day Mitsuko goes on crying. Everyone teases me. When a lunch box was missing from our group, I was told by the teacher that I must have stolen it. Everyone tormented me and ostracized me.

Mother, Mitsuko might die if you don’t come to see me. Please bring a bowl with a little rice. I am so hungry, I can’t stand it. All we ever get as a side dish is pumpkin every day. Mother, please. As soon as this letter arrives, come right away, OK? By all means come.

Mitsuko.⁶⁰

When visitation restrictions were lifted, parents began arriving with food, which was shared with everyone in their child’s class. In all, the experiment was a failure, as the parents eventually had to leave and the cycle of loneliness began all over again.⁶¹

The Transition From Students to Laborers

Although most students had begun their evacuations attending school full time, they increasingly were used for state-mandated or local labor. By the end of the war, some

56. Sato, 254.

57. Ibid.

58. Hayashi, 254.

59. Havens, 165.

60. Havens, 165-6.

61. Havens, 166.

schools had nearly closed altogether, while others carried on with just two or three hours of classes, every other day.⁶² From the beginning, students had been required to help the local farmers to provide their food, but they soon found themselves substituting for the manual labor that men had provided before they were shipped off to the war. Younger children often picked plants, such as moss, while older students would pick bracken. Students would also plant rice, sweet potatoes, and pumpkins, and cut wheat and field grasses.⁶³ By the end of the war, as supplies were becoming scarce, the government requested that the students be used even more to collect food and other crops. One teacher's diary noted that on 23 July 1945, sixth graders were instructed to collect: Ramie: 50 lbs; wisteria bark 100 lbs, bamboo bark 165 lbs.⁶⁴ Schedules from Tatsuoka national school, which had been relocated to Iida, reveal that the students helped with a variety of agricultural chores, including "treading wheat plants, opening new lands, cultivating silkworms, cutting rice plants, placing topsoil in paddies, and mowing weeds."⁶⁵ In addition to agricultural labor, students were often enlisted to ferry supplies from remote locations to their school to await pickup or further transportation.

In the last year of the war, students were being increasingly used for military labor. Students in rural Shimozuma were instructed to "dig a hole," which eventually became an anti-tank trench and "octopus holes."⁶⁶ Many children had to harvest fodder (grass, etc.) for military horses, which other classes were sent to military stables to feed and clean them.⁶⁷ If there was a military project nearby, children were be enlisted to help carry supplies to a worksite or act as a link between sites. Children were frequently instructed not to ask about, or to examine their cargo, and were reprimanded for asking questions about what they were carrying.⁶⁸ One teacher's short diary entry certainly demonstrates the severe conditions under which the children were often required to perform: "Carried charcoal from deep in the mountains five miles away, drenched by evening shower. Spurred on pupils by saying it was all for victory's sake."⁶⁹ However, a school principal's report indicates that there may have been some perks for the children if they served on agricultural labor detail. He found that, despite the hard work, students found "going on labor service one of their greatest pleasures because at a time when food was very scarce they would receive sweet potatoes for working on the farms."⁷⁰ If children were working near a base, they were told not to look at the buildings or equipment, and not to report anything they did see, even to their parents, or it would be a violation of national security regulations.⁷¹

War Follows the Evacuees

62. Rubinger, 70.

63. See Shimizu, 187 and Hashimoto, 191.

64. Shimizu, 187-8,

65. Havens, 163.

66. Sato, 236.

67. *Ibid.*, 237.

68. Shimizu, 187.

69. Shimizu, 187.

70. Havens, 163.

71. Sato, 238.

Ironically, even though most of the children had been evacuated to preserve them from the onslaught of American aerial attacks, the sheer numbers of airplanes flying overhead continued to threaten the lives of the evacuees. Although some rural areas had initially been free from the threat of aerial attack, the construction of nearby military bases or the storage of war materials made them targets later in the war. As a precaution, school was sometimes cancelled when bomber formations flew overhead. One eighteen-year-old substitute teacher recorded on 12 April 1945 the passing overhead of twenty-five P-51s and 250 B-29s, at which time students were dismissed and sent home.⁷² If possible, classes were rescheduled to make up for the lost time.⁷³ Students went through training drills to save the Imperial Rescript on Education and the portrait of the emperor in case their school was bombed.⁷⁴

Unless the raids directly affected the school, opportunistic instructors often found ways to integrate the bomber formations and air raids into their curriculum, while the children's open minds often saw more than military machinery flying overhead. One such example of this took place in mid-1945, when students observed a Japanese interceptor slam into a B-29 that was flying overhead. The children shouted "Banzai!" which prompted the teacher to have them write an essay on their emotions.⁷⁵ Students often found that the planes taught them about their own world, as well. One child ironically described a fact the bombers taught him: "Around noon, a black cluster rose up from the water's surface way off on the horizon... it was a large formation of B-29s heading for Mt. Fuji... it was then that I found out that the earth is round."⁷⁶ Although the children may have taken something positive from watching the planes, the effects of their deadly raids was well understood. Some students, on seeing the planes, would yell "bastards!"⁷⁷

Initially, Japanese air defenses were able to mount a threat against the vast American bomber formations. Because of this, fighter escorts stayed close to the bombers, and would rarely venture off on their own. As the war raged on, Japanese air defenses as a whole had become effete, and launched ever fewer fighters to meet the long-range bombers. Free of their pursuers, bomber escort fighters could often leave the formation. The rules of engagement in total war encouraged pilots to expend their remaining ordnance on "targets of opportunity." Children working in groups in the open country or children walking to and from school could not be differentiated from soldiers at attack altitudes. Although parents continually admonished their children to work under the protection of trees, large-scale harvesting had already greatly reduced the tree cover near even the smallest of towns. Also, during warmer months when most agricultural work took place, children typically wore traditionally lightly colored summer clothes, which made them more obvious targets.⁷⁸

Interestingly, dodging bullets was often viewed as some kind of sport. One child described his experiences with the planes that would dive against him and his companions.

72. Shimizu, 187.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. Nakagawa Akihiro, "A Boy, Fleas, and the War's End," in *Senso: The Japanese Remember the Pacific War*, ed. Frank Gibney and trans. Beth Cary (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 253.

77. Hashimoto, 191.

78. Sato, 237.

You would put your courage to the test. On hearing the planes banking, you'd see how long you could go without flinching. How brave could you be? ... You'd just throw yourself flat, and raise your head to watch the plane... You can tell if they are aiming at you. Then you see sparks fly... You learn to judge from experience the angle of the sparks. When they flash at forty-five degrees, they're most dangerous. Then you closed your eyes instinctively... The instant you knew they'd missed, you'd stand up and start running. They were so low that the pilot sometimes opened his cockpit window and leaned out... I even waved at them.⁷⁹

Two factors probably combined to create this scenario. First, the children, no matter how overwhelmed by the effects of the war, were still heavily influenced by the militaristic values of courage, fierceness, and determination in the face of the enemy. American planes were obviously an instrument of the enemy, and to back down from one would be giving into the very savage, devilish beast that frontline Japanese troops stood up to ceaselessly. The second reason that the children could be rather cavalier when faced with an attacking plane is that, although fighter planes of the era were devastating weapons when used against aircraft or large ground targets, they were rather ineffective against individuals.

Conclusion

The stated goal of the evacuation process was to allow children to continue their education; however, the state clearly made few provisions to ensure that this would be accomplished. Why, then, were masses of children evacuated into the countryside? Obviously, the children, educated or not, were in great peril living in cities that were being attacked repeatedly. It would be unfair to assume that the Japanese state's motives were not without some measure of altruism. Although further research could reveal that pressure was exerted against politicians to save the lives of children, the same research will most likely reveal that the state considered the children to be a form of human capital—worth preserving for use during the war.

The state's willingness to treat its children as a form of material wealth did not differ from how it treated anyone else in the educational structure. Without regard for their status, or for the pupils they taught, male teachers were increasingly called into military service, leaving inexperienced recent graduates, or males who were physically or mentally unsuitable for military service to teach. Ironically, this resulted in increasing opportunities for women to become teachers, an occupation that was available to them only in limited forms before the war. Previously, the state had generally considered women unsuited to teaching. Therefore, in essence, the state was willing to enlist, as educators, those whom it considered to be less qualified instructors.

The increasingly demanding work duties given to the children are direct evidence that the state needed immediate muscle power more than future mental prowess. Children were supposed to work to earn a portion of their keep, but their use as manual laborers or to draw haulage clearly extended beyond reasonable expectations. Even after the children completed their compulsory six years of education, they were normally shunted immediately into groups, organizations, or schools that facilitated military preparation (primarily males) or to work in manufacturing (both genders). In addition to the hard labor

79. Sato, 237-8.

and poor instruction, the state failed to ensure that students and their schools had the necessary supplies to attain the ultra-nationalistic educational goals that had been stipulated in the National School Ordinance of 1941. If anything, the state should have been concerned with the spiritual upbringing of the children, but, instead, increasing demands sped up the state's need to utilize children for its own militaristic agenda.

In the end, the Japanese state's efforts to evacuate schoolchildren to the countryside was similar to its overall war effort: ill-considered, under-funded, and inappropriate for a long, drawn-out conflict with a superior foe. In the case of the children, at least many of them had the opportunity to survive the intense bombings undertaken in many Japanese cities, but the state and its ill-considered plans could not protect them from the war. In fact, the Japanese state's poor planning ensured that the war came to the children in many different forms. Instead of outright death, there was malnourishment, mental and physical abuse, corvee labor, severe homesickness, and an understood fear that in the absence of a Japanese victory. A great majority of these psychological and physical injustices manifested themselves within the survivors as a reluctance to speak about or even acknowledge their experiences. As these survivors have entered their twilight years, many of them have formed reunion and alumni groups to share their stories with others. Thankfully, the Japanese state's efforts, for all of its flaws, preserved the lives of these children so that they still meet with one another again, on much more peaceful and serene terms.

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