Japanese Reflections on World War II and the American Occupation

A. Porter, Edgar, Porter, Ran Ying, Porter, Edgar

Published by Amsterdam University Press

A. Porter, Edgar, et al.
Japanese Reflections on World War II and the American Occupation.
Amsterdam University Press, 2017.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/66619.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/66619

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2366400
The Attack

On December 2, the First Air Fleet aboard the flagship Akagi received the formal order to “Climb Mt. Niitaka,” the signal to proceed to Pearl Harbor for the lead attack. On December 6 the First Air Fleet proceeded to refuel their planes and the Akagi raised the Z flag, the de facto national flag with the red sun centered against a white background. At 6:00 a.m. on December 8 (Japan time) the First Air Fleet launched the first wave of attack. At 7:00 the next wave left the Japanese aircraft carriers. At 7:48 the planes arrived at their target. The attack began by bombing and strafing first the military base of Kaneohe. Then the leader of the attack force signaled to his pilots “To, To, To,” giving the order to begin bombing the principal target, Pearl Harbor. Five minutes later he sent the message “Tora, Tora, Tora,” the signal that the attack was not opposed and success had been achieved in surprising the enemy. By 10:00 the first wave of attackers had returned to their carriers. The attack continued for the next several hours, however, as full-size I-70 as well as midget submarines targeted military bases around Oahu. At 1:15 the Japanese command ordered the attack to break off, and the fleet began returning to port, leaving the occasional submarine to harass American ships in the area.

Years later, Yuji Akamatsu, one of the pilots trained in Saiki who worked in his family fish paste business after the war, sat eating and drinking as he recalled the attack for young people asking about his exploits. Enjoying his replenished cup of sake, a relaxed and smiling Akamatsu began, “It was really no big deal. Enemy fire in those days was so inaccurate; it wasn’t that dangerous.... The only scary part, he said, was “coming over the mountain, flying so close to the ground that the trees swayed from the turbulence created by the plane’s propeller. We got so close to the ships, there was really no chance of missing.”

The damage done by the surprise strike was heavy, but results proved far from perfect, as the American aircraft carriers were not in port at the time

---

1. The date of attack in Japan was December 8, while it was the morning of December 7 in Hawaii. The date was chosen in part due to the assumption that a Sunday morning would find the U.S. fleet relaxed after a late Saturday night.
3. Quoted in Helm.
and thus not taken out. Final figures show that a total of 2,403 members of the military and civilians in Hawaii died in the raid, most of them navy personnel. Three ships were totally destroyed: the battleships Arizona, Oklahoma, and Utah. Serious and moderate damage was inflicted on more than a dozen other ships, but eventually most of them returned to fighting shape. A total of 162 U.S. aircraft were destroyed, mostly on the ground. Meanwhile, Japan lost 29 aircraft, one I-70 submarine, and five midget submarines. Japanese dead were estimated at 129, more than half from the I-70 and the midget submarines.4

No one in Japan besides those directly involved in the planning and implementation of the attack had any indication there was to be an attack. They could not know how their world was about the change. Morimasa Yunokawa, a 20-year-old cadet in the National Naval Academy in Tokyo at the time who would eventually serve in Oita City and Usa as commander of a kamikaze unit, remembers hearing about the Pearl Harbor attack on the radio, just like other Japanese citizens.

None of us at the Naval Academy had any privileged information about the attack. After the public announcement, the students assembled for a general meeting. The head of the academy addressed us. He announced that Japan had begun war on the United States and England. He proceeded to instruct us to continue focusing on our studies and not be distracted by the war. We all knew, however, that we would soon join the fight against these new enemies. I'm sure everyone had different feelings, but I thought, Banzai!! There were a few people who thought going into war against the Anglo-Saxons was a bad idea for Japan. They thought Japan was in danger. Only a few thought this, though. And I was ready.

People in Oita had expected not war, but a peaceful resolution to tension with the United States, at least if they paid attention to the local newspapers. On December 6, for example, the local newspaper reported that negotiations with Washington were heading toward a peace agreement, despite little progress. Everything changed on December 8, when a local radio announcer interrupted regular programming, saying that there was important breaking news and warning, “Do not turn off your radio – This is of utmost importance.” The broadcast went on to describe the attack on Pearl Harbor. On December 9, newspaper headlines gave details of the

4 Slackman, pp. 308-309.
attack on Pearl Harbor, as well as simultaneous attacks on Guam, Manila, Hong Kong, and Malaysia. The battleships *West Virginia* and *Oklahoma* were destroyed, it said, with four aircraft carriers and four more destroyers heavily damaged. Japan, it reported, lost only a few planes and no ships.\(^5\) While these initial reports proved exaggerated and erroneous in specifics, success at Pearl Harbor energized the population and everyone was exhorted to defend the country.

The front page of the Oita newspapers, like those all across the country, carried the country’s formal declaration of war as presented in the emperor’s Imperial Rescript, which justified this expansion of the war against the Western powers as a response to the United States’ and Great Britain’s threatening behavior toward Japan and their interference in the peace of East Asia, especially China. The call for unqualified dedication from the citizens of the country appears in the final sentence:

> We rely upon the loyalty and courage of Our subjects in Our confident expectation that the task bequeathed by Our forefathers will be carried forward, and that the sources of evil will be speedily eradicated and an enduring peace immutably established in East Asia, preserving thereby the glory of Our Empire.\(^6\)

**Rallying the People**

Editorials in Oita City newspapers focused on the coming challenges and encouraged the people to prepare for war. One stated:

> The negotiations for the continued efforts to assure the Greater East Asia Co. Prosperity Sphere have fallen apart and the United States was trying to prevent us from building it. We were surprised that negotiations did not work out and they tried to stop us. However, looking at history, we have not been dominated and we win wars waged on other countries. We have fought a hundred battles and won a hundred battles in the past five years. Although not an easy decision, we are confident we can win. They see us as a small economy but we are not. In this fight, to support our troops, we will ask for sacrifices because hard economic times may

\(^5\) *Oita News (大分新聞) (Oita City, Oita Prefecture, Japan)*, December 6, 1941, pp. 1-2.

\(^6\) *Japan Times and Advertiser (Tokyo, Japan)*, December 8, 1942.
fall on us all. This is a long-term war and you must be prepared. But if we unite as a nation, we will without a doubt be victorious.\(^7\)

The chairman of the Oita City business association released a statement of defiance for the citizens: “We have fought in the Russian and Chinese wars but this is unlike anything we have experienced before. ‘One million souls, one heart’ is no longer just a phrase but truly represents what we need now. I support our leaders and our nation. This will be a long war but I will be resilient and we will win.” The mayor of Oita City was also quoted: “We have gone up against big countries and been victorious before. Now we will be even more earnest as we fight against two of the largest nations.”\(^8\)

In the local newspaper of December 10, 1941, the governor of Oita Prefecture issued the following statement, setting the tone for the next four years of war:

> At long last we are at war with the unrestrained barbaric British and American nations. In order to establish prosperity and peace in East Asia and protect the existence of our empire, we must wage this war against England and America. Our emperor has addressed this nation with a declaration of war which has been a long time coming. This is going to be a long war that we must endure in a calm and collected manner. With the cooperation of our people, the emperor’s invincible army and the government, we will build a trusting relationship, working together to fulfill our ultimate goal. To support the building of Japanese military, we must establish a consistent productive force and a stable economy. For a stable and safe future of Japan, we must carry on the establishment of the Greater East Asian Co. Prosperity Sphere with no delay.”\(^9\)

Public support for the war with these new enemies was both highlighted and encouraged through the local press. “It has been a day since the British-American-Japanese War began. In Beppu, the emperor’s declaration of war has ignited the passion of the people, as patients dressed in white from the Beppu Military Hospital and students from the Nankokumin School marched through the night in celebratory prayer. The citizens met throughout the city, strengthening their resolve. Citizens throughout the city feel

---

\(^7\) *Oita News*, December 9, 1941, pp. 1-2.

\(^8\) Ibid. While the attacks on Pearl Harbor were aimed at the United States, attacks in Hong Kong and other British colonies initiated war with Great Britain at the same time.

\(^9\) Ibid., December 10, 1941, pp. 1-2.
angry toward the brazen arrogance of our enemies." This was followed by a call from the newspaper to “join us at Haruki Shrine on December 11 at 14:00 to support the efforts against the enemy countries.”10

Finally, showing an early indication of just how big an impact this war would have on the local populace, especially its school-aged children, the newspaper headlined a story, “Short Summer Break and School on Sundays: Speeding up Graduation for the War Effort.” It read, “In order to speed up the graduation of second-year vocational school students, there will be more classes during the summer and on Sundays as well. This will be implemented from the school year starting April 1, 1942. Summer breaks will be shortened to between one and three weeks long and the third school year will begin in January and end in September. Students will attend school on Sundays twice a month.”11

The attack on Pearl Harbor made striking impressions on the young people in Oita. Takafumi Yoshimura was ten years old and a student in the small town of Usa. When asked to relate his first memory of the war, he recounts:

The date of December 8, 1941, was imprinted in my mind clearly. It was a cold morning, and I went to school as usual. All the students gathered for an assembly in the school yard. The principal announced that Japan was now in a war with America and England. He didn’t elaborate on the state of war, but I remember he was tense. I was in the 4th grade in elementary school. I was excited to hear about the war, and it never occurred to me that Japan could lose. At the time, newspapers and radio programs always informed Japanese citizens that Japan was winning, so my family and I believed that Japan would win the war easily.

This was the prevailing sentiment, especially among the school-age children. Tomiichi Murayama, the future prime minister of Japan who was then a school boy in Oita City, gives voice to the unified sense of excitement felt by the boys in his school. “I was just a kid so all I remember was that excited ‘Yay!!’ feeling.”

Toyoki Goto, son of a farmer near Oita City, was in the third grade in 1941. He remembers the Pearl Harbor attack serving as his introduction to the glory surrounding Japan’s military might. “I had no idea where Pearl Harbor was. All I knew was that we were fighting a tough war, but really

10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
I didn’t even know what war was. My teacher announced the attack to us and urged us to be ready to die for Japan. During school we drew pictures of the war. All of us either drew pictures of planes flying or soldiers shooting guns. We had nothing else to draw.”

Yonosuke Yanase was nine when the Pacific War began. “The teachers told us this, the radio told us this. It was everywhere. At home, my dad read the story from the newspaper to us. We were so excited; everyone in school was excited. For a long time, it seemed we were always winning.” Mr. Yanase remembers, “Everything revolved around dying. The teachers would tell us that we were the children of the emperor and Japan, and that dying for the emperor was glorious.” This message of glorious, expected death was engrained from the earliest years and permeated the minds and, in so many cases, the determination of these young children growing up through the war. They prepared for a martyr’s death.

To reinforce this, a story with accompanying photos celebrating the suicidal death of young naval officers in the Pearl Harbor attack appeared in the youth magazine, School Weekly: Junior Edition, in April 1942. Titled “Nine War Heroes at Hawaii,” it reported:

The heroic action of the Special Attack Flotilla which surprised the entire world at the outset of the War of Greater East Asia in the Battle of Hawaii has been revealed. The attack was planned and put into practice by First Lieutenant Iwasa and eight other officers. They carried out a thrilling exploit unprecedented in history and after performing their duties the crews shared the fate with their vessels.12

Quiet Doubts

This glorification of death and martyrdom on such a grand scale was not always prevalent in Japanese society and here it is instructive to take a step back and look at the years just preceding the rise of militarism. In fact, a strain of pacifism, or at least restraint and critical reflection on the role of the emperor and the military was not unheard of only a few decades earlier. In a widely read poem striking for its direct challenge to authority written during the Russo-Japanese War by Akiko Yusano, one of Japan’s

12 School Weekly: Junior Edition, vol. 73, no. 1, Monday, April 6, 1942. It is worth noting that this was an officially approved publication used for teaching English at a time when speaking English was under attack in some parts of the country.
most famous and controversial poets in the early part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, this sentiment is unqualified:

\textit{O My Brother, You Must Not Die}

O my young brother, I cry for you  
Don’t you understand you must not die!  
You who were born the last of all  
Command a special store of parents’ love  
Would parents place a blade in children’s hands  
Teaching them to murder other men  
Teaching them to kill and then to die?  
Have you so learned and grown to twenty-four?

O my brother, you must not die!  
Could it be the Emperor His Grace  
Exposeth not to jeopardy of war  
But urgeth men to spilling human blood  
And dying in the way of wild beasts,  
Calling such death the path to glory?  
If His Grace possesseth noble heart  
What must be the thoughts that linger there?\textsuperscript{13}

Akiko Yusano’s poem became the anthem for expressions of antiwar sentiment during this earlier war and was put to music and sung in protest meetings. During the consolidation of the militarists in the years leading up to the war in China and the Pacific, the poem was banned and the poet sidelined. It was to reappear after World War II, as recalled by a woman who was a young student at the time. “After the war, the poem by Akiko Yusano was printed everywhere, and we were taught to recite it, but most of us had never seen it or heard of it before, though we later found out how famous it had been before the war years.”\textsuperscript{14}

Such sentiment never completely died even during the war years, though the nationalist education found in the schools made it very difficult for young people to fathom anything but the glory and supremacy of Japan’s leaders and the military. It was certainly forbidden to express doubts as openly as in Yusano’s poem. Yet there were small gestures, and questions.

\textsuperscript{14} Interview with Hiroko Takamoto.
In Shanghai, the father of Shunsaku Nanri, a Japanese trading company executive who had lived all over Asia and now raised his family in that Japanese-occupied city, told his middle school son upon hearing of the attack on Pearl Harbor that Japan was now in trouble and would certainly lose this war. Back in Oita, where the language of the new enemy was increasingly under attack as a legitimate line of study, one strong principal stood up against this nationalist reaction. A student at the time, Yasuo Tanaka, remembers those days just after the attack:

At first nothing much changed. Soon English class became a problem. I was in the second year of middle school then. Everyone had strong feelings and questioned why we still held English classes, why we needed to learn the language of our enemy. However, at the time there was an English exam for the advanced-level examination, so what should we do? Principal Ono met with the students and said that not to learn English just because it was the language of the enemy was unwise. Because it was the language of the enemy all the more we should master it. In a war situation, he explained, it’d playing into our favor if we could understand what the enemy was saying. He stressed to us that, as students, we should study first before concerning ourselves with the enemy. Preparing ourselves by studying hard was our responsibility. I think Principal Ono’s sentiment was not isolated, but people wouldn’t voice it in public.

Indeed, comments such as these were rare, especially if made openly. Nevertheless, there were quiet doubts. One example of the conflicted response to the Pearl Harbor attack comes from the family of Masaaki Yano, residents of the town of Kitsuki. Masaaki was born in Canada in 1927, and his sister Megumi soon followed. His father Shizuo, the sixth of eight children, had left Japan in 1923 for a new life. This was no ordinary family he left, as the head of this household historically oversaw much of the cultivated land in Kitsuki, supervising farmers working their fields in this fertile rice-growing region. Akin to a Western manor home, known in Japan as shoya, this house overlooks much of the local farmland sitting above the Yasaka River and sits just next to the Buddhist temple that still serves the local community today.

The departure to Canada was not a popular decision by others in the family, but times were tough in Japan in the 1920s and Shizuo was bored with life in the countryside. He did not worry about abandoning his family, however, as he had two older brothers to take over the family obligations.

15 Interview with Shunsaku Nanri.
As his son Masaaki recounts, his father “flew” to Canada with his wife and began a business in strawberry production. By all accounts the family was happy there, with Masaaki and his sister growing up Canadian, speaking English at all times except around the house with their parents.

In 1933, however, Masaaki’s father was called back to Japan following a family meeting that decided he had to return to Japan and manage the family manor and surrounding lands. Uninformed that such a meeting was to be held, the sudden call to return home to run the family farm proved traumatic to the entire family. The meeting took place because, by that time, all his siblings had taken on other responsibilities.

The eldest son left home as a teacher and the second son toured the world as a military officer. So my father was told to come home, as he was the only one left to take care of the family responsibilities. Initially he was unhappy with the decision, and refused to return. Both he and his wife enjoyed their lives in Canada and wanted to stay there. The family affairs in Kitsuki were of little importance to them. However, as more pressure came, he gave in and our family left our home in Canada.

That is how, in 1933, my father, mother, sister and I moved to Japan, a foreign country to me. I was about to enter primary school. We sailed from Canada to Yokohama on the ship Hikawa Maru. We moved in the house with my ageing grandparents and all the property was transferred to my father. From the beginning I was in trouble with the language. In Canada, my name was Sam, and I spoke Japanese only at home. But now, I had to go to the temple next door to our family home every day to learn Japanese. I started by learning how to write my Japanese name properly, Ya No Ma Sa A Ki, only these six characters. When I entered school, other children made fun of me for my poor Japanese.

Masaaki Yano’s introduction to Japan was dominated by one theme. In his small rural school the nationalism in education was unquestioned, including, unlike the experience of Yasuo Tanaka in Oita City, the attitude toward speaking and teaching the language of the enemy. He recounts:

At that time, patriotic education was carried out in all of Japan. I didn’t understand much because I was small, but I do remember militarism dominating our lives. At first we heard of victories in China. After I entered high school, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, and life became even more militaristic. At the time, students were happy, because we won, we won! No, not just happy, but totally thrilled. On the radio, in the school
and at home, everyone couldn't get over the big victory. Our patriotic fervor switched from against China to against the United States and Great Britain. All things related to our enemies were condemned. English classes were banned. I felt sorry for the English teachers in our school, as they were now in disgrace.

At home the response was much more muted. “My parents,” Mr. Yano remembers, “harbored no ill feelings toward Americans and any Westerners for that matter, for; after all, they’d lived in Canada for ten years. In fact, they missed Western democracy after moving back to Japan. So they didn’t mention the war much. You could say they were neutral.” The family’s position in Kitsuki, however, was further complicated, and at the same time, enhanced, by the second brother, who had abandoned the family business to join the military. This was no ordinary soldier, but a naval officer who had risen to supreme head of all Japanese naval operations before the war.

Rear Admiral Teikichi Hori, whose family name was changed from Yano as a child when he was adopted by a neighboring family with no male heir, was one of the best-known persons to hail from Kitsuki. ¹⁶ A close friend of Admiral Yamamoto since their days in military school, he had risen to the highest ranks of leadership in the years leading up to the war, including participation in diplomatic negotiations in London and Washington, D.C., in the 1930s. Just prior to the onset of war, however, he resigned from his duties as his positions lost out to those advocating war. His nephew insists that Hori, like his friend Yamamoto, believed Japan could not defeat the United States and the effort should be on reaching a peaceful resolution rather than beginning a war. “However,” states his nephew Masaaki Yano, “Hori’s way of thinking was considered dangerous among many in the Japanese Navy. He resigned, yes, but really he was fired.” Even though there was some concern that Hori was not fully supportive of the war effort (he lived out the war in Tokyo), to be known as a nephew of such a famous military leader gave the young Masaaki not only status among his peers, but also pressure to be excessively patriotic. He had to play the super patriot to show everyone he was up to the task.

In the days following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Oita newspaper reported the enthusiasm of the entire populace, mentioning particularly the school children. One girl, talking to her friends, said, “Boys will have to

¹⁶ The purpose of this adoption was to maintain the family name for the next generation, as there were no sons in this family, but Hori never lived with his adoptive parents and stayed with the Yano family throughout his upbringing.
join the army and fight. They have to be careful fighting such big countries.” Word spread that Japan was victorious in not only Hawaii, but also Guam, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, and Shanghai. Students left school with their teachers and went to the surrounding shrines to pray for the “much needed victory.” Students from Iwata Girls High School in Oita City went en masse to the Haruki Jinja Shrine to pray for Japan’s future victories. During the shrine visits the mood was somber but, according to the reporter, “the student’s resilience was impressive.”

Skepticism began to fade even from those who quietly questioned the war when news of these early victories appeared in the press. Even young Shunsaku Nanri’s father in Shanghai, an early critic after Pearl Harbor, “soon changed his view when we won so many battles and were successful in conquering so much of Asia. He became patriotic then.”

After the attack on Pearl Harbor it was clearly dangerous to question the war anywhere in Japan, and any subtle attempt to do so was an invitation to trouble. This attitude was propagated clearly by the national publication, Bungei Shunju, a forceful voice of militarism, when it issued a clear and stark warning to all who would question the direction Japan now embarked upon, as seen in this editorial:

Unless and until we sweep away every and all influences of democracy and internationalism, we Japanese will not be able to see the truth.... We should eliminate any suspicious thoughts that lurk within academia and the press.... It is Bungei Shunju’s position that freedom of speech and publication must be strictly controlled.18

The almost total lack of press freedom was assured by the strict oversight of all newspapers and magazines in Japan during these war years. In Oita, military personnel visited the Oita Godo Press offices every day to make final decisions about which stories could be published, and how to present the news in ways that aided in the war effort. Journalist Yasuo Tanaka, writing after the war, recounts how his older colleagues had to approach their job at the Oita Godo Press. “During the war the final decisions about what went into the newspaper was made by the army. Newspapers had to be censored every day before they could be published. We never really knew

the truth, and even though some of us guessed Japan was losing the war, the government, through the military, hid the truth from everyone, so we didn't know the real story.” Shunsaku Nanri, another reporter, recalls, “The newspapers were censored by the soldiers so much that the papers couldn't even write about the weather forecast.”