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Published by

Frühstück, Sabine and Anne Walthall.

Child's Play: Multi-Sensory Histories of Children and Childhood in Japan.

University of California Press, 2017.

Project MUSE. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book.63407>.



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[136.0.111.243] Project MUSE (2025-01-19 00:40 GMT)

Reversing the Gaze

The Construction of “Adulthood” in the Wartime Diaries of Japanese Children and Youth

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On 25 April 1944, seventeen-year-old girls’ high school student Horibe Chieko was being trained to join her classmates in a factory near Nagoya; they had been mobilized by order of the authorities, removed from their homes, taken out of school, and put into a dormitory. The singular preoccupation among the girls was who was going to get leave to go home, and when. When they were told by a teacher, Mrs. Okayo, that they could not go home to see their families, Chieko wrote in her diary that “everyone’s face got dark, and we thought of our teacher.” At that point, the girls began moaning about staff members who, in addition to their teaching responsibilities, had been tasked with abetting student mobilization on behalf of the state. “That Okayo! She’s without any pity or mercy,” wrote Chieko in her diary, “We went to bed [in the dormitory] and everyone started complaining. Nobody could sleep She doesn’t understand a thing” (Horibe 1989: 25 April 1944). Chieko was hardly the first teenager to say “no one understands me;” the gulf between young people and adults was a real one then, just as it is today. Chieko and her classmates viewed adult authorities as an arbitrary and often ignorant external force, completely at odds with the youthful society in which they forged independent hierarchies, values, and rules.

From a structuralist perspective, analyzing the concept of “childhood” should require a simultaneous investigation of “adulthood,” particularly from the perspective of the youth for whom adults were the Other, but this is rarely a part of the historiography. Instead, the “new sociology of childhood” has influenced historians to look at the fluctuating, artificial categories that we have applied to age cohorts, mirroring prior and ongoing theoretical interventions in the history of race, gender, and sexuality (James, Jenks, and Prout 1998; Waites 2005; Stearns



FIGURE 8. Drawing by evacuee Noma Seizō, entitled “The Thief,” 1944, apparently depicting a child watching an adult stealing from a drawer. The drawing is preserved at the (Kyoto) State School Museum (Kokumin Gakkō Hakubutsukan).

2011; Cunningham 1998). The historical research focuses almost exclusively on deconstructing the ponderous writings of Foucauldian “specialists” like educators, social reformers, legal experts, and psychologists. Meanwhile, Mary Jo Maynes has argued that historians’ treatment of young people has mirrored their past treatment of other disempowered social groups (Maynes 2008: 116), which puts us at risk of conflating the cultural history of “childhood” with narrating children’s history (although these are inseparable subjects). To make matters worse, children tend to be heavily focused on their peers rather than adults, keeping their descriptions of the latter comparatively brief.¹

Nevertheless, adult society was a source of texts, films, images, and speech from which children drew inspiration, and young people universally recognized the power that grownups possessed over them (Rohlen 1989). Historians of education and youth have shown how adults intervened directly into the process by which Japanese children learned life writing, including the *tzuzurikata undō*, or life writing movement, that had become ubiquitous by the period of total war. Critical analysis of adult views will continue to be methodologically necessary, but young people’s views of adulthood are also crucial for the deconstruction of concepts such as “childhood” and “adulthood.”

Further, the degree to which young people were influenced by adults is dependent on how they viewed adult authority figures, so understanding the construction of

adulthood among children and youth is part of revealing the mechanisms of socialization that have affected us all. Rather than dwell on whether there is an “authentic” voice for children (or adults), this essay will simply “reverse the gaze” and see how young people, like Horibe Chieko, described grownups in their personal documents. In particular, I wish to focus on the transition from “childhood” (six to twelve years old, *kodomo* / *jidō* / *gakudō*) to “teenager” (thirteen to eighteen years old, *shōnen* / *shōjo*), and how descriptions of adults and their world changed. In wartime Japan, this transition coincided with leaving primary school and, increasingly, entering the workforce, which meant taking on more adult roles. Expectations related to gender, class, and age intersected at a time when young people’s language skills developed at rapid pace and they became more self-reflective. As the famous French teenage diarist Marie Bashkirtseff put it: “While shooting I am a man; in the water a fish; on horseback a jockey; in a carriage a young girl; at an evening entertainment a charming woman; at a ball a dancer; at a concert a nightingale with notes extra low and high like a violin . . . Seeing me with the gun, no one would imagine I could be indolent and languishing at home” (Bashkirtseff 1912: 5 October 1873).

This chapter will examine how young people wrote, in their personal diaries, about the social leaders, state officials, and family members who exercised power over them. The transition to adolescence brought great changes to juvenile subjectivity, namely: the awareness of larger, abstract social structures dominated by grownups, the identification of adults as eventual peers, and the transformation of the family from a source of security to an object of affection.

THE DEVILS YOU KNOW: INTERACTING WITH SOLDIERS, TEACHERS, AND OTHER AUTHORITIES

By 1937, the Japanese government was heavily involved in the management of society and the economy, resembling what Theda Skocpol considered a social revolutionary force, even if the values it espoused are today considered “conservative” regarding gender, sexuality, and class (Skocpol 1979; Ambaras 2006: 168). Whenever representatives of the state attempted to influence children and youth, they experienced mixed success. First, children had a weak concept of the state apparatus, discussing only the individuals with whom they had direct, personal contact, and they largely tried to obey representatives of the state as they would adult relatives. Second, while teenagers had a much stronger ability to perceive adults operating on behalf of the state as part of a network of abstract, largely unseen structures, teens also felt that these authorities were legitimately subject to personal scrutiny; in other words, teenagers embraced, endured, or sometimes challenged adults who represented the Japanese government as they sought to discover their place in society.

Evacuated schoolchildren were bombarded by Japan’s complex social networks as they became wards of local governments and groups. Kids from the city were

looked after by village leaders, barracks commanders, youth clubs, school headmasters, dormitory mothers, teachers, Women's Society (Fujinkai) members, local veterans, and ordinary village residents; the argosy of adult authority figures was intimidating, and children made an effort to get to know them, including learning local dialects.² Adults who tried to make the children laugh, or showed a little bit of kindness, were noted with greater fondness than teachers who looked after them every day. One evacuee described the delight that a particularly self-deprecating local, with a thick country accent, gave the children during a short lecture: "Itō Taisaku's talk was a lot of fun. It was all just about how great his village is. So funny. He said, 'I be Itō Taisaku, who Mister Teacher Shionoiri just introduced. I'm big and fat, just like my name says.' (太作) When he spoke like this, it was so funny, and he made all of us laugh" (Nakamura 1971: 122 [30 September 1944]).

By contrast, teenagers mobilized by authorities for war production (*gakuto dōin*) were more likely to complain about the conditions that adults inflicted on them. Even in letters home that were subject to prying eyes, teens subtly criticized the factory managers who cut their rations, writing, "When you're starving, you're willing to eat just about anything" (Takahashi 1992: 114 [1944]; also regarding the focus on food, see Kotoku 1992: 106–7 [1945]). Still, most teens embraced their role as laborers for the war effort even more aggressively than adult workers did. Girls pulled into factory work could incite each other to increase production, despite the fact that their diaries revealed they were losing weight due to the strict rationing system (Ōhayashi 1995: 95 [26 April 1945]). For these girls, the adults who managed the factory system for teenagers were judged strictly on their ability to live according to values they espoused among the young, and avoid overt hypocrisy. Consequently, some teenagers, like Sonematsu Kazuko, wanted to challenge their contradictions directly: "As a girl, I should be taking home economics, but from here on out Japanese girls cannot just busy themselves with girls' things. No, girls will have to be able to do what boys do as well. Boys must go to the battlefield. We want to go, too, but currently the state won't give us that freedom. But now the time will come when they *must* give it to us" (Sonematsu 1978: 807 [6 January 1945]). Simultaneously, however, wartime social demands, including giving up school for war work, could be disappointing for teenagers who had only recently been told to forgo their personal ambitions in favor of public service (Ōhayashi 1995: 88 [19 April 1945]). While children simply observed whether a grownup was likely to be supportive or abusive, teenagers tried to grasp the extent to which adult systems served their individual expectations regarding how the world should work.

In wartime Japan, soldiers were perhaps the most important symbols of authority; paper plays (*kamishibai*) regularly depicted idealized interactions between children and soldiers, conflating the innocence of childhood with the purity of service (Matsunaga 1939; McCowan 2015: 16–17; Kushner 2009: 243–64; Orbaugh 2015; see also chapter 9).³ Children wrote consolation letters (*imonbun*) to (unrelated, unknown) soldiers; in personal diaries, some children apparently viewed

this as an enjoyable moral obligation: “When I got home [from school] I wrote letters to the sailors in the Navy. As always, I worked hard to make the soldiers happy” (Nakane 1965: 30–31 [8 May 1945]). Some evacuated children were billeted next to servicemen, and thus had ample opportunity to reflect on the relationship they shared with these men. Other representatives of the state (e.g., teachers, evacuation officials, and barracks commanders) encouraged them to interact with soldiers as part of the latter’s rehabilitation, “consolation,” or “rest and relaxation.” Evacuated children wrote home describing how they “played” with soldiers and “got along well with them” (Andō 1990: 247 [5 January 1945]). When children spent considerable time with soldiers, they sometimes enjoyed the privileged access to rationed foods that these men enjoyed, including beef; in return, the children entertained the men:

After eating dinner with the soldiers, we had a talent show (*engeikai*). First, we sang “When I Go to Sea” (Ume yukaba), “My Song of Youth” (Waka washī no uta), “Commander Hirose” (Hirose chūsa), “Wibble Wobble” (Tekkuri tekkuri), “Jump, Jump, Jump Up” (Tobe tobe tonbi) and other games, my counting song, and the girls all sang “In the Next World” (Tsugi no yo). Then the soldiers got on stage, too, and painted their faces, and the school headmaster got up as well. We asked the soldiers to do something, so they sang, did sword dances, and performed magic tricks. Mr. Kumatani sang some songs from Isumi and Akita, then we sang the school anthem and it was over. (Asano 1984a: 249 [21 March 1945])

Interaction between servicemen and children was normalized in wartime Japan, from photos soldiers took with children (both at home and abroad) to media representations such as film, comics, novels, and paper plays. At least in Japan, where soldiering was publicly celebrated, children viewed time spent among servicemen as exciting, fun, and especially pleasurable whenever food was involved. Nakamura Naohiko described a visit to the barracks involving the consumption of biscuits, potatoes, miso soup, chestnut rice, beef, grilled tofu, spring onion soup, beans, fish, and sashimi—an incredible feast for a child in the war’s leaner years (Nakamura 1971: 126 [24 November 1944]). Nevertheless, unlike with teachers, the names and personalities of individual servicemen rarely shine through, so children wrote about them with about as much affection as a parent’s business associate bearing gifts or a distant cousin’s amusing pet dog.

By contrast, teenagers’ descriptions of encounters with the military authorities were influenced by how they perceived both their position within the broader society and the future course of their lives. Boys who entered military life early, such as teenaged flight cadets (*yokaren*), saw their superiors as tough but fair guides to a secretive world that they were eager to join. Drillmasters and instructors rapped the beds of cadets with bamboo batons, shouting, “Get up you lazy bastards,” but students like Nishimoto Masaharu listened to their explanations closely during induction, writing in their diaries, “At last, my time has come.”

These attitudes could change with greater experience in the ranks: as the end of the war approached, Masaharu began to see capricious military commanders as irrational and abusive (Nishimoto 2007: 12–16 [13–15 December 1944], 222 [30 June 1945]). , while other teenage students were eager to assimilate to military culture (Nakamura 1986: 22). In vocational (*senmon gakkō*) and higher schools as well, teenage boys composed “letters of resolve” in which they declared their desire to “give my body to the empire,” reflecting an attempt to meet the expectations of instructors who were part of an increasingly militarized education system (Akai 1968: 9). Although teenage girls were never conscripted, some found their “resolve” (*kakugo*) through interactions with male siblings or cousins in the armed forces, while others, like Yoshida Fusako, articulated sympathy for fighting men she did not personally know: “I learned of the sad fate of the [soldiers] who died on Attu. Tears fell down my face” (Yoshida 1987: 118 [31 May 1943]). Girls also looked on the technological might of the armed forces with awe as they became part of the military labor force: “On our way to Yokosuka, we were excited to see the largest aircraft carrier in the world, but it didn’t come out. They say ordinary people don’t get to see the Navy factory, but we could get a good look. It really demonstrated the majesty of our great Navy. The Yokosuka Navy Hospital was splendid. Whenever they used X-rays, an alarm would sound. The contrails from the aircraft were beautiful” (Kaneda 2007: 36 [6 November 1944]; also see Ohayashi 1995: 86 [17 April 1945]).

It is well known now, however, that teenagers drafted at all levels of elite universities, middle, and high schools had wide-ranging responses to giving up education for service (Wadatsumi-kai 1988; Seraphim 2006). As the conflict in China was heating up in August 1937, sixteen-year-old Nakano Takashi’s friend Masuda Ei’ichi sent him an antiwar poem:

War is bad
 I do not want to die, therefore
 I oppose the killing of men
 Those who wish to be killed
 Or would enjoy killing what they love
 Only those kinds of people could celebrate war
 All other people will oppose it
 I hope that you will agree with me, and forgive the foolish words of
 an idiot writing on a hot summer day
 (Nakano 1989: 148–149 [4 August 1937]).

While few doubted the importance of military authority in wartime, teenagers were far more likely than children to perceive the adults within the armed forces as flawed, arbitrarily abusive, and open to interrogation. This was particularly so if they felt that their life trajectory was being thwarted by conscription, but even

those who embraced the call to arms wanted the imperial forces to be more rational than they actually were (Nakamura 1986; analysis in Moore 2013: 188–89).

Unsurprisingly, teachers enter into children's records frequently as authority figures, and primary schoolers carefully discriminated "fun" staff from the disciplinarians. Younger children wished to win the approval of adults, and these figures oversaw the practice of life writing itself, including the *tsuzurikata undō*, as nine-year-old evacuee Nakane Mihoko's diary reveals: "During Japanese class we read everyone's composition exercises (*tsuzurikata*). Most people wrote on swimming. I also wrote about "Having fun swimming." Everyone did such a good job. In my evaluation [the teacher] wrote 'well done', but there were some corrections. I thought, *I will pay attention to fixing my errors and doing even better in areas of praise*" (Nakane 1965: 90 [25 August 1945, postwar]). Some teachers came across as stern and unlikeable, sending children on personal errands, having them labor on behalf of the school or state, or simply scolding students for simple infractions. For many first-year primary school students, however, (particularly female) staff members made a special effort to make the institution less threatening by playing games, telling tales, and refraining from scolding the children. "Today I went with mama to school," wrote Shimura Takeyo in his *katakana* diary, "When I got there everyone was already there. Teacher told us a funny story and made everyone laugh" (Shimura 2010: 30 [1 April 1940]). Teachers were seen by children as sources of amusement whenever the grownups decided to show films, invite outside speakers, or belittle themselves to get a quick laugh. Many of these events were militaristic in content, but children described such entertainments in their diaries as "fun" or "good." Primary school students recorded the names of many films, usually accompanied by *Nippon nyūsu* newsreels, with subjects including kamikaze, "unsinkable battleships," and struggles over Pacific Islands, which were sometimes the subjects of mimetic play (Iida: 3 December 1944; Nakamura 1971: 125 [7 November 1944]; Tsujii 2009: 18 November 1944; Shino 1990: 7 [28 November 1944]; Kan 1990: 41 [10 March 1945]; on *Nippon nyūsu*, see Nornes 2003). Apart from patriotic movies, schoolchildren also fondly described games that the teachers played. Card games, skiing, fishing, and other outdoor activities supervised by teachers could be the highlight of a child's term time.⁴ Schoolboy Watanabe Haruhiro, in his entry for the class *yosegaki*, wrote: "I've never had so much fun as when I played dodgeball with the dorm ladies in front of the old school" (Tsumamoto gakuryō 1945: "Dai-2-han"). Children took great delight whenever adults relaxed and joined them for snowball fights, comedy performances during student talent exhibitions, and sporting events. These were, it must be said, rare occasions, as wartime Japanese adults seemed to put a greater than usual emphasis on sternness and fortitude; nevertheless, these messages peddled by teachers were much less likely to find fertile ground in the minds of children, who were more interested in playing and being entertained.

For evacuated children, their relationships with powerful, nonfamilial adults were even more important, as siblings, old playmates, and loving parents were far away. Sometimes adults appeared as stern authority figures—elder men and women who lectured children from the city on discipline and exhorted them to work hard: “Mr. Okumura came to see us sixth graders from Osaka’s Shinpō School,” Fuji Shōhei wrote, “He told us not to complain about material shortages and learn to discipline our hearts” (*kokoro wo migaku*; Fuji 1996: 4 November 1944). Some of the evacuated children formed close relationships with the adults who looked after them in the countryside. This was true even for teachers, who gave the children a sense of continuity with home, as Shōhei’s diary shows: “Today when I was on my way back from school, the kids [billeted] in Shinshūji Temple were gathered in the main hall of Honkakuji Temple to discuss [my teacher] Mr. Takegami. Thinking, I wonder what this is about, I listened carefully—it was a surprising announcement that he will be leaving! It was like I was stuck in a bad dream, as I had learned from him for five years and like him, but it can’t be helped. That night we had a goodbye ceremony for Mr. Takegami” (Fuji 1996: 5 October 1944). Evacuees also had a “dormitory mother” (*ryōbo*) who was responsible for their security, health, and happiness outside their classroom activities and, later, their labor on behalf of the state. Newly evacuated students sometimes slept on the same futon as the dormitory mother until they became accustomed to their new lives; memoir literature is full of fond reminiscences and hagiographies regarding these women. Sometimes students, like the schoolboy Asano Takahiro, became so attached to their dorm mothers that, when these parental surrogates left, the children would cry (Asano 1984b: 269 [20 June 1945]). These relationships were utterly dependent on the children’s willingness to form bonds with adults who gave them some measure of consolation during a time of great difficulty.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, teenagers could take a different view of school authorities, particularly when they struggled to understand the rhyme and reason of the systems adults created. For those who were fortunate enough to enjoy middle and girls’ high school education, teachers still fulfilled an important role in determining a teenager’s future, so girls like Yoshida Fusako watched nervously as classrooms and groups were assigned faculty at the beginning of the year (Yoshida 1987: 116 [5 April 1942]). As Japanese teenagers began to select their own reading materials from newspapers to novels, however, the parameters of public education could feel confining. Fifteen year old Kojima Yoshitaka had little interest in what his schoolmasters in Nagoya were trying to teach him: “Actually, these days I never study and am just caught up in writing my diary. Today when I got home from school I took off my [military style] boots, ate a sweet potato, read the morning edition [of the news], did some sketching, and then read some more of Sōseki’s *Botchan*—that was my day. I just did a little bit of English homework and that dispatched my obligation for the day. I’m in trouble!” Inspired perhaps by *Botchan*’s irreverent satire of the teaching profession, the next day Yoshitaka was overjoyed

to discover that his mandatory archery practice had been cancelled, so he ducked out of extracurricular activities right away—only to be “caught” by his teacher outside the toilets. “I made him wait outside the work shed for up to an hour when he decided I’d forgotten [about my jobs] and went home. I’m going to get it tomorrow, what a worry.” For Yoshitaka, there was a far more interesting world of literature and learning outside of the schoolhouse (Kojima 1995: 96 [19 January 1944]).

For those who were being pulled out of school and into the state’s mandatory labor system, experiencing the arbitrary nature with which adults wielded power over them triggered frustration rather than playful rebellion. When sixteen-year-old Inohara Mitsuko’s youth labor factory decided to distribute winter coats based on a lottery instead of need, it triggered an uncharacteristically strident anger:

Sensei read the winning numbers. I listened as hard as I could, straining. Out of the four girls in my room, I was the only one not called. I went back to my room and cried bitterly. Why, in this world, does nothing turn out the way I want it? I don’t even want the coat anymore—I’d just give it to a girl who doesn’t even have one. But no one thinks this way except me. People only think of themselves, and I just rolled up in my futon and cried. I was overwhelmed with emotion, and wrote my mom a letter. People who won a coat are now chattering about buying tickets to visit home. I became enraged. I tried to console myself by going to bed early, but my eyes were wide open and I couldn’t sleep at all—even when I told myself that this is fate. (Inohara 1991: 15 January 1945)

Nakano Takashi, who at sixteen years old saw his teacher conscripted for service in China, looked on the older man with contempt. The teacher was, according to Takashi, probably sacked during the 1920s “military reduction” (*gunshuku*) period and forced to become a physical education instructor. Referring to the teacher’s personal philosophy as a “mess” (*mecha-kucha*), Takashi’s description of his teacher suggests that he saw the older man’s absurdities as a synecdoche of the stupidity of the adult world around him. In the style of *Botchan*’s protagonist, who gave staff members in his school nicknames like “Mountain Storm” and “Red Shirt,” Takashi had taken to calling the newly-commissioned officer “Kiln Head” (Jagama) after seeing him in a large, ridiculous white helmet. Watching the older man ride away in a train, waving with his dress-uniform white gloves, Takashi wrote: “The train whistle blew, and it rocked back and forth while moving forward. People were shouting ‘Banzai! Banzai!’ I screamed angrily: ‘Banzai, Jagama! BANZAI!’ Moving along with the train, Mr. Jagama saluted with a gloved fist, and at the entrance to the train car he stood starkly in the middle of his messed up ideology” (Nakano 1989: 154 [24 August 1937]). Thus, while young children tried to situate adults into categories such as “fun” and “strict,” teenagers were able to express a greater range of views when describing their putative superiors, including derision, which reflected their struggle to find their place in a social world controlled by such people.

For the most part, adult authorities in the personal records of evacuated school-children were inscrutable supporting actors. Nevertheless, children did value the

views of their elders, and little girls like Nakane Mihoko often worried, “I wonder if I’ve been a good girl this month? Next month I’ll be even better, and make mother and father happy” (Nakane 1965: 76 [31 July 1945]). By contrast, teenagers felt freer in directly criticizing their superiors while seeking to understand them as individuals, sometimes seeing these authorities as irrational, unfair, and stupid. The concept of “adulthood” changed significantly as children matured into teenagers, diversifying in representation depending on how the young adolescent diarist understood his or her position within larger, abstract social structures.

RULING IN THE HOME: PARENTS AND OTHER FAMILY AUTHORITIES

For young children, whether they were evacuated or forced to become refugees, separation from the home was a source of anxiety and trauma; the diaries make it very clear that, regardless of adult efforts to construct a more resilient childhood for evacuees, little children’s constant desire to go home was difficult to overcome. Evacuated schoolboy Nakamura Naohiko wrote excitedly about his father’s impending visit: “Finally dad is coming to visiting hours. If only tomorrow would come a little more quickly!” (Nakamura 1971: 126 [20 November 1944]). Fifth-grader Umamo Yōko, who was removed from Tokyo’s Shinagawa Ward to rural Shizuoka Prefecture, described her reunion with her father in an evacuation diary: “I began running, saying aloud, ‘Daddy.’ I was so happy, so happy, I couldn’t help myself. I had not seen my dad’s face in a month. I was crying. [On the next day, her class went to collect chestnuts.] I followed my dad and the others. Dad collected so many for me, so our group got the most. [After feasting on the chestnuts and other foods, her father had to leave the next day.] I was sad, but not everyone’s mom or dad could come, so I had to be strong” (Umamo 1988: 10–12 October 1944). In some cases, children did not admit to missing their parents, or feeling disappointment when reunions were thwarted, particularly if they had already taken pains to construct a heroic persona for themselves in their personal records. Sixth-grade schoolboy Fuji Shōhei worked hard to cultivate such a stance: “Today we were meant to sleep in till 8 a.m., but we were woken up at 5:30. Then, mom said to come to Fukui station because she would be there as part of a comfort service (*imontai*), so I went to see her. But orders were changed, so nine different people were sent. My mom wasn’t there, but Ueda’s uncle was there, and he gave us all kinds of things to eat and took us to Fujishima Shrine for a memorial photo. I was happy.” Nevertheless, Fuji’s longing still appeared subtly in his diary. After declaring he had “resolved to obey my teacher’s lessons,” Fuji wistfully recalled a day out with his father, writing “the weather in Osaka’s Uranama Park was so nice last autumn. It leaves in me a feeling of disappointment and loneliness. We plan to put on a happy face for the people of Fukui during our sports day” (Fuji 1996: 9 October and 5 November 1944). Authorities worked diligently to generate resilient

evacuees, but children's emotional attachments to adult relatives could not be so easily managed, even when the kids were trying to play along.

It would be wrong, however, to see the family solely as a social structure in opposition to militarism or mobilization programs. According to Fuji, adult relatives in Osaka sent military-themed toys to children evacuated to Fukui Prefecture (Fuji 1996: 24 September 1944), and other children recorded visits by cousins, uncles, and elder brothers in the service who passed on heroic war stories. The toys, clothes, and tales from family tied into the rituals organized by schools, social clubs, and evacuation authorities, becoming a part of the shared culture of children and youth:

On 6 January [1945], we prayed hard for victory, marching to Yamagata Shrine [in Yamanashi Prefecture]. We purposefully took the long route there. I also put three books in my rucksack as well as tying a headband (*hachimaki*). I used the headband dad gave me, the kamikaze one . . . The Yamanashi Youth Corps (*sei-shōnendan*) came and gave each evacuated child a lump of coal so we wrote thank-you cards for them. This week I'm the weekly head (*shūbanchō*) for our group. I'm already done being a trainee (*kyūchō*) and am now a unit commander (*butaichō*)—I lead the 2nd Unit. (Asano 1984a: 248 [8 January 1945])

Because younger children could not apparently grasp abstract concepts such as economies, governments, and war, they largely accepted what trusted adults told them about these things. That being said, the fervor with which adults supported the war could be frightening as well, even if children did not record these feelings at the time (Shimura 2010: 42).

Meanwhile, authorities may have considered teenagers adults for the purposes of labor mobilization, but their hearts appeared tied to home life as strongly as ever. Even a working-class girl like Mikawa Michiko loathed compulsory labor and wanted to go home. The arrival at her factory dormitory of a woman who had worked for years with Michiko's family was a source of considerable excitement. "When the train arrived and I saw her happy, smiling face," she wrote in her diary, "I was hit by happiness beyond words and tears came streaming down my face." The presence of a beloved friend of the family, whom the children all called "auntie," inspired Michiko to write that she could "overcome any adversity" in her life away from home (Mikawa 2002: 12 [20 May 1945]). Despite authorities' redefinition of adulthood, teenagers rebelled, and not simply because they were elites and thought they deserved better. As Saitō Tsutomu showed, Tokyo teenagers of various backgrounds organized strike actions, sabotage, and even walked away from the factory, saying "the teachers on the floor said we could go," when they wanted to return home as materials and rations ran out in the dormitories. Sometimes adults won the admiration of students when they protested working conditions, with students gathering outside factory management offices shouting "Go, sensei, go!" as a teacher shouted at a foreman (Saitō 1999: 340–48). Cultures of labor

resistance in the home exacerbated these tensions: Morizaki Azuma recalled his elder brother saying, “[Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki] murders fourteen- and fifteen-year-old boys” and “If this was a factory where the management cared more about paying deference to royals than injuries suffered by their workers, we’d smash them with a strike action” (Morizaki 1971: introduction). The reverse was also true, however: girls raised in patriotic households could bring fire to the dragging feet of unenthusiastic faculty. Girls in Osaka critiqued teachers in their high school group diary for failing to turn up to work and meal time—“I felt like the teacher should’ve been there, because even one absence will reduce war production”—and encouraging each other to carry on in the face of adversity (Fumimaro: 16 June 1945). Such dedication must have secretly terrified some staff members.

Nevertheless, teenagers’ forcible entry into the working world changed their view of the home: newfound independence inspired teenagers to see family primarily as an object of love, no longer merely a necessary source of security. In many cases, this was the direct result of experiencing independence: “Our mobilization order has come at last. The headmaster told us. I was still anxious about it when I went home. When I got home, I resolved to accept it. I will go, absolutely . . . Visiting Miura’s house, her mum said, ‘When you go, you’ll only have yourself to rely on.’ This hit me like a ton of bricks” (Shinozuka 2007: 21 [21 September 1944]).

Some teenagers, including sixteen-year-old Suwa Kanenori, initially embraced the new experiences that work and dormitory life afforded. Unlike the evacuees, Kanenori was excited to be on his own, working alongside his school friends in a dormitory. Once the war brought bombers to his native Kagoshima, however, Kanenori wrote at length about family back home, including the adults who had once exercised authority over him: “Today Ōzawa came for the first time, and we really got the job going. Ah, going to work is great fun. [Iwo Jima has fallen, so] I’m really worried about Kagoshima. They’re going to get it for sure. I sent dad a letter asking if everything is fine. Oh, please get through this—mom, dad, my brothers, my friends” (Suwa 1997: 58 [20 March 1945]). As for many adults, desiring independence did not mean that teens wanted to be miles away from their families. Just a few days after she was drafted and sent to the factory dorms, Inohara Mitsuko wrote in her diary, “Tomorrow at last I can go home. I am so happy. I miss my mom so much. Please, please let me go home early.” Mitsuko, who felt unready to leave home when mobilized, was no longer simply pining for the security of being in her parents’ house. After all, once Osaka was devastated by air raids, her home would hardly have been a safe haven, as she was well aware: “I bet Osaka is in a sea of flame. I began to worry about my parents at home. Then, it started to rain. Was it a blessing from heaven, coming to suppress these fires? . . . The next day we learned that Osaka’s Tenōji and Nishinari Wards were utterly destroyed. After breakfast, I went back to bed, but I couldn’t sleep. I have no energy, not until I know my family is safe” (Inohara 1991: 12 January and 14 March 1945). Kanenori’s diary went further: labor mobilization and the bombing war not only redefined his relationship

with his parents, it exposed an entire network of known and unknown adults who were negatively influencing his life.

During this world war, I have for the first time seen how things really are at school, and everything else. Up until now, things have been really easy going to school far away. Instead of coming all this way to Handa, though, I would rather be doing my best closer to home. When the decisive battle comes to the home islands this autumn, I think I'm better off at Kagoshima . . . I haven't had any letters in ten days. They've probably all been burned in an air raid. Just the thought of all of those letters burned up in my old hometown. And, I've not written any postcards or letters lately. There's no paper so we're all cutting back, but without any messages from home, in this far off town, it's really hard, so you lose all spirit. (Suwa 1997: 59 [26 March 1945])

As these accounts show, teenagers reacted differently to labor mobilization depending on many factors, but most important were their expectations for the future, which were significantly influenced by gender and class. Nevertheless, the experience of work and dormitory life birthed different views of adult relatives than those articulated by evacuated children: teenagers began to express love and concern for their family that did not involve a fear of being left to their own devices.

With the arrival of aerial bombing of the main islands, however, children and teenagers had to confront the fact that relatives could not protect them from large organizations run by hostile adults—otherwise known as “the enemy.” As children transitioned into adolescence, they wrote with greater clarity on abstract, unseen structures that victimized not only young people, but also their parents, uncles, and other affiliated adults. Children struggled to understand networks of unknown (and hostile) adult actors, sometimes viewing them through the lens of religious, supernatural, or magical thinking, as nine-year-old Nakane Mihoko's diary reveals:

At about 1 a.m. there was an air raid warning. We all woke up and went into the shelter. It was dark and I couldn't figure out what was going on, but once I calmed down I got in OK. Then after a bit the enemy planes came making an awful noise. Father looked out a little bit at the sky and it lit up. He said, “Oh! Oh! They're close.” Mother said, “It's OK, they're not that close.” Then “boom, boom, boom” went the bombs, making a terrible noise, but it didn't seem like they fell in our neighborhood. Every time I heard those noises, I prayed to the gods. Then we heard the all clear. I was so happy. I believe our house was saved by the gods, so I thanked them from the bottom of my heart. Afterward everyone laughed about how father said “Oh! Oh!” every time the bombs fell. (Nakane: 12 [4 April 1945])

Older teens saw more clearly how the bombing war was a process determined by organized adults at home and abroad. In May 1945, fifteen-year-old Kojima Yoshitaka, who had been loaded with many children onto a train, was warned of the impending arrival of Allied planes in an air raid over his hometown of Nagoya. As the train stopped, he quickly grabbed his younger brother, ran for an air raid

shelter just outside the city, and watched Nagoya being systematically destroyed. Yoshitaka's understanding of how adult systems functioned, and that the enemy targeted them, makes his diary read very differently from Mihoko's.

Nagoya is shrouded in black smoke. They say four hundred enemy planes attacked us. I pray for the safety of my father and sister. The north and east wards, as well as the suburbs of Nagoya, are under heavy bombardment . . . Looking from Tenjin-bashi, I could see smoke coming from the direction of our house, and my heart shivered with fear [*kokoro ga ononoku*]. Fortunately, in the north ward, our neighborhood was spared. I heard Mitsubishi Aircraft Manufacturing at Kami-Iida, the Mitsubishi plant at Ōzone, and other factories were totally destroyed. Rumors are growing that the prefectural and municipal government buildings, as well as the castle, were all wiped out in Nagoya . . . Fires dance in the evening sky; rumbling of the B-29 engines; firing antiaircraft; between life and death, air raids at night.⁵

The discovery, particularly in the teenage years, of a larger social environment that was beyond the control of parents and familiar adults could be an unsettling one, especially at a time of total war. An integral part of the transition from childhood to adolescence seems to have been teenagers' realization that, ultimately, they would have to navigate a world replete with complex and unseen structures and engage with adults who had no reason to treat them kindly.

CONCLUSION: POWER, HIERARCHIES, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF ADULTHOOD

Adults directly influenced the way young people wrote about themselves, and in the historiography of childhood and youth this discussion takes the form of the production of children's media, the work of education systems, or the transmission of social values. Adults also deeply affected young people, however, through directly damaging means such as psychological abuse, neglect, and physical violence. Yamada Kikue, a housewife and mother of four children, reflected on the enormous impact that adults had on young people during the war years. When the firebombing of Hachiōji began, local authorities blocked her children's entry into air raid shelters, Allied forces dropped incendiary bombs that severely injured the hand of her school-aged son, and Japanese doctors refused to treat her son's wounds at hospitals, causing the hand to be later severed in an emergency operation. "He kept rubbing and waving the stump around," she wrote, "saying, 'Fix my hand, fix my hand!' He'd ask me, 'Mama, when will a hand come out? When will I grow fingers?' . . . It was excruciating for me." At the end of the war, rationing authorities would not issue her extra cloth to fashion longer sleeves so that she could hide his scars. Teachers declined to protect her son from bullying and turned a blind eye when he was ostracized (Yamada 1975: 84–85). Adults had nearly all of the power, and one of the most important lessons of wartime youth

was that grownups were often dangerous and untrustworthy, despite what social lessons about “adulthood” may have tried to teach them.

Adulthood was an important concept for children and youth, and they formed opinions of it that were divorced from the discourse that adults generated about themselves. Furthermore, views of the adult Other went through considerable change as children matured into teenagers, encountered shifting social expectations, and discussed these issues with other young people around them—what we might consider a form of scaffolding for socialization. “Childhood” and “adulthood” were thus not merely fixed as an equally dependent binary; they were rather defined by the imbalance of power between adult authorities and the young people whom they sought to nurture. Unlike colonialism, patriarchy, institutionalized racism, or other cases where linguistically reinforced divisions were used to support “violent hierarchies,” to use Derrida’s phrase, childhood was always seen as a transient state in which the ruled would inevitably become rulers within a single lifetime. Sixteen-year-old Lena Mukhina, in wartime Leningrad, captured the vicissitudes of this process in her diary:

Sometimes mama wants me to kiss her, or embrace, and I become depressed because of the sad thoughts in my head. I shout to myself: Go on then, cry! But I must restrain myself, and in my heart I feel helpless. I always feel like something is missing. When mama isn’t home, I want her to come back, and when she is at home, I don’t want to see or hear her. To me, [she is so] boring. . . . I want to meet new people, see new faces, everything new. Something new. . . . I would love to run away somewhere far, far away . . . I want to go to a new best friend, who loves me, and tell her my sorrows. . . . But I have no one, I’m lonely. And none of this can be said. Silly mama, she doesn’t understand much. Not very much at all. (Mukhina 2011: 23 May 1941)

Thus, when teenagers grappled with the irrationality of adult social structures or redefined the home as an object of affection, they were not just reinventing their subjectivity, they were also involved in a power struggle.

Meanwhile, children had a weak grasp of the abstract concepts and structures that adults invested so much energy in creating, maintaining, and re-producing; consequently, and in their search for security in wartime, they were firstly attentive to discriminating adults as kind, helpful, and “fun.” Teenagers, at least in part due to a presentiment of their future roles in the labor force, were far more capable of, and interested in, understanding the social, political, and economic structures that adults constructed, and finding a place within them—although not every teen arrived at this point at exactly the same time. Adults’ ability to establish a rapport with young people was determined, first and foremost, by the willingness of children and teenagers to engage on their own terms; because adults wielded almost all of the power, the only weapon young people had in response was to ignore them and, in the passage of time, let the formerly powerful pass away into obscurity. As adults, parents, and teachers, we should be careful not to mistake compliance for

influence, because our power to construct them as “children” passes with time, but their power to construct us as “adults” will come to define our experience of old age.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Travel expenses, photograph equipment, and research time for this project were funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (“Remembering and Recording Education, Childhood, and Youth in Imperial Japan”). I wish to thank Sabine Frühstück, Anne Walthall, L. Halliday Piel, and Peter Cave for feedback on my work, and especially Elise Edwards for suggesting an important change in the main argument of this chapter.

NOTES

1. For example, in Kan Yoshiko’s otherwise articulate diary, her entries on adults were short: she described Ms. Kanemaru as “very nice,” feared the strict gym teacher who screamed “idiot” (*baka*), and was so upset, along with the other girls in her group, at potentially being stuck with a teacher named Yoshino that they all broke out in tears. Kan 1990: 38, 40, 42 [20 September 1944, 9 October 1944, 7 March 1945].

2. Nakamura 1971: 128 [4 January 1945] and 135 [26 February 1945]. Asano 1984b: 268 [17 June 1945]. Although he mentions only the local village *fujinkai*, by 1945 this was probably a National Women’s Defense Society branch (Kokubō fujinkai). For dialects, see Nakamura 1971: 124–27 [20 October to 24 December 1944]. Also see Umano’s teacher’s warning that they should endeavor to get the locals to “like you.” Umano 1988: 12 September 1944.

3. “Paper plays” (*kamishibai*) were put on by itinerant narrators who displayed drawings of scenes while telling a story. Although attendance was free, children who bought candy from the narrator were allowed to sit in the front of the audience. This was a popular form of mass entertainment in the first half of the twentieth century.

4. Asano Yukio recorded many games played with adults, including four squares, *hyakumin isshu*, and rock-paper-scissors for biscuits (Asano 1984b: 263–64 [2 January 1945]).

5. The Shōnai River runs across north Nagoya, and into the sea directly west of the city. Tenjinbashi, Kami-Iida, and Ōzone, were all parts of northern Nagoya or its suburbs during the war. Kojima is commenting on well-known areas around his home, and the urban systems that supported them (Kojima 1995: 14 [17 May 1945]).

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Note: Unless noted otherwise the place of publication for Japanese books is Tokyo.

Abbreviations

HmPM: Himeji Peace Museum (Himeji heiwa kinenkan)

KaPM: (Yohohama) Kanagawa Peace Museum (Chikyū shimin Kanagawa puraza, Heiwa tenji-shitsu)

NWHM: (Tokyo) Nakano Ward Local History Museum (Nakano-ku kyōdo shiryōkan)

OIPM: Osaka International Peace Museum (Ōsaka kokusai heiwa kinenkan)

- PA: (Nagoya) Peace Aichi (Aichi-ken kokusai heiwa kinenkan)
 SSM: (Kyoto) State School Museum (Kyoto-shi gakkō rekishi hakubutsukan)
 TWHM: (Tokyo) Toshima Ward History Museum (Toshima-ku kyōdo shiryōkan)
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