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JAPAN

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Civilians in Japan suffered from a long war and had the sense of the imminence of war which lasted much longer. What the Japanese describe as the Great(er) East Asian War began in December 1941 and the full horrors of total war reached the Japanese cities with the bombing campaigns of the last year of war. But what the Japanese call the North China Incident and later the China Incident were in essence the beginnings of a war against China which lasted from July 1937. There were few families which did not have sons called up for service at the front and were not affected by this war in other ways. But even before the China War, there were calls for national mobilization at every level because of Japan's isolation in the world which affected the life-styles of civilians. Emergency mobilization plans covering the whole of the Japanese economy were discussed from the Manchurian Crisis of 1931 onwards.[1]

Many Japanese civilians had a sense of impending crisis as the state made increasing demands on them over the decade from September 1931. It is sufficient to record that for the major military-naval operation which began in 1937 there was an immense need for emergency funds in addition to the budgets for which the army and navy had been competing in previous years. From this time a massive control of the economy began which affected all civilians. In March 1938 the Diet passed, despite stiff opposition, the national mobilization law which gave the government tremendous powers to intervene in the economy, including powers to conscript labour. Japan, which had already experienced a tightening of political controls for two years, came under a war economy from that date. The government placed short-term funds under its control and regulated corporate accounts. Industry had to concentrate on war needs. The old concentration on the production and export of cotton goods came to an end, depriving Japan of foreign exchange. For example,

the Toyota Company, which had originally been a cotton machinery enterprise, converted its production increasingly to motor vehicles which were required for the China campaign. This was a typical sort of switch, partly commercial to meet changing patterns of trade and partly national to meet the demands of a regulatory government.[2] A Cabinet Planning Board was established in October 1937. Among other actions it imposed a limit on imports in order to save foreign currency and set priorities for the importation of essential goods for army use.

Something of the atmosphere of the times is captured in the letters of Richard Storry, a young professor of English at Otaru Commercial College in Japan's northern island of Hokkaido. Four months after the start of the China Incident he sent his parents a letter which illustrates the attitudes of civilians as he saw them.[3] In order to avoid Japanese censorship it was handed to a P. and O. skipper calling at Hokkaido ports.

> The army started the fuss in N. China and the navy began it all in the Shanghai area, so I am heartily against this business. But I dare not say so in my normal letters as police surveillance in this country reaches incredible dimensions; the land is stiff with police spies who keep the closest watch on all foreigners.
>
> At the beginning, in July, one heard criticisms of the aggressive policy against China. Some students here wrote an article in the college paper attacking the government for its "fascism". This caused a stir, and since then students, whom I know well, have said how much they disliked the power of the military, but it is not safe to rely on these signs of dissatisfaction. The country at large, with the successful war on, supports the government ... Intelligent Japanese, who in their hearts condemn the war, cannot protest. The Conservatives like it because it rouses the "National Spirit" and develops Emperor worship. The army likes it because they like fighting. Big business imagines it will get rich by the war and young men have no idea, as a whole, of criticising their elders whom from youth up they are taught to regard as their betters. The women of course don't count. ...
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> I have been and am treated well. Even with this trouble on, the Japanese students are mostly friendly, and my acquaintances are if anything more kind and generous to me than before. The police are petty tyrants, much disliked by foreigner and Japanese alike. As I look at my students, either in a lecture room or as they drill and do manoevres in the snow, my heart aches at the pity of this war, and the wars that will come upon them. But they think it no tragedy, their greatest glory is to die in the service of the Emperor, collectively they become a very terrible fighting machine, and as they die they shout "Banzai, long live the Emperor".

Storry's experience as a foreigner in an academic atmosphere and in an agricultural part of the country may not have been typical. The first twelve months of the China Incident were a period of success for Japanese arms. In July 1938 Storry had to report: 'Personally I hardly feel any effect of the war'. But the campaigns ran

into trouble thereafter – what one writer calls 'the China Quagmire'.[4] This was a situation into which the Japanese armies were more and more drawn without coming any closer to achieving a peaceful settlement. The civilians at home were not fully aware of Japan's deteriorating fortunes, unless they had a family member involved at the front.

Civilians soon became aware that they would be affected by the total war that was developing. Government controls involved rationing, the introduction of a coupon system, central fixing of wages and prices and police campaigns against black-marketeering. The production and sale of luxury items was prohibited. Within the family there was no sugar and no sweet things were available for children. For the rest of the war period they had to be content with sweet potatoes.

Moreover, the civilians were called upon for belt-tightening and sacrifices in their daily lives. For example, we are told that the first day of every month was designated as 'Service Day for the Development of Asia' when the people had to rise early in order to visit the Shinto shrines. During that day restaurants and bars were compulsorily closed; and civilians were required to eat the simplest and poorest meals.[5] They had to be taught to 'control their appetites' for the war effort. The spartan life-style of many Japanese families became more and more restricted as the war progressed.

Japan passed her next turning-point in the year 1940. Not, as we might expect, in 1939. When the war in Europe broke out in September 1939, Japan was numb: numb because the Japanese army had sustained a frightful defeat at Nomonhan; numb because of the Nazi-Soviet Pact; numb because of the threat by the United States to end her Trade Agreement with Japan and thus threaten economic sanctions. As a result of this numbness, Japan declared her strict neutrality in the European war. Japan, like some European countries, passed through a period of 'phoney war'.

1940 began symbolically with the celebration of the 2600th anniversary of the origins of the Japanese empire, the coming to the throne of the legendary emperor Jimmu. The war in China was static; the war in Europe was moving in favour of Germany. Political dissent and anti-nationalist sentiments were driven underground. Politicians who criticized the China campaign were expelled from the Diet. The government resorted increasingly to propaganda on Japan's New Order in East Asia and the Great(er) East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere.[6] While opinions may differ on this, it would appear that these doctrines had greater impact in boosting morale at home than they did overseas. Political parties were in effect merged into a larger unit when the Taisei Yokusankai was founded in October. Agencies like the Foreign Ministry which were on the whole internationalist in complexion were purged and had their wings clipped and the range of their activities reduced. Neighbourhood

watch groups (*tonari-gumi*) began to ensure at the local level the loyal pursuit of national objectives or, as some Japanese have called it, 'ultra-nationalism' (*etsu-kokka-shugi*). As a result of all this, the population was cowed. The people had been infused with 'the national spirit' from their earliest schooldays. But even this was tightened up with the introduction of national education in April 1941.

The Japanese education system had served an important purpose in the creation of the nation-state. It now had an essential role in moulding the thinking of children towards the war and, by that means, influencing the attitudes of families. In the spring of 1941 a major tightening took place when the traditional *Shogakko* (elementary school) was abolished and a new *Kokumin Gakko* (National School) substituted. The objects of the new education were set out in the *Kokumin Gakko-rei*. Its prime purpose was to organize primary education in order to achieve the 'way of the empire' and 'the basic training of the nation'.

The practical consequences of this may be seen in some of the changes in curriculum which writers have described. School textbooks (*tokuhon*) were already standardized and approved by the Ministry of Education. They carried strong ideological overtones in their stories and the morals to be drawn from them. For example, songs to the tune of Auld Lang Syne which were deeply rooted in the pre-war educational system were now prohibited for use in the classroom as they were considered to be over-sentimental or too western in ideas. Songs that carried echoes of foreign tunes were to be discouraged. Instead the approved songbooks included the national anthem, *Kimigayo*, and songs commemorating Empire Day, *Kigensetsu*, the Russo-Japanese war, the Rescript on Education and other national events.[7] It may not be too much to say that this all served the purpose of creating a nationalistic education in order to fit the children for the disciplined life as soldiers and dedicate them to the war effort.

Needless to say, these reforms in the educational field applied also to physical education. Apart from military drills, which had been incorporated in the curriculum for boys' education, special encouragement was given to training in the martial arts. For some time past the Education Ministry, which dominated the public sector of education, had been commending the martial arts as something uniquely Japanese and as a form of training which would increase the sense of national identity among the young. *Kendo* (fencing) was made compulsory for boys. Just before the war with China broke out, a nation-wide programme of *judo* training was formally introduced; and *judo*, archery and *naginata* were offered at girls' secondary schools as optional subjects. By 1941 these arrangements passed from the high school to the elementary school level as boys at the top of elementary schools were specially instructed in *judo* and *kendo*. Two years later the physical education syllabuses of

schools were completely modernized for schools at each level from elementary school to college and instruction in the martial arts was made compulsory.

This emphasis was in accord with the educational ceremonials which increased in the war years. The Education Rescript (*Kyoiku chokugo*) which had been promulgated by the Emperor Meiji in 1890 was officially and ceremonially read out in all schools. It brought home to the children, in spite of the difficulty of its language and concepts, that the fundamental character of the Japanese nature was loyalty and filial piety and the need for self-sacrifice of the individual for the state. While this was something that had been built into the school system over many years, it naturally acquired a special relevance for Japanese during the war years. It encouraged the notions of national self-sufficiency and self-confidence, especially on the home front.

When the emperor issued his rescript on 8 December 1941 declaring war against the United States and Britain, a new phase of Japan's war effort began. Initially there was great popular exuberance, the exuberance of military success and of economic achievement. Thus, rubber and oil which had previously been scarce suddenly became plentiful because of the conquests of Malaya, Indonesia and Burma. But this was short-lived. Merchant shipping became scarce and Japan lost the command of the seas by the end of 1942. She even had to appeal to Germany to ask whether she could think of some way of absorbing some of the raw materials from her newly-acquired territories.[8] Setbacks in the war effort were concealed. Partly losses such as the defeat in June at the Battle of Midway were not adequately reported to headquarters. Partly military defeats were presented to the people as 'strategic withdrawals'. How far the people understood how the war was going is still hard to tell.

But the civilians were in no doubt about the hardships which the war was causing to their everyday life. Scarcities of food have been vividly portrayed by Lady Toshiko Marks, herself a schoolchild in wartime Japan:

> In 1942 the main foods (rice, miso, soya beans, salt, sugar etc) and clothes (cotton, wool, leather etc) came under government control and people could acquire these foods only through rationing. Clothes became unobtainable.
> In early 1943 people started suffering from a desperate shortage of food. Even rationed food was at a minimum and starving people had to go either to the black markets or to nearby farmers in order to get extra food: sweet potatoes, radish, carrots, eggs, flour and anything else to supplement the rations.
> Children were often taken - or sent by their mothers - to carry food, since small children seemed to escape the checks of the 'economic police'.[9]

Gradually food grew more and more scarce. Rice, the staple of the Japanese diet, had traditionally been imported to about one-quarter of Japan's needs. With the coming of war the number of people involved in agriculture dropped, while the demand of the armed and emergency services for supplies increased. The allied blockade of the seas exacerbated the problem and communication with Manchukuo, a major supplier of soya beans, and China grew more and more difficult. When the bombing of Japan began in earnest, the fairly rudimentary network of arterial railway lines was frequently dislocated. All in all, there was a deterioration on all fronts.

Food shortages led to malnutrition and disease. By the end of the war the Japanese civilians were down to a starvation diet – and one with nutritional limitations. Fish was increasingly in short supply. Vegetable and fruit cultivation which was labour-intensive had to be neglected. Dependent on night-soil and comparatively primitive, vegetable production was reduced by 81 per cent. Disease of many sorts from diarrhoea to scabies and tuberculosis spread alarmingly. The medical profession was reduced and hospitals were no longer able to cope. Medicines and dressings were seriously lacking. If there had been the prospect of release from these predicaments, morale might have been kept up, but the leaders knew – and the people may have had an inkling – that the situation could only go from bad to worse. The gamble that the military and naval leaders had initially taken on a successful short war had been shown to be illusory. The victims were the Japanese people. It is estimated that civilians in Japan suffered more than in any major belligerent country.[10]

A new chapter in the experience of Japanese civilians began with the coming of air-raids to Japan's home islands. The first Doolittle raid on Tokyo in April 1942 was experimental from the American side and an unexpected and unwelcome development for the Japanese government. It was also a new experience for Japanese civilians who had thought that they would be immune from the aerial bombing of the European war. Air-raid precautions were introduced immediately and children were required to carry gas masks wherever they went. Towards the end of 1943, well-to-do people started to move privately to their ancestral roots *(furusato)* in the countryside. This was intended to avoid the expected air-raids in the cities and to come closer to the sources of foodstuffs. After the capture of Saipan, the Americans were able to attack Tokyo, some 1350 miles away, with their B29 Superfortresses. The first of these attacks took place in June 1944 and they became more regular from October onwards. On 9-10 March 1945 the first full-scale incendiary attack on Tokyo took place. Great as was the devastation, it has to be said that many families had by this time left the capital and schools were already

suspended. It was the fathers who were left to cope with the emergency. Air-raid shelters came too late to be of great service and were of simple construction. When the incendiary bombings spread to 66 other prefectural cities, food supplies dried up, communications became uncertain and absenteeism spread to ordnance factories. Professor Coox has reckoned that

> the B-29s destroyed 40 per cent of Osaka and Nagoya; 50 per cemt of Tokyo, Kobe and Yokohama; and 90 per cent of Aomori. At least 241,000 persons died, and 313,000 were injured in the raids against the homeland. Conventional bombing killed almost as many people as did the two atomic bombs in August.[11]

Japan had a formidable airforce; but its fighters were unable to intercept the waves of incoming bombing. It suffered from shortages of aviation fuel and from an inadequate early warning system. The military authorities were inclined to conserve their air resources in order to prepare for the *kessen*, the expected 'decisive battle' including the allied invasion of Japan's home islands.

Considering the volume of air attacks and the danger of the impending invasion, it is surprising how slow the Japanese bureaucracy was in addressing the problem of civil defence. It seems to have been overconfidence about Japan's invulnerability that led to the long delays. It was not until November 1943 that government plans for evacuating important sections of the population were announced. There were hopes that one million evacuees from Tokyo who were not required for industry could be moved to the countryside by September 1944. Just short of two million people had been moved by the spring of the following year out of a notional population of 8-9 millions. By this time the transport network was hardly able to service a major evacuation programme. This meant that much reliance had to be put on the provision of air-raid shelters for civilians in the city areas. Here too the plans were very late in appearing. Theoretically every citizen of Tokyo had a shelter to go to; but the protection which they afforded was questionable and their appropriateness for protection against incendiary bombing was doubtful. It is perhaps true that the inadequate provision of civil defence – for whatever cause – made little difference in face of the intensity of carpet-bombing of Japanese cities carried out in the spring and summer of 1945. As Dr Gordon Daniels writes,

> It is impossible to refrain from some mention of the policy of the Japanese towards their own civilians. The time and effort they directed towards air-raid prevention was surely wholly inadequate and the failure to evacuate Tokyo with more urgency, and to devote more resources – when they were still available – to shelters, seems to show culpability of a high order.

He ends with what might be an epitaph for the Japanese experience during the war years: the 'rulers chose their own prestige before the welfare of their own citizens.'[12]

The *kessen* which was so much feared came ever nearer with the American capture of Iwojima in March 1945 and the savage battle of Okinwawa which followed. The prime minister, General Koiso, resigned on 5 April just before the surrender of the Germans, Japan's only remaining ally. Admiral Suzuki replaced him with a conviction to prepare for the worst but also to cultivate the paths of peace. For the helpless civilian, it was apparent that the *kessen* would have to be fought with a shortage of manpower and of weapons. However the authorities shuffled the manpower, the resources of Japan's home islands were inadequate. The Voluntary Military Service law which passed the Diet called up for service all males between 15 and 60 and all females between 17 and 40. The propaganda of resistance was formidable. The Japanese were told that, while the Americans were decadent, the Japanese had a spiritual strength which would carry them through. The resistance of Okinawa showed that the Japanese army had what might be called a 'Tiger in its Tank'. Would a similar power of resistance exist among the civilians? The allies may have thought so. Certainly they prepared elaborate measures for counter-propaganda. The aircraft that flew to Japan jettisoned large quantities of leaflets, telling the Japanese what was going on in the war and calling on them for surrender. In short, Japan's eight years of war brought untold suffering to her civilians.

But the sufferings of civilians seems to have had comparatively little impact on the government's decision for peace. As we survey the agonized discussions which took place in the decision-making bodies in July and August, we must conclude that the voice of the civilians went largely unheard. The cabinet and the army were reluctant to accept the allied terms calling for unconditional surrender. These had been reiterated in the Potsdam declaration of 26 July:

> We call upon the government of Japan to proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all Japanese armed forces... The alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction.

The prime minister decided to react to this by *mokusatsu* (silence). Ten days elapsed. Then the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on 6 August; the Soviet armies entered Manchuria and Korea two days later; and on 9 August the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki in the western island of Kyushu. The Potsdam declaration was accepted at a joint meeting of the cabinet and the military high command in the presence of the emperor during the night of 9-10 August. But it was accepted only with significant reservations. For the people at large who were

left in the dark, much depended on the broadcast by the emperor which took place on the morning of 15 August. Since an imperial message by radio had never been heard before, the people, we are told, expected a speech of exhortation, calling for final effort and sacrifice. Instead they heard a message which they barely understood because it was spoken in court language. It announced that Japan had decided to effect a settlement and accept the provisions of the Allied Declaration. Bewildered, the people bowed, sang the national anthem and proceeded methodically with their daily business. Martial law did not have to be declared.[13]

The sacrifices of Japan's civilians were borne stoically. Initially they had been relieved by news of military success – in China, at Pearl Harbour and Singapore. Thereafter morale was kept up by blatant suppression of the truth. The notion that Japan was fighting 'the Great East Asian War' was a powerful inducement to accept hardships. The final months of the war were a time of great agony and suffering. It was during this period that most of the civilian casualties were caused. These have been estimated at 300,000 dead and 25,000 missing in Japan's main islands.

An essential source of information on all aspects of the wartime experience of Japanese civilians is the United States Strategic Survey for the Pacific. During the summer of 1944 the Joint Chiefs of Staff had authorized studies into the allied bomber offensive against Germany. While the prime purpose was a military one, related to the effectiveness of the armed services, it extended to civilian morale, to physical damage caused and to the economic effects, broadly construed. One of its subsidiary objectives was to give guidance on the war against Japan, then entering a critical phase. By the summer of 1945 the decision had been taken to carry out a strategic bombing survey for the Pacific battle-zone on a much broader basis than the European survey. The teams began arriving in Tokyo on 4 September, two days after General MacArthur had taken the Japanese surrender. They were able to issue questionnaires and interview essential personnel almost immediately. These were to cover not just the metropolitan areas of Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya but also Iroshima and Nagasaki. Japanese government had survived at both a central and provincial level, even if it was in a state of shock, and seems to have made the pragmatic decision to collaborate with the survey. So the survey was remarkable for its comprehensiveness and for the first-hand impressions which it was able to collect so soon after the event. Since relatively few Japanese documents survived the bombing campaigns, the information obtained from other sources was vital to an understanding of how the civilians were affected by the war (among other things). The survey teams were able to return to the United States by the end of 1945. Their reports began to appear from July 1946.[14] While some of their conclusions were speculative and controversial, it is hard to overestimate the value

of these – and also the British report on the atomic bombing[15] – as historical sources. A non-Japanese must write with reserve of the wartime attitudes of Japanese civilians which he cannot know at first hand. Sources are scarce and can be slanted out of respect for hindsight.

In the aftermath of war the lot of the civilians was even worse. In a sense we know rather less about this for, while the agonies of the wartime period were vigorously studied in the Strategic Bombing Surveys, post-war experiences – and expectations – are rarely charted. Certainly the destruction of the means of transport had a great impact on the normally mobile life-style of the Japanese – on the railways the main lines and subsidiaries had been broken; buses with charcoal burners on the rear for fuel operated sparingly; the *densha* (street-cars) in the cities gave a solid, if slender, service; and German-style bicycles were the only reliable means of travel. In the city-centres only stone or brick building survived. There was for a while a natural reluctance to re-establish bomb-destroyed areas like Hiroshima. Since shops were fewer and access to the countryside was difficult, food supplies were extremely difficult. The black market which had developed during the war expanded after the peace-making. The *katsugiya*, the itinerant merchant plying his trade between country districts and the cities, was a common figure on Japanese railway stations carrying black market rice, while the small coastal craft were often found to be carrying the other staple of the Japanese diet, fish.

Despite their ordeal, the Japanese civilians survived. Sir Peter Parker, who served in Japan in 1945 and 1946, describes his visits to a Japanese family who revealed that they had a contingency plan for mutual suicide if the occupation proved to be as savage as was predicted.[16] Such was the Japanese image of the enemy that wartime propaganda had created. Despite the intense relief that the family had survived the war, they were still willing to take each other's lives in the face of an invader. One may reflect that Japan, in the period down to the surrender, was not under any form of military occupation and that the cruelties and hardships imposed on her people were the result of the actions of their own leaders and not of a conquering invader. Down to the end of the war the Japanese civilians accepted their lot uncomplainingly. While there was a peace movement in the summer of 1945 which consisted of influential civilians,[17] there were no serious uprisings against the government collectively or individual assassination plots against the leaders (though there had been many instances of assassinations successful and unsuccessful in Japanese politics of the 1930s.)

NOTES

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11. A. Coox in P. Duus (ed.), *Cambridge History of Japan*, vol.6, *The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge 1989), p. 369.
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13. The best account is still to be found in R. J. C. Butow, *Japan's Decision to Surrender* (Stanford, 1954), esp. chs.8 and 9.
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15. British Government Inspection team (including the Government of India), *The Effects of the Atomic Bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (London, 1946).
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17. Butow (above, note 13), p. 75 and *passim.*

THE CIVILIAN IN WAR

The Home Front in Europe, Japan and the USA in World War II

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