

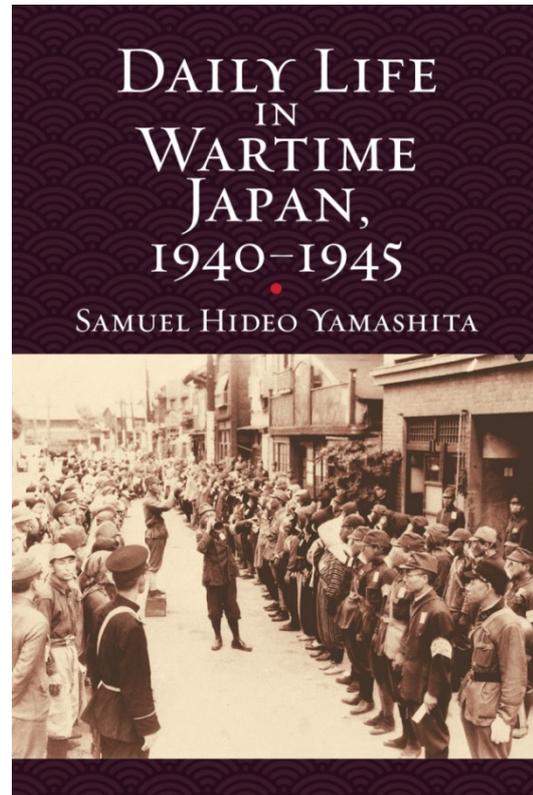
Samuel H. YAMASHITA: *Daily Life in Wartime Japan, 1940-1945*, Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 2015, 256 pp., ISBN: 9780700624621.

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Collaboration and Resistance in a Time of Total War

At just 189 pages of text, one might think that Samuel Yamashita's new monograph on a subject so large—the daily life of citizens in wartime Japan— would be too ambitious, but Yamashita has succeeded in packing in quite a lot of detail in a readable format. Shifting between individual diaries and the larger narrative of WWII, Yamashita admirably makes the home front experience understandable to a contemporary audience. Yamashita cautions us not to believe that we learn about past experience through diaries, but a *narrative* of the past; nevertheless, the records left behind start a dialog with us in the present, which can push our discourse on war, society, and subjectivity into new grounds. As Yamashita points out in his fine introduction, the diaries of supposed «apes, vermin, and lunatics» were studiously avoided by Americans for decades, which is why their impact on our understanding of war experience should not be underestimated.

«The wartime government assumed that all Japanese were loyal and patriotic citizens who would follow orders and obey regulations», Yamashita writes in Chapter 1, and «this was generally true» (p. 17). Marshalling evidence from diaries, Yamashita, like many of us who examine war diaries in Japan, sees clearly that the Japanese people supported both the war against Nationalist China in 1937 and the Allies in 1941. In the section “Routinization of the War”, Yamashita posits that the daily routine that enabled war mobilization inured citizens against its privations, or at least limited the expression of dissent. Some context is lost here, due to the book's focus and brevity, including the silencing of opposition leaders prior to 1941, either through assassination or other threats, but overall the thesis is sound: by all of them being part of the war effort, either through social pressure or personal connection (a conscripted son, for example), Japanese citizens had little incentive to oppose the government (with the exception of farmers who hid food: p. 57). While Yamashita avers, for example, that the Imperial Rule Assistance Association never achieved its aspiration to become a «mass-totalitarian Nazi Party» (p. 14), his book shows that the Japanese state met its goals for wartime social management nonetheless. The de-



bate over whether Japan was “fascist” or not will doubtless continue, but in any case it was able to suppress dissent and mobilise its people as well as Germany, and arguably better than Italy or Spain.

Like Katarzyna Cwiertka, Yamashita sees food as the central problem with the Japanese war effort, echoing US Naval estimates from the war years. Japan was starving by the end of the war, because it was a maritime empire that, unlike Great Britain, had no great ally supplying them while supply lines were failing, markets were disrupted, farmhands were off fighting, and the colonies were collapsing. Showing case after case of queuing for food—in some cases, scraps of noodles (p. 45)—Yamashita demonstrates that the lack of food was not just a problem of calories, but misallocation of labour hours. The book also delineates some of the effects of bombing on urban systems: regional cities were worse affected than Tokyo, but regional towns had better food provisions (p. 46) and rural villages enjoyed an «abundance of food» (p. 54). On top of this, food access was conditioned by «social class ... gender, and age» (p. 56), making generalisations for the period very difficult. While it is difficult to say the women «bore the heaviest burdens» given this level of diversity (p. 56), it is clear from the diaries that they were under extraordinary pressure, which has somehow been lost in much of the historiography of the war.

Following his discussion of food, Yamashita adds a lot of material on the experience of evacuated children during the war years, which is a welcome addition to the field. He begins by explaining how textbooks continued to offer prescribed subjectivities for children into the war years, but increasingly narrated stories from the position “I” or “we” instead of third person tales featuring historical figures; Yamashita argues, and I agree, that this represented an intensification of state efforts to mobilise youth (pp. 70-71). Yamashita examines a teacher’s diary, who expended considerable energy in serving the state’s interests in “disciplining” evacuated children, but more interesting is his analysis of schoolgirl Nakane Mihoko’s evacuation diary. For much of this section (pp. 76-88), Yamashita simply translates Nakane’s diary to show the extent to which spiritual training and labour had been embraced by children, at least in the diaries that were vetted by adult teachers. Continuing in Chapter 4, Yamashita suggests, but does not explicitly argue, a reason why children’s diaries and correspondence with parents were so relentlessly cheerful: parents wanted to maintain a good relationship with teachers in order to protect their children from them. «Forgive me for inquiring about Shizuko», wrote one parent (p. 95); this moment caught me by surprise, and prompted a more careful consideration of why critiques of the war situation are unlikely to be found in evacuation correspondence, and it was not just “wartime culture” or simple censorship by teachers. Teachers could physically beat evacuees, deny them food, and otherwise make them emotionally miserable, if they so wished, and the parents could do little to help their children so many miles away, especially if they were working in key war industries. It is little wonder then, in not only Japan but also wartime Britain, that so many working families refused to send their children into the tender mercies of almost total strangers. Yamashita also raises another important point: the monitored correspondence between families “subjectified” them all (pp. 103-109), and this is one component of Imperial Japan’s impressive social mobilisation machine. As Yamashita warns, «the families’ correspondence cannot be taken at face value» (p. 110); in Chapter 5, he uses post-war memoirs to critically analyse the food shortage and its impact on children, but this

methodology can be used in future studies to re-examine gender roles, bullying and hierarchy, views on teachers, and other issues relating to wartime childhood.

Yamashita then turns his attention to the *kamikaze* pilots in Chapter 6, arguing that the pilots embraced a «discourse of death and self-sacrifice» in the process of committing to suicidal missions against US Navy ships, particularly targeting air craft carriers. In analysing the published diary of Tsuchida Shōji, Yamashita observes that the self-disciplinary function of the diary is something that is resonant with Foucauldian theories of subjectivity (p. 133); I have made similar arguments in my own work, and Yamashita and I generally agree that proliferation of disciplined diary writing across Japan indicates the importance of self-fashioning in the ability of the Japanese state to mobilise its society for total war. Whether the diaries were “private” or not may not be as important as we think, although Yamashita points to an important difference between Navy and Army special attack pilots’ diaries (p. 153). The linguistic environment Japanese soldiers found themselves in, which Yamashita highlights so well in his discussion of their struggles over religious views of death (pp. 142-147, 153), were in my view more determinative than whether a diary was “public” or “private”.

In evaluating the level of “resistance” to the state’s war mobilisation programme, in Chapter 7 Yamashita presents four ways in which people pushed back against the government. First, organised resistance, including assassination attempts, emerged exclusively from the far right, and would probably not have resulted in the termination of the war; desertion and collaboration with the Allies were comparatively very rare (pp. 158-159). Second, Yamashita estimates that eight to ten thousand Japanese in Tokyo alone sought to buy food outside of the rationing system every day from 1944 to 1945. Third, thievery was rife, from food items to clothing, doorknobs to coffins (pp. 162-164). War mobilised teenagers, desperate women, and little children all engaged in spontaneous acts of rebellion against the outrageous demands of wartime authority. «In the end, however», Yamashita writes dolefully, «most Japanese did what their argument asked them to do» (p.172), which is sacrifice themselves for the country.

Nevertheless, as Yamashita concludes the book, «most of the adults on the home front readily accepted the surrender» (p. 188). As Yamashita hints throughout the book, resistance to the message of obedience and sacrifice was lurking just below the surface. The closer and more carefully we read these documents, particularly the manuscripts in local collections, the more likely we will hear the quiet whisper of “anti-war sentiment” that set the foundation for Japan’s remarkable tradition of post-war pacifism.