



Edgar A. Porter and Ran Ying Porter

# Japanese Reflections on World War II and the American Occupation

Japanese Reflections on World War II  
and the American Occupation

# Asian History

The aim of the series is to offer a forum for writers of monographs and occasionally anthologies on Asian history. The Asian History series focuses on cultural and historical studies of politics and intellectual ideas and crosscuts the disciplines of history, political science, sociology and cultural studies.

## *Series Editor*

Hans Hägerdal, Linnaeus University, Sweden

## *Editorial Board*

Roger Greatrex, Lund University

Angela Schottenhammer, University of Salzburg

Deborah Sutton, Lancaster University

David Henley, Leiden University

# Japanese Reflections on World War II and the American Occupation

*Edgar A. Porter and Ran Ying Porter*

Amsterdam University Press

Cover illustration: 1938 Propaganda poster “Good Friends in Three Countries” celebrating the Anti-Comintern Pact

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 94 6298 973 3

e-ISBN 978 90 4853 263 6 (pdf)

DOI 10.5117/9789462982598

NUR 692

© Edgar A. Porter & Ran Ying Porter / Amsterdam University Press B.V., Amsterdam 2018

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the author of the book.

Every effort has been made to obtain permission to use all copyrighted illustrations reproduced in this book. Nonetheless, whosoever believes to have rights to this material is advised to contact the publisher.

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	9
Introduction	11
Preface	15
1 “Something Big Was Going to Happen”	17
Saiki Goes to War Footing	17
Admiral Yamamoto Comes to Saiki	21
Conflicted Pride	24
2 One Million Souls, One Heart	27
The Attack	27
Rallying the People	29
Quiet Doubts	32
3 Oita Men Troop to War	39
“Leaving My Hometown”	39
A Buddhist Priest’s Gift for Hitler	41
Oita Soldiers	43
On to Nanjing	46
Nanjing Legacy and the Pride of Oita	48
Our Chinese Family Meets the 47 <sup>th</sup>	53
Securing Victory and Moving On	56
4 The War Expands and the People Mobilize	61
Farmers and Fishermen	61
Guarding the Emperor	62
Empty Urns	65
Pure Spirit of the Saipan Children	66

5	Invincible Japan	71
	Moral Education	71
	Hiding the Truth	74
	Military Education	76
	Learning to Kill, Preparing to Die	80
	The Beatings	84
	Creeping War Weariness	89
6	Fire from the Sky	92
	Prime Targets	92
	April 21, 1945	103
	No Place to Hide	107
	Filling the Craters and Building the Shelters	112
7	“I Shall Die with Pleasure”	120
	Edgar’s Encounter with the Kamikaze Boy	120
	Oita’s Kamikaze	121
8	Never-ending Sirens	127
	Cancelling Classes and Evacuating Students	127
	Dodging Bullets and Delivering Babies	129
9	A Hard Price to Pay	132
	Child Scouts	132
	Easy Targets	133
	Taking Revenge: B-29 Is Downed	134
	Meanwhile on Okinawa	139
10	Donate Everything	141
	Children Join the Army	141
	Kamikaze Nightmares	143
	The Stench of Death	146
11	Eliminate the City	152
	Targeting Civilians	152
	Oita’s Heroic Nurse	154
	Too Many Bombs, Too few Targets	156

12	Oita's Advisors to the Emperor	158
	Never Surrender	158
	The Advisors	158
13	The Lightning Bolt	161
	Digging In	161
	Nursing the Wounded	163
	No Taste for Invasion	164
14	We Didn't Surrender – The War Just Ended	168
	The Emperor's Voice	168
	Poison for the Women	170
	Defeated and Sent Home	170
	Ugaki's Pride	176
	Oita Men on the <i>Missouri</i>	178
15	Hungry, Confused, and Afraid	180
	Waiting	180
	Occupation Plans	180
	Running to the Hills	184
	Bartering for Food	185
	The Passion of a Mother	187
	Suffering Together	188
16	The Devil Comes Ashore	190
	Getting Acquainted	190
	Working for the Americans	193
	Searching for Contraband	194
	Confusion in the Classroom	195
17	A Bitter Homecoming	198
	Demobilized	198
	Awkward Reunions	200
18	The Occupation Takes Hold	204
	Censorship and a New Order	204
	Baseball and Chocolate	207
	The Americans Were So Wasteful	209



19	Miss Beppu, Crazy Mary, and William Westmoreland	212
	The Call for Volunteers	212
	Closing the Houses – Sort Of	215
	Crazy Mary and Miss Beppu	219
	The Korean War and Exit from Beppu	221
	Conclusion	223
	Chronology of Japanese Historical Events, 1905-1957	227
	List of Interviewees	231
	Bibliography	233
	Index	237

# Acknowledgments

Writing a book on Japanese history, with a focus on interviews and archival study, demands the support of a core team of cross-culturally sensitive and dedicated people to see it through. We were fortunate to have such a team. Here we want to acknowledge them. First, Kana Nakahara, organizer, interpreter, translator, transcriber, and confidante, joined us from the beginning. She allowed us to worry about the content and direction of our study, while, in addition to her interpreting, translation, and transcribing, made sure we got to the right places, enriched our interview questions and improved our cross-cultural skills. Motoko Sato set up many interviews, interpreting, transcribing, and translating many of them, along with archival documents and wartime newspaper articles. We are very grateful to her for her many efforts. Matthew Barkley, master translator and transcriber, proved essential to the completion of the book due to his professionalism and speed of work. Others assisting in translations and transcribing were Miyuku Toyada-Inobe and Yoko Hsuing. Joel Bradshaw and Edward Shultz read drafts of this work and their comments and suggestions proved essential in improving the book.

There are two men who need special mention. Susumu Yamamoto, a dear friend and tireless supporter, accompanied us to select interviews and historic sights and provided helpful comments on the direction of this work. Ikunosuke Watanabe proved a gold mine of referrals, arranging interviews with his many contacts throughout Oita Prefecture. His kindness and generosity will always be remembered and appreciated. For helping in a myriad of ways we want to acknowledge Nader Ghotbi, Emiko Oonk, Chisato Kudo, Akiko Uematsu, Maiko Cagno, Kuniharo Mumamoto, Yuko Hada, Natsuko Hada, Mamoru Hirata, and the priests of Gokoku Shrine in Oita City. In addition, the archivists and librarians in the Oita Public Library, the Oita Archives, the Beppu Public Library, the Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University Library, the American Center Library in Fukuoka, and the Usa City Library provided important, sometimes surprising, materials that strengthened the book.

To those who agreed to sit for one, sometimes two, interviews, we cannot show our appreciation enough. Their names are found throughout the book and are listed alphabetically at the end. As we go to press, we know that some of those interviewed have passed away since we met them. We have tried to represent their views as accurately as possible and hope those still living, and those passed on, would find that to be the case.

Finally, for guiding this book through publication, we thank Saskia Gieling, Jaap Wagenaar and Ed Hatton of Amsterdam University Press; and Hans Hägerdal and Roger Nelson for their guidance, suggestions, and support.

This book is dedicated to the members of our family who experienced the years covered in the following pages. In China, Ran Ying's mother, Ma Ji Sen, and aunt, Ma Ji Feng, saw the war up close and their observations and sacrifices are chronicled here. In the United States, Edgar's father, G. Ray Porter, served in the U.S. Army Air Corps during the war and his uncle, Grant Porter, fought with the U.S. Marines on Guadalcanal and Peleliu. Each of them also survived the war.

## Introduction

The personal histories of those who experienced the war and Occupation in Japan between the early 1930s and mid-1950s will soon fade away as age takes its toll. With this in mind, the authors decided to chronicle as much of that oral history as possible and to accomplish this in as deep and, at the same time, broad an approach as possible. Deep in the sense that we dug into layers of memory from citizens living in one prefecture in Japan, a place that reflects in both drama and detail the national challenges and attitudes of the times; broad in the sense that we interviewed diverse populations of Japanese citizens encompassing ages and professions across the spectrum of society during the war years. These memories, enhanced by local newspapers and archives, introduce us to the people of Oita Prefecture as they struggled to survive a quarter century of hardship and chaos.

The idea for this book began with two separate but quickly merging interests. Soon after moving to Japan to teach in an international university in Beppu, a resort town of 120,000 citizens located in Oita Prefecture, Edgar discovered that following the close of World War II the United States established a regional Occupation headquarters in Beppu. In what is now Beppu Park, this headquarters remained active for almost ten years, from the end of World War II through the Korean War, as the primary U.S. presence for much of the island of Kyushu. The name of the base was “Camp Chickamauga,” after the Civil War battle fought in Edgar’s native state of Tennessee. Visits to the park, as well as the local library, brought forth information and materials to motivate a historian to dig deeper.

At the same time, Ran Ying was engaged as a volunteer at the Beppu Foreign Tourist Information Office, located in the center of town only a few blocks from the park. Her fellow volunteers were retired businessmen and teachers from the area, all of whom spoke English. Over dinner for several months Ran Ying would recount the stories these men and women shared with her about their lives during the war and Occupation. As these captivating stories kept coming, we began to see the richness of a more complete study and shifted our focus from that of the U.S. Occupation to one combining the daily life of those experiencing both the war and the Occupation as it had transpired in this coastal prefecture on Japan’s southeastern coast.

The motivation to pursue this research was driven by the opportunity to let people tell their own stories, with little overlay of hidden agenda from the two of us. We knew this to be important and difficult, for we each represented countries most impacted by Japan’s expansion into Asia and

the Pacific, namely China and the United States, and we each had family members who had found themselves face to face with Japanese aggression. Edgar's uncle fought with the U.S. 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Corps at Guadalcanal and Peleliu, and Ran Ying's family, including her mother, became refugees from advancing Japanese troops immediately following the Battle of Nanjing in late 1937. Edgar's uncle survived the war, while Ran Ying's family lost several members during their evacuation, including her grandfather. Thus, while we share our views of the consequences and legacies of the war from our perspective in the conclusion, we did not want our interpretation of the lives of Japanese citizens during the war to be colored by our preconceived personal biases. This was made all the easier because as we each made friends throughout the city and prefecture, we were struck by their willingness to share their stories and, at the same time, by the warmth and charm of the people around us. We wanted to introduce these everyday Japanese lives to an audience that remembers wartime Japan through the limited and foggy lens of a few events only, namely, Pearl Harbor, the Bataan Death March, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the surrender on the battleship *Missouri*. Our aim was to present another side of the story, one that focuses primarily on a period dominated by harsh militarization and xenophobic nationalism. We would invite them to express how the war had changed their lives and give their own reflections about and interpretations of those events. So we began, with Ran Ying first approaching her colleagues at the Foreign Tourist Information Office to inquire if they would agree to be interviewed. He agreed and in the end no one we approached declined. Following Edgar's experience in previous oral history projects, this proved unsurprising, as almost universally people enjoy sharing their life stories.

Preparing for this research, we understood the daunting task faced with recording and recounting oral history. Our oral history methodology is most closely aligned with grounded theory, an approach to research that originated in sociology and was outlined by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. "In its original form, it is an insistence that researchers come to a chosen topic without a hypothesis or preconceived notions. As research continues with a person or group, scholars can form their conclusions or hypotheses by analyzing data as they gather them and reinterrogating their information to see what insights they can gain." This can be summarized as: "A researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind.... Rather the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data."<sup>1</sup>

1 Mary A. Larson, in *Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Thomas Lee Charlton, Lois Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2006), p. 119.

One overriding concern for any historian engaged in oral history is that of memory reliability. Memory is selective and over many years it becomes largely a reconstructive exercise; even to the point of telling of stories that may in fact have happened to someone else, or which one hears about and integrates quite unknowingly into his or her own history. We presume this “imagination inflation” found its way into some of the stories we heard and recount in the following pages.<sup>2</sup> With this in mind, however, it is clear to us that the overriding themes and particulars that arise from this oral history make for a compelling and accurate interpretation of events from the period addressed. Except in rare exceptions we did not discover a *Rashomon* phenomena where different people viewed similar events in wildly different ways. The legacies and evaluations of these events, and, in fact, the moral values placed on them, do diverge, however, in several cases.

Prior to the first interviews, a list of questions was prepared that gave direction for the interview in a general sense, i.e., the topic would stay as much as possible on the war and Occupation years, while at the same time allowing for recollections to take the interview off in directions surprising, yet captivating at the same time. Each interviewee received the same list of questions, no matter the age or experience during the war. From there the interviews flowed depending on the specific experiences. For example, some were soldiers, so their battlefield experiences took the basic questions in that direction, while others too young to remember much of the war years were allowed to discuss what their parents had told them, and then jump to the questions related to the Occupation years where memory was firsthand. This approach follows the “thick dialogue” process utilized by the oral historian Alessandro Portelli, which requires “a flexible interview approach, but not the point of noninterference. ‘In thick dialogue, questions arise dialectically from answers.’”<sup>3</sup>

To build our interview list we depended initially on our own network, as described above. We then moved to “opportunistic recruiting” with the assistance of our friends’ and colleagues’ networks. From there the list of those to interview snowballed as introductions led to more introductions until over 40 people had been interviewed.

Interviews proceeded with the assistance of interpreters and translators when, as in most cases, the interviewees spoke little or no English. For this project we had the good fortune to have four professional interpreters and

2 Carole Wade and Carol Tavis, *Invitation to Psychology*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education), pp. 266-269.

3 Larson, p. 119.

translators working with us. They not only set up the interview schedules, but forwarded in advance the list of questions in Japanese to those requesting them and accompanied us to the interviews. All interpreters were Japanese. This was essential to ensure that the introduction of the two foreign interviewers proceeded with proper Japanese protocol and etiquette, which is especially important when visiting those of advanced years. Following the protocol formalities, the interviews began with an introduction by the interviewers, stating the reason for pursuing this study and showing appreciation for allowing us to talk with them. Most interviews took place in private homes, with some in business offices and community centers. Interviews lasted between one to two hours each. In all cases the hosts provided Japanese tea, fruit, and sweets. We also presented a gift to each interviewee at the end of the session, usually in the form of sweets. Each interview was taped with the authorization of the interviewee, then later transcribed and translated into English by the team of interpreters and translators.

It is the hope of the authors that the stories that comprise the bulk of this book, combined with original histories and media accounts of the times, will help the reader gain a more complete understanding of the impact the war had on families living in Japan during those horrific years. It is only through listening more, and lecturing less, that real dialogue can take place and greater understanding finds room to grow.