

Looking Modern

East Asian Visual Culture from Treaty Ports to World War II

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Japan

INTRODUCTION: Looking Modern in Japan

Hans Bjarne Thomsen 174

VIEWING THE MODERN BODY IN JAPAN

Marketing Health and the Modern Body: Patent Medicine Advertisements
in Meiji-Taishō Japan

Susan L. Burns 179

The Girl with the Horse-Dung Hairdo

David L. Howell 203

VISUAL CULTURE AND STRATEGIES OF JAPANESE NATIONALISM

Japan's National Treasure System and the Commodification of Art

Julie Christ Oakes 220

Planes, Trains and Games: Selling Japan's War in Asia

Barak Kushner 243

Capturing Visions of Japan's Prehistoric Past: Torii Ryūzō's Field Photographs
of "Primitive" Races and Lost Civilizations (1896–1915)

Hyung Il Pai 265

Glossary 294

Index 302

Planes, Trains and Games: Selling Japan's War in Asia

Barak Kushner

During Japan's war to establish dominance in Asia, Japanese soldiers did not expect to return home alive, and few considered it even possible that Japan's war would end quickly. In light of the demographic determinants that many believed would aid Japan's military power on the Chinese mainland, and later against the Allies, Japan's youth culture played a dominant role. Numerous studies have documented and analyzed the nature and forces behind mobilizing the adult population of Japan and its imperial holdings, but what about the soldiers of the future, the soldiers who were to staff the next wave of Japanese hegemony in Asia? Children and teenagers, generally categorized under the Japanese terms *shōkokumin* and *shōnen*, held the key to Japan's potential success for two major reasons. First, the government, military, and society at large realized that youths would be the combatants in a few years time as the war progressed. Second, society and the government deemed it a high priority to forge youth culture into step with national goals as the elder generations left the home front for the battlefield. Japanese youths developed into a tertiary backbone of the economic and social structure that provided the engine of domestic support for Japan's imperial project.

The role of youth in Japan's imperial propaganda and World War II mission has only recently gained the attention of scholars. The real question regarding why we need to understand how imperial children were mobilized, instead, should analyze the nature of Taishō (1912–26) democracy. After all, the supposed beneficiaries of the "liberal" Taishō era were the same parents and youngsters who became infantry soldiers and kamikaze pilots in the early 1940s. For Taishō-era parents, Japan's Fifteen Years' War was a life-changing event. The war psychologically shaped generations of children to the extent that Yamanaka Hisashi and others have devoted their careers as chroniclers to discussing, analyzing, and debunking *shōkokumin* history, or the history of Japan's "little folk." Japan's success in war meant that all generations, young and old, in this new version of total war held different reasons and



Figure 1. *The Golden Bat* (*Ōgon batto*), was an immensely popular hero in prewar, wartime, and postwar *kamishibai*. Stories within this genre usually had little to do with the war and focused on tales of banditry and escapes of daring. See color plate 22.

rationales but ultimately supported the war aims. In his book on Japanese wartime children's literature, Hasegawa Ushio recalls that when he was a third-grade student during the war, he wanted to be a pilot and dive his plane into enemy ships. He was eight and would have had to wait ten years for such a dream to come true, but that was his vision of the future. Who knew how long the war would last, though it would certainly not be short, he believed at the time.¹ Hasegawa was already mentally prepared to do battle in elementary school!

The purpose of this research is to center on the quasi unofficial, not the schools and educational content directly managed by the government, but that which existed outside the school, outside the daily purview and grasp of the government. In this regard, *kamishibai*, paper plays, fit the bill perfectly. Certainly *kamishibai* were censored, but the multiplicity of companies that produced the plays and the incorporation of traditional stories like *Ōgon batto*, or *The Golden Bat* (who ironically was neither golden nor a bat—the hero was in fact a flying skeleton who wore a cape), and others into the lexicon of the war was something that emanated from society (fig. 1). *Kamishibai* production groups developed into voluntary associations that not only created wartime propaganda but also served as the medium for propagating support for the war among Japan's youth. Did children understand the term *kokutai*, or “national polity”? Did they fathom slogans espousing how Japan would

unify the eight corners of Asia under one roof, as supposedly embodied in the obscure slogan *hakkō ichiu?* Probably not. Such terms often perplexed adults, too. Frequently, even government leaders required specialists in Confucian terminology to explain the meaning. Examining *kamishibai* allows us to analyze how the future soldiers of Japan understood the value and significance of Japan's imperial war. Obscure *kanji*-laden slogans were fine for the literate adult population, but the younger generations that would be fighting in Japan's "one hundred year war" required color maps, splashy drawings of jungle warfare, pictures of tanks that spoke, dogs that traveled, heroes like the Golden Bat, and soldiers who defied the odds and valiantly opposed Japan's dastardly enemies. This less easily quantifiable arena of propaganda was after school, on the playground or on the streets. In essence, in wartime Japan children received a double dose, more potent than adults—school instilled war propaganda in the children all day and then outside school propaganda masqueraded as games and entertainment.

Japanese bureaucrats who stood in charge of the programs to "imperialize," *kōminka*, young Taiwanese, Chinese, Koreans, and Southeast Asians into Japanese imperial subjects realized, as did officials back on the main islands, that formal education was only one facet of mobilizing youths for the imperial Japanese project. A wartime investigation of Japan's imperial mission in Taiwan admitted that to create good imperial subjects out of the Chinese, Japan could not merely rely on education. Unfortunately, the author lamented, in Japan misguided individuals who had received a good education still made mistakes once they became bureaucrats. Seeing as how this occurred in Japan where imperial education was "notably better" than in the colonies, schooling by itself was understood not to be the only formula for success. As the tome on modernity in Taiwan noted, true mobilization demanded "education for the spirit" (*kokoro no kyōiku*), which up to this point elites deemed grossly insufficient.²

We should not be quick to dismiss songs, paper plays, and games that all mentally prepared Japan's youths for the inevitable battles they would face at home or abroad. *Kamishibai* evolved throughout the war, as did the mobilization of youth. The impact on youth culture is reflected in a song played on the radio in the spring of 1945, entitled "We, the Ever-Victorious Little Folk" ("Kachinuku bokura shōkokumin"):

Ever victorious youth of Japan
 For the sake of the emperor
 Instructed to die by the parents whose
 Red blood we have inherited
 Wearing a white sash of determination to die
 We valiantly charge ahead!³

Youth culture in Japan did not remain a social element ignored in the total mobilization of society for war.

What Are *Kamishibai*?

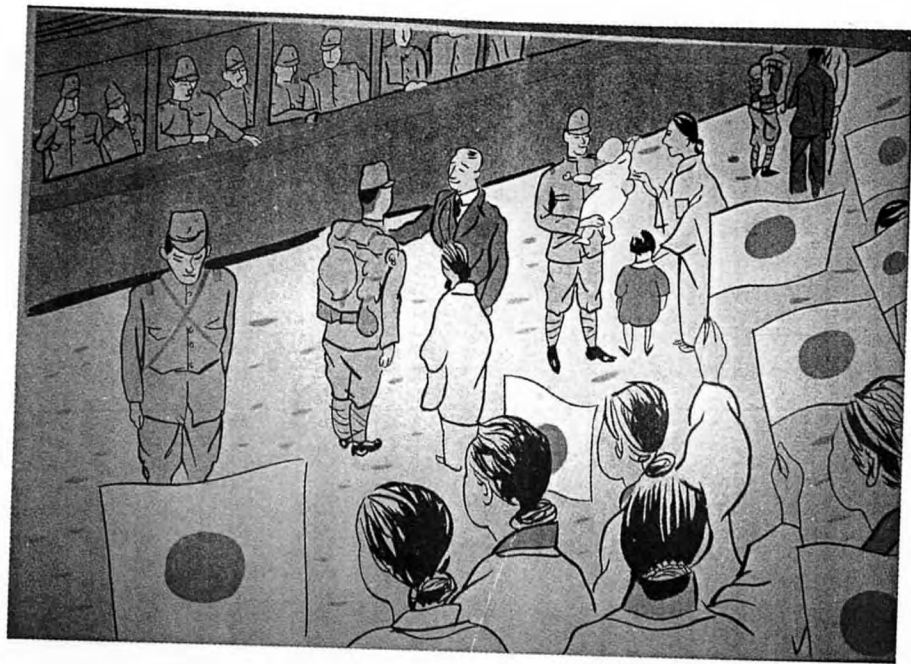
The history of *kamishibai* has deep roots in Japan; some scholars trace its very genesis to the production of the *Tale of Genji* that depicted scenes of hand scrolls being unrolled and stories read out loud to others. Regardless of its specific Heian origins, the practice of employing hand scrolls and unfurling them while a reader performed the dialogue to the side appears to have been fairly widely practiced. This practice later transformed into *nozoki gankyō*: during the Edo period, buskers would set up a box with a panorama or scene in it or, as technology advanced, some type of 3-D model. People would peer through a hole to marvel at the scene for a small fee. These boxes later led to the development of *utsushie*, quite similar to a colored-slide show where the performer would change slides while shooting light onto a surface and recite a story. Afterward came *tachie*, a type of Punch and Judy show with flat, paper puppets. These inventions changed into, by the 1920s, a new media—*kamishibai*. Unlike the *tachie*, which required memorization of dialogue and a mirror so one could see what he or she was doing, in *kamishibai* everything was printed on flat cardboard and the script was usually written on the back.⁴

The late Tokugawa era witnessed a proliferation of moral lessons to guide youth in correct Confucian comportment. The new Meiji state, created after 1868, oftentimes drew on this legacy but served up just as much a dose of entertainment with brightly drawn stories underscoring a sermonizing lesson. The lessons were often humorous, but the underlying message drew children into the fold of the state: behave correctly and follow what was told. *The Boy with Two Heads* (*Zenaku ryōzu kyōkun kagami*), illustrated by Toyohara Chikanobu in 1882, is one such popular example of this genre of moral lesson-cum-entertainment. In this series from a picture book (based on a 1798 Tokugawa story), a young boy is born with two heads—an evil one and a good one. Throughout the young boy's life, the bad head is a poor student, is naughty to his family, ogles girls, and so on. It is clearly the traditional and thus not modern head. The good head, the modern head of the new era, fulfills all the expectations of a good Meiji youth. Finally, near the end of the story, the bad head slowly atrophies and eventually dies off, "under the pressure of its own wickedness." In the end, the youth marries a nice woman and lives happily ever after.⁵ (Presumably with only one head.)

These state admonitions for youth to behave in line with a national mandate did not cease with the close of the Meiji era. In fact, in many ways the message changed during the 1910s and 1920s to promote Japan's pursuit of glory and empire, but the vehicles retained visual cues boxed as games or entertainment for children in the form of *kamishibai*. In mobilization terms, I would label this "sweet propaganda."

Kamishibai served as one of children's greatest pleasures in terms of entertainment from the 1920s to the 1950s. *Kamishibai* performance was closely linked to children buying the products, sweets, and snacks from the man who performed. It was a special relation: performers frowned on kids watching for free, since the performer's livelihood depended on

Figure 2. A panel from the kamishibai, *Flowers of the Home Front* (*Hana no jūgo*). During the war, women and girls played a central role in staging sendoffs and receptions for soldiers deploying to or returning from the front. These ceremonies played a significant role in public support for the war. No date or publisher provided, possibly produced in 1943. See color plate 23.



the value of sweets he managed to unload. Many children, in order to have the spare change to buy snacks, performed chores and other assorted odd jobs to gather money. Usually *kamishibai* performers attached a large wooden box to the back of a bicycle. Performers also rented the paper sets from various distribution companies which usually also authored the texts and drew the images. The box served as a holder for the sweets and doubled as a carrying case, and easel on which to show the plays. Performers then packed up, closed the lid on the case and pedaled to their next corner. *Kamishibai* performers had their territories, and since it was a public performance it would not have been unusual for a performer to get in a fight with a tofu salesman or someone else who interrupted the climax of a performance.⁶

During the fifteen-year war, children's games, literature, and entertainment served to provide a concrete image and promote a discrete notion of imperial Japan's expanse and the role of children in it. In school the study of maps, in coordination with that day's news, announcements regarding the imperial forces, and so on, caused students to open their textbooks and observe the cartography of the empire. These activities, not only taught as part of the curriculum but also reinforced in entertainment on the street in *kamishibai*, promoted a visual sense of the empire's reaches.⁷ A youthful understanding of the empire and its goals did not stop with the theoretical or printed word. During wartime school trips to Manchuria, Japanese students carried souvenir booklets with them on their travels and stamped each rail station's insignia they visited. Map observation, travel, and pictures provided a physical experience and buttressed children's understanding of the empire and its mission. War became a right of passage for a young Japanese boy who dreamed of adventures in the jungle and for young girls as well who understood that their role was to maintain vigilance at the home front (fig. 2).⁸ *Kamishibai*, advertising, and children's entertainment also presented what children came to champion, that the war and their participation in



Figure 3. *He Will Not Die* (*Kare wa shinanai*), written by Takeda Toshihiko, Kokumin Bunka Kamishibai Kyōkai, 1942. See color plate 24.

it was fate. As one youth wrote in a woman's journal in an essay about how the children feel about the war, "my grandfather went to war in the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War; my father served during the Manchurian Incident. Next it's my turn."⁹

By the time Japan invaded Asia in the 1930s, learning frequently focused on the "education of sentiment." However, as much as Japan's imperial goals shifted from the Meiji to the Showa era, in terms of the content children received in class the difference was not all that great a stretch. Visual education on the eve of Japanese expansion did not appear incongruous with its predecessors. The media of the *sugoroku*, a children's dice game like Chutes and Ladders, or picture books had strong ties back to the Meiji era. By the time of World War II games with titles like "Around the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere," published in the magazine *Ie no hikari*, appeared. The *sugoroku* game, in which children worked their way through the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, included Japan, New Guinea, Indonesia, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, China, and Thailand. These types of games also visually reinforced imperial geography offered in school textbooks.¹⁰ Japanese propaganda researchers commented on the manner in which *kamishibai* affected youth culture. In the monthly propaganda journal printed in Manchukuo, *Senbu geppō* (Pacification Monthly), Ishii Hiroshi observed that if a person suddenly placed a frog in hot water, it would leap out. However, he said, if that person carefully placed the creature into cool water, then slowly raised the temperature of the water, after two and a half hours the frog would not notice the change in temperature and would end up being boiled alive.¹¹ Obviously, Ishii



Figure 4. *The Key Is to Pay Attention* (*Kokoro no kagi*), written by Kobayashi Yoshio, Dainihon Gageki, 1943. See color plate 25.

felt that *kamishibai* did not need to parrot harsh ideology for Japanese imperial propaganda to be effective. Successful mobilization required consistent and constant contact between the target audience and the medium.

For children, sentiment was important for effective propaganda, but the focus did not have to be specifically military in nature. One *kamishibai* written with youth in mind centered on a factory worker, Hamamachi Toshi (fig. 3). In this story, *He Will Not Die* (*Kare wa shinanai*), Hamamachi is horribly burned in an accident and his disfigured body is brought to the hospital. As the *kamishibai* performer flipped the pictures, the audience would be told that as soldiers die at the battlefield the same is true with workers. The audience of children was supposed to gain solace from the fact that all facets of society play a significant role in support of the war—soldier and worker alike. The title and content of the play, while gruesome and graphic for children, underscored the message that the memory of soldiers, just like the memory of Hamamachi and his sacrifice, would be remembered. Thus, his death was not in vain.

In Japan, wartime *kamishibai* researcher Matsunaga Kenya revealed his impressions of why *kamishibai* held particular appeal for quickly and efficiently mobilizing children. It could be performed at any time, he said, and performance-wise most anyone could perform. The venue for performing made it easy to move freely about, and it was relatively cheap to produce, Matsunaga pointed out. In his conclusion, he declared *kamishibai* as “the



Figure 4a. A card from *The Key Is to Pay Attention*. The houses are locked and frowning at the stranger in town. In the wartime version of this *kamishibai*, the stranger was depicted as a foreigner or robber. See color plate 26.

ultimate entertainment of the masses.”¹² Saki Akio, a colleague of Matsunaga’s, averred that *kamishibai* served as an excellent weapon in the effort to promote a cultural work ethic, *kinrō bunka*. Saki was talking about the latest effort to develop “renovation *kamishibai*” (*sashin kamishibai*), through the establishment of a group, the Japanese Education Kamishibai Association, on July 12, 1938. As Saki glowed, “one of the greatest roles of *kamishibai* is that they serve as a form of enlightenment propaganda.”¹³ He also opined that *kamishibai* could be employed to assist Japan and the colonies in a variety of ways, such as through guiding lifestyle choices, by promoting hygiene through washing hands and other mundane tasks. Other quotidian necessities such as paying attention to strangers in the neighborhood and locking the front door to reduce crime also became topics of *kamishibai* (figs. 4, 4a).¹⁴ Wartime battles depicted in deep colors were also popular ways to draw children into the excitement of war (fig. 5).

At the outset of the late 1920s and early 1930s, with unemployment creeping upward, *kamishibai* performing became the silent avenue for many out-of-work laborers and intellectuals eager for a day’s wages. Each day the average performer traveled to about ten places to perform, and each performance usually drew around thirty to forty kids. Thus, in Tokyo alone, each day *kamishibai* influenced about nine hundred thousand children. Japanese government estimates revealed that there were close to two thousand *kamishibai*



Figure 5. *Solomon Islands Naval Battle* (*Soromon kaisen*), written by Suzuki Keizan, Nihon Kyōiku Gageki Kyōkai, 1943. Unlike other *kamishibai*, this one included specific instructions to performers concerning voice, speed, and tone so that children would remain enthralled with descriptions of Japan's victories at sea. See color plate 27.

performers in Tokyo.¹⁵ Early *kamishibai* researchers discovered what their less intellectual brethren performing in the street already knew: *kamishibai* gained popularity among children because of the alternating pictures which made them appear as slow movies, the strength of the colors, the impact of the drawings, the tone of the explanations, and the unsatisfied excitement that came from waiting for the next installment in the series. Children were hooked.¹⁶

In the early 1930s, social discontent regarding the prevalence of *kamishibai* raised its profile but change came slowly. In 1932 a voluntary *kamishibai* group assembled itself in a bid to preempt government regulatory moves and improve the image of *kamishibai* among adults. The Nippon Gageki Kyōkai (Japan Picture Play Association) claimed in its charter the desire to “improve and raise the quality of *kamishibai* industry employees and to have the industry help assist in the education of children and support social mobilization. . . .”¹⁷

Nonetheless, *kamishibai* passed fairly smoothly under the government's radar of concern until around 1933, when suddenly everyone realized that this unregulated industry wielded enormous influence on the nation's youth. This type of influence was termed *kōgai kyōiku*, or “extracurricular education,” and caused anxious stirs in society. Police reports concerning the prevalence of *kamishibai* performances among adoring audiences of young Japanese

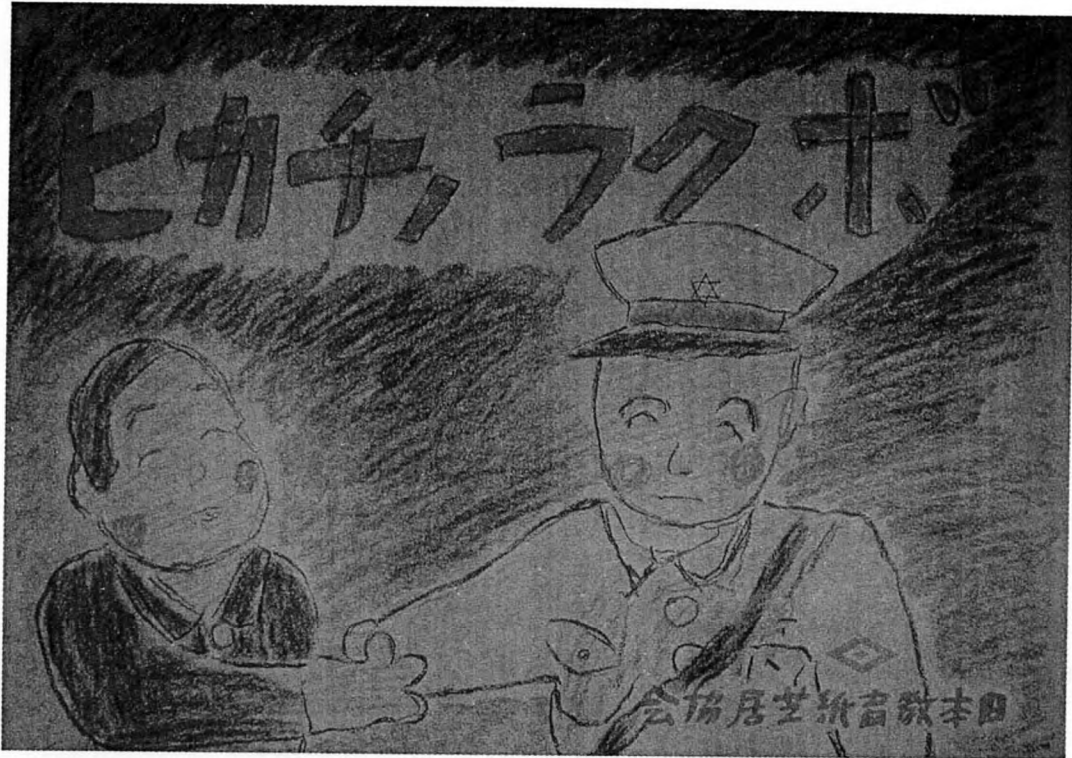


Figure 6. *We Pledge (Bokura no chikai)*, written by Kishi Toshio, Nihon Kyōiku Gageki, 1942. The oath the children took was that when they grew up they pledged to go to war and fight just like the pilots flying overhead. See color plate 28.

ministries had mobilized *kamishibai* years before. In October 1938, the Ministry of Finance used *kamishibai* to promote its “Eight Billion Yen Savings” campaigns, complete with the central character of Chochiku Ojisan, or “Uncle Thrifty.”²³ *Kamishibai*, as the government understood, reinforced the country’s basic educational principles, at least those enunciated after March 1941. Such principles promoted “disregard for personal accomplishments, spiritual development, and learning for its own sake.” Instead, education was to impart on youths a sense of belonging to something greater than themselves, namely, the nation. Music, in particular, was singled out to educate Japanese youth about “national sentiments.”²⁴ To teach children about national sentiment turned on the ability to disperse visual cues in maps, games, and plays, to depict the growing Japanese empire and the need to be vigilant in the maintenance and stability of Japan’s role in Asia. All these themes can be seen in the polished *kamishibai* previously mentioned, but more childlike productions were also popular. Researchers and writers assumed that youths wanted plays to mirror their world, so many were drawn to look as if they were produced by children themselves (fig. 6).

What Were the *Kamishibai* Like?

Kamishibai performers would usually carry approximately three stories with them, from twelve to twenty pages apiece, including action, drama, and tragedy. The action generally attracted the boys, and tragedy the girls. Why children enjoyed *kamishibai* is a complex question, but researchers during the war felt they understood the situation. In their words, in the world of children, unlike the universe of adults, bad does not go unpunished. Conversely, good does not go unrewarded.²⁵ Wartime Japanese *kamishibai* researchers believed that children expected good to gain reward and bad deeds to be punished at the end of every story. In many of the stories, Japan takes the side of good—a modern nation helping its Asian brethren drive away the evil Communists, Western rapacious capitalists, and other bad groups. A roundtable discussion concerning *kamishibai*, published in the April 1936 issue of the magazine *Gendai*, explained that what happened mattered little during the performance itself, but that at the end the just side must win—if not, the children would get angry. *Kamishibai* performers were not psychologists, but experience taught them about the children's market.²⁶ Kids loved *kamishibai* characters, like the Golden Bat because “he was a friend of justice who always arrived in the nick of time.”²⁷ Interestingly, the Golden Bat was not really the main character but, like a hero appearing in the nick of time, emerged at the end of a confusing story to set everything right.²⁸ *Kamishibai* writers easily managed to append less propagandistic characters from prewar popular *kamishibai* into more militaristic settings that enunciated wartime themes: while children adored the characters, the heroes themselves could appear at any time and place and were not fundamentally part of the plot engine. *Kamishibai* painted Japan's war in a simple pairing of good versus evil, with Japan on the just side.

During the war, old stories that were popular with children remained and new ones emerged, touting *chochiku shōrei* (encouraging savings) and *seni kōyō* (raising the war spirit).²⁹ One can tell that numerous *kamishibai* specifically targeted children: in many stories, the characters are lifelike, culled from military episodes, or based on life on the home front, but other stories focus on animals. One popular paper play from 1943, *Go Little Sparrows* (*Ganbare kosuzume*), concerns three young sparrows that are hungry. At the outset, all the little birds want to fly to a nearby wheat field and feast on the wheat. The mother sparrow tells them no. The owner of the field, Gorō's father, the mother sparrow explains, is away in the northern areas where it is cold. Gorō is taking care of the fields all by himself, and others are fighting in the southern regions. After the mother describes the tough conditions under which the Japanese soldiers endure hardship, the little sparrows agree that the soldiers, too, must be hungry, so no one should be extravagant. They agree to no longer complain.³⁰

Major newspaper companies like Asahi also produced news photo *kamishibai*. *Kamishibai* taught behavior and support for the war, linking the battlefield all the way to the home front. One such *kamishibai*, *Strength of the Home Front* (*Jūgo no chikara*), took place in a small village in northern Japan, in Akita Prefecture. In the opening scenes, an elementary



Figure 7. *It Takes a Village* (*Mura wa ittai*), written by Soma Taizō, Gageki Hōkokusha, 1941. See color plate 29.

schoolteacher stands in front of the room explaining, “Tomorrow is Sunday but I want everyone to gather here. Asada Shōichi’s elder brother is enlisting and I want everyone here to send him off.”³¹

The elder Asada brother enters the military and time passes. During his training an officer asks him: “Hey, Asada, what’s the matter lately? You seem kind of out of sorts.”³² The weight of the family debt continues to burden Asada, but he is embarrassed to talk about it so he just replies that he is sorry and he will try better. But the officer figures something is up and gets in touch with the military reservist association in Asada’s hometown. The association uncovers the whole story while the younger Asada’s classmates overhear the reservist talking to the teacher and realize their friend’s family is in debt because one of their fathers is a creditor. Shōichi later writes to his elder brother that he can stop worrying about the family; the debt has been forgiven. After having been somewhat of a “sissy” in the ranks, the elder Asada now flies into the company leader’s office and pleads: “Company leader, please. How can I be of service to the nation?” The company leader pauses and replies: “Asada, I am so pleased. . . .” A short while later, Asada is at the front. In one of the last pictures in this series, Asada remembers all the help he received from the home front—the reservist, his younger brother, and his brother’s friends. He believes that “the strength of the warm assemblance of his nation’s people” aids him at the battlefield. The last scene closes with the words “protect the home front.”³³ The salient point here is that everyone, including the elementary school students who play a pivotal role, helps the elder brother perform his



Figure 8. *Iron Arm* (*Tetsu no kaina*), written by Togami Mineji, Nihon Kyōiku Kamishibai Kyōkai, 1940. Like many other *kamishibai* producers, Togami also wrote theoretical tracts about how to perform *kamishibai*, for example, *Kamishibai jitsuen kōza* (Tokyo: Keibundo Shoten, 1944). See color plate 30.

duties at the front. The military is seen as humanistic—even capitalists can be swayed by the logical and nationalistic sentiments of their offspring. This type of *kamishibai* describes a constant theme in wartime Japanese propaganda that individuals need to band together to make Japan strong. A similar *kamishibai* that focused on this idea contained girls and boys working together to help the country in *It Takes a Village* (*Mura wa ittai*) (fig. 7).

As much as entertaining military events, family stories, drama, military heroes, and gods maintained a presence in *kamishibai*, everyday political and propaganda speeches were also turned into *kamishibai* to distribute to the “little folk.” A *kamishibai* entitled *We Are at War* took a speech that Mabuchi Itsuo, commander of the imperial Japanese army propaganda corps in the Shanghai region, orated and drew appropriate pictures.³⁴ As the Cabinet Board of Information proclaimed in 1942, the war produced tumultuous times but also presented the opportunity to renovate and create society anew. In fact, “War is the mother of culture,” the government agency proclaimed.³⁵ The idea that the nation was at war clearly made it into the panels of *kamishibai*, as depicted in *Iron Arm* (*Tetsu no kaina*). In this story, a valiant soldier loses an arm in battle and returns home to take up farming once again. His arm is replaced with an iron hook, and the audience sees scenes of him as a successful farmer, doing his all for society just as he had before going to war. But the villagers remain hesitant that he is able to pull his weight until the day he saves two boys from drowning in the river. After that, everyone realizes that even a soldier with an iron arm is just as good as everyone else (figs. 8, 8a).



Figure 8a. A *kamishibai* panel from *Iron Arm*, showing the handicapped soldier performing his regular peasant duties after his return from the front. Note that his right arm has been replaced with an iron hook. See color plate 31.

Children as Consumers of Japanese Imperialism

Kamishibai not only projected a national and international vision of Japan and its harmonious empire, but paper entertainment also created consumer support among all generations. The Taishō era gave birth to renewed interest in children as a market for literature.³⁶ Mitsukoshi, other department stores, and related publishers realized by the mid-1920s that children were the consumers of tomorrow. Department stores created juvenile expos and began producing glossy posters of their own to entice youths into purchasing goods.³⁷ *Kamishibai* and producers of children's entertainment envisioned Japan's war in Asia beyond a simple military necessity. Such children's mobilization propaganda visualized the war as the culmination of Japan's advanced technology and modernity in the fight for good.³⁸ In part, the orientation of the country as a whole appeared to denigrate individualism, but capitalistic desire on behalf of commercial enterprises to tie their products of nationalism into wartime exigencies never stagnated.

As Japanese society exhorted youths to think of the nation over themselves, companies implored children to purchase products that would assist them in this endeavor. Advertisements of products that could be placed by children into *imon bukuro*, that is, "comfort bags," sent to soldiers throughout the Japanese empire, garnered prominent space in newspapers and magazines and on billboards. Numerous advertisements proliferated, but a sample includes caramel for pilots to chew as they attacked, toothpaste to promote the

strength of the empire, and a stomach cure to sponsor a benevolent relationship between the Japanese military and the Chinese.³⁹ Children, along with women, had special roles on the home front. Wartime Japanese society championed children's unfailing effort to promote harmony, as depicted in the *kamishibai*, *It Takes a Village* and *The Key Is to Pay Attention*. Popular media now excitedly proclaimed youthful participation in the war through consumerism.

War products placed by youths into comfort bags were significant for several other reasons. Companies and media corporations created children's games to tie in with the political situation. By 1928 there was already a *sugoroku* charting Japan's role in Manchuria. In essence, the games and consumer product placement created a dual situation. First, products of wartime consumerism did not just appear but were intricately tied into the nascent capitalism that grew during the Taishō era. Second, not all the children's products were directly linked to the war; some touted other features of modern Japan, usually the country's technological advances such as fine urban design or trains. The *sugoroku* and other child-oriented pictures and writings were now presented in clear, modern prose, not unreadable script, and often with *furigana*, syllabary writing printed alongside *kanji*, so that children could digest the information on their own.⁴⁰

Concern with the war and youth did not end with the *kamishibai* production and performance staffs. Japanese society at large and the authorities also grew more anxious. In 1940 the Health and Welfare Ministry issued a mandate for change, "to renovate lethargic, unwholesome everyday lives plagued by materialism and individualism, and to lead the people to conduct wholesome, cheerful leisure activities based on the fundamental principles of the national polity."⁴¹ The significance of mobilizing children and fusing their spirit of protecting the home front with their financial support of sending gifts to the battlefield is key. Not only were children consumers of the empire, but they also helped maintain the prominence of the idea of empire domestically and in a melodramatic fashion connected adults on all ends of the imperial periphery. Children's efforts did not go unnoticed. Soldiers stationed in all sectors of the Japanese empire wrote to magazines thanking the people on the home front for their sacrifices because that made it possible for them to fight at the front, they said.⁴² Medical corpsmen and military doctors also sanctified this feeling by asserting in print that receiving comfort bags from children and families at the home front spurred on soldiers' sense of duty, "immeasurably invigorating our spirits."⁴³

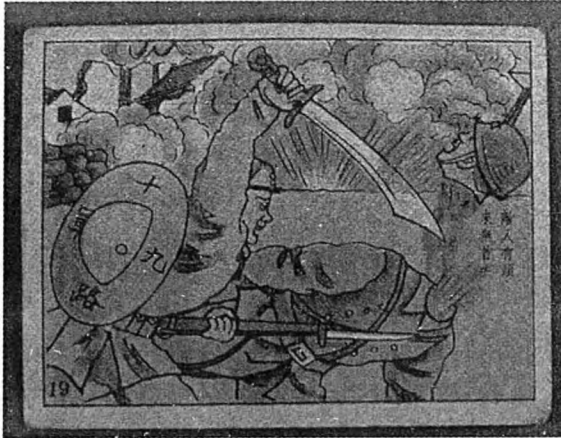
What Japan Accomplished in the Colonies

Companies and the government did not limit their efforts to mobilize children only within the Japanese islands. *Kamishibai* proliferated in the colonies, mirroring activities on the home front but with a slightly different focus. The Japanese felt their efforts in

colonizing Asia were to eradicate sloth and promote health, hygiene, and the pursuit of empire. Within that paradigm, the education and the mobilization of children were paramount. One author lamented upon seeing a picture of a Taiwanese child asleep on a water buffalo grazing in the fields that "if things continue in this manner, we will never be able adequately to create Japanese imperial subjects out of the Taiwanese."⁴⁴ The important role children played in motivating society in war bled beyond the national borders of the *naichi*, Japan's main islands, into what was termed the *gaichi*, or outside the mother country. The orientation of youths in the occupied areas and colonies developed as a barometer detailing the success of Japan's war aims. In occupied Beijing, the Japanese published a youth-oriented magazine entitled, *Qing shao nian* (1940–45), which appeared to be modeled on the Japanese children's periodical *Shōnen kurabu*. The Chinese version stated on its front page that the magazine served as a tool for youth culture to help renovate Asia.⁴⁵

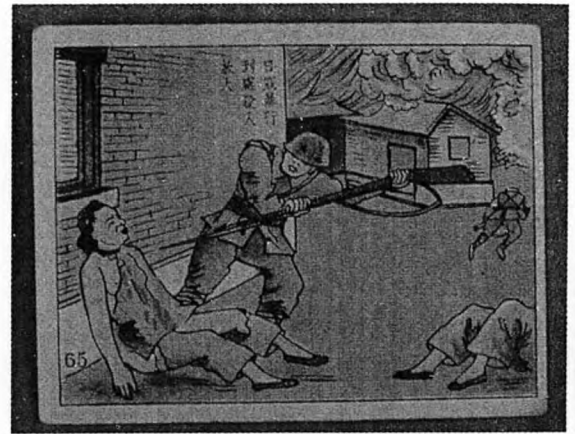
In Taiwan, Japan's showpiece colony before its efforts in Manchukuo, Japan's psychological efforts to eradicate Chinese unsanitary habits drew attention. A manual on the status of the transformation in Taiwan noted that the situation still left room for continued improvement, but things were getting better. Supposedly, pigs no longer wandered the streets along with chickens and ducks, and passersby did not have to hold their noses as they used to while walking in the street.⁴⁶ The same tome concerning Taiwan contained a picture of an aboriginal girl student with the caption "Even an aboriginal [Takasago] girl, whose people were until recently feared, became pretty like this."⁴⁷ Not only had Japan crafted a clean and modern city for Taiwanese amidst the alleged filth of its original culture but the book also tried to impress readers that Japan's imperial plans made aborigines attractive. Concern spread to Manchuria as well. The author of an article on *kamishibai* in Manchuria claimed that even his poor *kamishibai* were popular in Hōten (now Shenyang in China), where cinemas were plentiful, but even more popular in Dalian. He wrote that crowds asked for encores, and he was embarrassed by his success among children and adults. Those listening to the performances, he wrote, were *Manjin*, or Manchurians.⁴⁸

Japanese *kamishibai* did not influence children of the empire in a vacuum. Occupied areas of Japan's empire fought back with their own propaganda, aimed at both children and adults. Numerous areas for comparison remain, but one field similar to *kamishibai* was Chinese packages of cigarettes. Many of these cartoon tops ran in series of over one hundred panels. Obviously, cigarette box propaganda was not focused directly at children, but the images and stories employed suggest that the ubiquity of smoking and thus the general proliferation of these boxes throughout Chinese society wielded an influence on Chinese youth. These images, in graphic style, relay a clear vision of Japanese depravity and arrogance that could be understood even if the viewer could not read (figs. 9, 9a, 9b, 9c, 9d). Japan needed to compete not only for the support of its domestic youth but most certainly for those in its colonies, occupied areas, and fringes of the empire most in direct contact with the excesses of the imperial military.



Above Left: Figure 9. The Chinese explanation reads: “The enemy arrives with a head and leaves without a neck.” The soldier in blue is a Chinese National Soldier, and the soldier in green is the Japanese. Cigarette Box Cover Collection, Cotsen’s Children’s Library, Los Angeles, no. 71738, produced by the Wai Cheng Tobacco Company, Shanghai, no date but ca. mid 1930s – mid 1940s. (All box covers are from the same collection.) See color plate 32.

Above Right: Figure 9a. “The Japanese sentry is fiercely stabbed by our soldier and dies.” See color plate 32.



Above Left: Figure 9b. Children were also the focus on some of these cigarette boxes. In this scene, the Japanese soldiers can be seen torturing a young boy who is strapped in a tree high above. The caption says: “Merciless Japanese dwarf soldiers play games with a child.” The derogatory term for Japanese soldiers was frequently employed when writing about the Japanese military. See color plate 32.

Above Right: Figure 9c. Another constant theme was the Japanese military’s abuse of Chinese women. Here the caption reads: “The Japanese dwarf soldiers violate women everywhere, kill people, and commit arson.” See color plate 32.

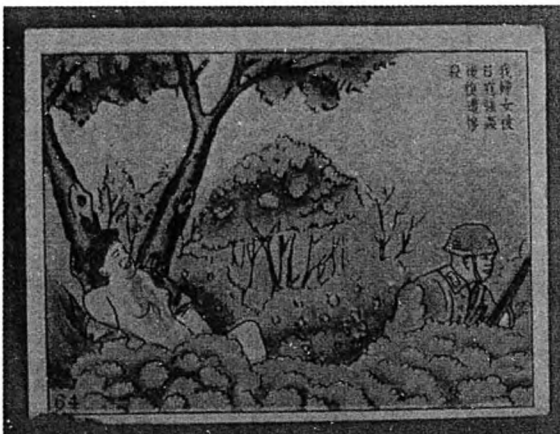


Figure 9d. This box cover is more graphic than the others in that it depicts a naked Chinese woman whom Japanese soldiers have attacked. The caption states: “After our women are raped by Japanese dwarf soldiers, they meet with a tragic death.” See color plate 32.

Kamishibai and the Postwar

Kamishibai did not disappear with Japan's surrender in August of 1945, and Occupation forces considered the paper play's impact on Japanese important enough to indict *kamishibai* producers during the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (popularly known as the Tokyo War Crimes Trials). The Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) was intensely interested in *kamishibai* and the effect they had on the nation as a whole. The Occupation authorities also worried about a Communist resurgence in Japan; Communist groups had quickly adapted to using *kamishibai* to propagate their message. After the defeat, *kamishibai* shops hastily reorganized to amuse children in their new, postwar, and fairly desperate condition. One association, the Friends Association, a producer in Tokyo, organized in January 1946 what it claimed were "efforts to produce pleasant and delightful *kamishibai*. Because we find the children of the streets deserted, their problems of amusement and sentiment neglected, and organs and plans for them utterly lacking. Oh, what a miserable situation the most of them are [in]!"⁴⁹ Everyone was destitute on the eve after the surrender and the father of modern *kamishibai*, Kata Kōji, author of the immensely popular *Golden Bat* series, recalled in his postwar memoirs that most of the snacks performers could sell at first were scraps of flour fried in fish oil as flat crackers (*senbei*) and sweet potato slivers.⁵⁰

So effective had *kamishibai* been in mobilizing the younger generations that from July 20–21, 1946, the Tokyo War Crimes Trials put *kamishibai* producers on trial. Prosecutors first required testimony from Saki Akio, a central player in the Japanese Kamishibai Association and a wartime propagandist. Saki, however, made it seem as if all the *kamishibai* produced were printed at the behest of the government and the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (*Taiseiyokusankai*). The lawyer for the defense (former prime minister Tōjō Hideki's lawyer) Kiyose Ichirō asked Saki to reenact a *kamishibai* performance in court, probably the first ever held during a military trial. That performance in open court managed to somehow gain judicial acquiescence that *kamishibai* were more educative for the postwar rather than criminal tools for wartime mobilization.⁵¹

In the postwar era, *kamishibai* quickly shed its military camouflage and adopted the new dress of democracy, even if the participants remained the same. Producers and writers organized a new journal, *Kamishibai*, staffed by many of the same people who had promoted wartime propaganda among children. The new companies quickly called for the democratization of Japan. Saki Akio also perceived the shifting public landscape and reflected this transformation with an article in December 1947 appealing that new *kamishibai* should follow the directives of the Postdam Declaration, be educative, and "support the development of a work ethic."⁵² What he said was not that dissimilar to what had been written during the war. He merely removed the tagline at the end referring to working for the national empire. An article in the same journal featured Inaniwa Keiko, another wartime *kamishibai* writer who had penned a paper play called *Kushi* (Comb), which had extolled the virtues of mothers who supported their sons' participation in battle so that the country could



Figure 10. The original depiction of the Golden Bat.

authorities were not clear on what to offer up for censorship. Kata Kōji highlighted this ambiguity in his reminiscences concerning the postwar evolution of his famed character, the Golden Bat (fig. 10). At one point, Occupation censors felt that the skeletal Golden Bat appeared to Westerners as more of a bad guy than a champion of justice, and SCAP officials recommended Kata soften the image. He responded to the series of interfering demands, ultimately rendering the wartime skeletal character into what Kata himself felt was a more Prince Valiant image, complete with an effeminate permanent wave.

In April 1948, the minister of education Morito Tatsuo announced at a national *kamishibai* contest that “*kamishibai* were needed to rebuild Japan; however, if producers think only of their own profit . . . the future of Japan will be dark indeed.”⁵⁴ But postwar Japanese had other plans and as Japan entered the mid-1950s, on the cusp of its incredible economic explosion, *denki kamishibai*, or television as it later came to be known, grew more popular. With each passing year, the numbers of *kamishibai* performers dwindled. Arashiyama Kōzaburō, however, believes that linking television with *kamishibai* insults the latter because until Japan’s economic miracle arrived, he remembered, “*kamishibai* performers usually arrived at dusk, in the warm darkness as evening settled and suddenly around the corner the performer appeared with his movable stage. . . .”⁵⁵ We cannot deny the nostalgia that still remains for this bygone era but neither should we ignore the role *kamishibai* played in mobilizing children for war and their shift to propaganda for postwar, American-led democratic reforms. The seamless continuity with which producers and performers continued in the same field, as we have seen with so much else with wartime Japanese propaganda, should also pressure us to further examine the manner in which Japan faced defeat in the war and victory after the occupation.

fight. After the war, Inaniwa adapted and explained that *kamishibai* should be considered a tool of war but could also play a role in democratizing society. “We need *kamishibai* that focus on our daily lives as individuals within a society and not on action for the sake of the country as we saw during the war,” she wrote.⁵³

Even with renewed and reinvented interest in postwar *kamishibai*, SCAP’s policies demonstrated a firm lack of understanding regarding what it deemed necessary to censor, just as the Japanese

Endnotes

- * All images are reproduced with permission from the Cotsen Children's Library in Los Angeles. I would like to thank Ivy Trent, head of the children's collection, Lyssa Stapleton, Art Collections manager, and Deirdre Feehan for the assistance and expertise in digitally reproducing items from their extensive collection.
1. Hasegawa, *Nihon no sensō jidō bungaku: Senzen, senchū, sengo* (Tokyo: Heibunsha, 1995), introduction. One interesting item concerning most books published on the topic of children and Japan's war is that many take the form of exhibit with little commentary. Visual presentation replaces analysis, albeit infused with some historical content. The Meiji and Taishō eras provide food for thought for many scholars, yet hesitancy over the war and children remains. In part, this reluctance may stem from the fact that, with the exception of Yamanaka Hisashi and his supporters, many Japanese want to focus on the next generation and not their own. As much as numerous scholars, Etō Jun being quite representative, criticized the U.S. occupation for its denial of war responsibility, the lacuna of Japanese research on youth and the war remains.
 2. Washinosu Atsuya, *Taiwan hokō kōminka dokuhon* (Taipei: Taiwan Keisatsu Kyōkai, 1941), 247.
 3. Yamanaka Hisashi, *Shōkokumin wa dō tsukurareta ka* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1986), 205.
 4. Kamichi Chizuko, *Kamishibai no rekishi* (Tokyo: Kyūzansha, 1997), 29.
 5. Ann Herring, *The Dawn of Wisdom* (Los Angeles: Cotsen Occasional Papers, 2000), 41.
 6. Yamanaka Hisashi, *Kodomotachi no Taiheiyō sensō: Kokumin gakkō no jidai* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1986), 2–3.
 7. Yamanaka, *Kodomotachi no Taiheiyō sensō*, 125.
 8. Kawamura Minato, *Manshū tetsudō maboroshi ryokō* (Tokyo: Nesuko, 1998), 54–55. Even today, Japanese schoolchildren still adore traveling with these stamp books and recording their station visits by collecting each station's symbol.
 9. Published in Fujin Kōron, Shōwa 17 nen, 3 gatsu, *Shōwa daizasshi fukurokuban: Senchūhen* (Tokyo: Ryūdō Shuppan, 1978), 162.
 10. Ury Eppstein, "School Songs Before and After the War: From 'Children Tank Soldiers' to 'Everyone a Good Child,'" *Monumenta Nipponica* 42, no. 4 (Winter 1987): 435.
 11. Ishii, "Kamishibai to kansō" *Senbu geppō*, February 1942, 68.
 12. Matsunaga Kenya, *Kyōiku kamishibai kōza* (Tokyo: Genukan, 1943), 19–21.
 13. Saki Akio, *Kamishibai* (Tokyo: Geijutsugakuin Shuppanbu, 1943), 22.
 14. Ironically, this same *kamishibai*, *Kokoro no kagi*, was used postwar, but censors blackened out the lines on "evil foreigners" and the stress on war culture. Many *kamishibai* were used in this manner postwar after the American occupation forced a reorientation of Japan's educational goals. However, during the early Occupation, materials were in extremely short supply, so many wartime *kamishibai* were quickly excised of their offending language and the same pictures were reused with slightly altered content.
 15. Uchiyama Kenshō, *Kamishibai seigi* (Tokyo: Tōyōtoshō, 1939), 2.
 16. Uchiyama, *Kamishibai seigi*, 4.
 17. Uchiyama, *Kamishibai seigi*, 40.
 18. Uchiyama, *Kamishibai seigi*, 20. The government made similar efforts to force comedians and entertainers in the vaudeville industry, along with comic book artists, to register their names so that a "line of blame" could be established if an artiste ran afoul of the increasingly stringent laws.
 19. Sakuramoto Tomio and Konno Toshihiko, *Kamishibai to sensō: Jūgo no kodomotachi* (Tokyo: Marujusha, 1985), 8.
 20. Kamichi, *Kamishibai no rekishi*, 41.
 21. Kamichi, *Kamishibai no rekishi*, 42.
 22. Kamichi, *Kamishibai no rekishi*, 71.

23. Uchiyama, *Kamishibai seigi*, 133.
24. Eppstein, "School Songs Before and After the War," 432.
25. Uchiyama, *Kamishibai seigi*, 107.
26. Uchiyama, *Kamishibai seigi*, as quoted on p. 108.
27. Kamichi, *Kamishibai no rekishi*, 34.
28. Kamichi, *Kamishibai no rekishi*, as quoted on p. 38.
29. Saitamaken Heiwa Shiryōkan, ed., *Kamishibai to sensō* (Saitama, Higashimatsuyamashi: Saitama Heiwa Shiryōkan, 1997), 8.
30. Saitamaken Heiwa Shiryōkan, *Kamishibai to sensō*, 12.
31. Reproduced in Sakuramoto and Konno, *Kamishibai to sensō*, 19–30.
32. The term used here, *memeshii*, might translate better as "you are kind of a wuss lately," or a "candy ass."
33. Reproduced in Sakuramoto and Konno, *Kamishibai to sensō*, 19–30.
34. Reproduced in Sakuramoto and Konno, *Kamishibai to sensō*, 102.
35. "Shisōsen dokuhon part 7, Shisōsen to bunka," *Shūhō*, October 1942, 20.
36. Herring, *The Dawn of Wisdom*, 78–79.
37. Herring, *The Dawn of Wisdom*, 79.
38. Herring, *The Dawn of Wisdom*, 86. Japan's advanced technology as a form of modernity to be cherished is depicted in numerous post-World War I *sugoroku* concerning flight.
39. For visuals concerning these and other wartime ads, see Machida Shinobu, *Senji kōkoku zukan imon bukuro no nakami wa nani?* (Tokyo: WAVE Shuppan, 1997).
40. Herring, *The Dawn of Wisdom*, 90. This was not the case, however, with the story of the boy with two heads.
41. David Ambaras, "Juvenile Delinquency and the National Defense State: Policing Young Workers in Wartime Japan, 1937–1945," *Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no. 1 (2004): 42.
42. See *Shōwa daizasshi fukurokuban*, for example, "Zensen shōshi no tegami" (Letters from the front, excerpted from *Fujin no Tomo*, Shōwa 16 nen, 3 gatsu). On p. 86, a similar soldier, Takeda Toshio, quartered in China, writes: "To everyone at the home front, our greatest pleasure as soldiers is to receive letters from the mother country."
43. See "Zensen shōshi no tegami," 88.
44. Washinosu, *Taiwan hokō kōminka dokuhon*, 321.
45. Don Cohn, *Virtue by Design* (Los Angeles: Cotsen Occasional Press, 2000), 41.
46. Washinosu, *Taiwan hokō kōminka dokuhon*, 221.
47. Washinosu, *Taiwan hokō kōminka dokuhon*, 220.
48. Ishii, "Kamishibai to kansō," 73.
49. CIS 760, GHQ Archives (National Diet Library Tokyo) Press, Pictorial and Broadcast Division, District I, Pictorial Section, 6 August 1948, memo for the record.
50. Kata, *Kamishibai Shōwashi* (Tokyo: Rippū Shobō, 1971), 192.
51. Sakuramoto Tomio and Konno Toshihiko, "Kyōiku kamishibai no sensō sekinin o tou," *Shinchihei*, September 1983, 86.
52. *Kamishibai*, December 1947, 2.
53. *Kamishibai*, December 1947, 2.
54. *Kamishibai*, April 1948, 23.
55. Arashiyama, *Kamishibai shūsei: Asahi gurafu bessatsu* (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha, 1995), 98.