

Nation and Body: Discourse for Disability in Sino-Japanese War and WWII Japan

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■ Research Purpose

This panel examines the treatment of people with disabilities in Japan during the Second Sino-Japanese War and World War II, based on historical documents from that period.

■ Research Methods

This research utilizes keyword searches to identify the relevant documents within the large-scale materials of the National Diet Library Digital Collection, which has greatly improved in terms of accessibility in recent years.

■ Significance of the research

There are excellent previous studies on the topics of war and people with disabilities, but only a small number of primary sources from the war period have been covered. This research addresses this gap by examining previously unreferenced important documents, offering new insights into how society viewed and treated people with disabilities during that era.

■ Evidence from Wartime Documents

□ People with disabilities who were considered to be non-“war potential” and were left to die

Even if the evacuation of infants, the elderly, the disabled and the sick is called for, young people aged between 10 and 16 must work as messengers during air raids. The evacuation of the elderly, the disabled and the sick requires the use of transport equipment, attendants, transport supervisors, monitors and carers. These people do not need special guardians when they stay at home, but a large number of the aforementioned people are needed to evacuate them. Also, the number of transport equipment required is enormous, so it is impossible to implement it. Even if these people are evacuated, it is the destruction of the family if the family is separated. [...] Evacuation is not actually possible.

□ Disability and appearance

[...] In order to play a prominent role in society, one must have a considerable academic background, as well as a well-proportioned appearance. A university president with a missing nose, a prime minister or diplomat with one hand or both legs missing, would hurt the self-esteem of the nation's people. [...] Doctors and priests are also looked up to by their patients and believers as objects of their respect and veneration, so they must be almost perfect in terms of talent, knowledge, and appearance.

□ Nationalism that prohibits the killing of children with disabilities

Therefore, if you do not suppress the natural characteristics of spontaneity, and instead nurture them, the child's future will not be as dependent and subordinate as the mother fears, but will strive to preserve and develop themselves, exercising their independence to the extent that is appropriate for their abilities,

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whether that be large or small. [...]

[...] We must consider that a child is not the child of just one mother. [...] A village is a part of a nation, and a family is a part of a village. Oneself and one's own child is a member of a family.

[...] Therefore, apart from the case where the state takes the life of a child from its own standpoint, it is not permissible for a mother to take the life of her child on her own authority. [...]

If we look at the reality of society, the blind child are not only able to preserve themselves by taking up some kind of occupation, but they are also able to make a reasonable contribution to society. [...]

We cannot help but be grateful for the advanced Japanese society we have. Mothers with disabled children should take note of the progress that our country has made.

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■ Consideration

□ 1. Non-“war potential” individuals:

Documents show that people with disabilities were excluded from evacuation plans for the following reasons: ① Because they could not be spared the manpower and equipment needed for their evacuation of them, and ② Because it was against family norms for anyone other than family members to care for them.

In other words, individuals deemed to lack “war potential” were denied in two ways (a. because they were not “war potential”, and b. because it was not feasible to assign “war potential” manpower to their care) in a meritocratic sense. In addition, they were also condemned to death by family norms.

□ 2. Appearance linked to ability:

Physical characteristics were more directly linked to disability than they are today. Some physical characteristics were praised, while others were excluded as affecting morale and self-esteem.

□ 3. A body that is used up or left to die:

While the discourse prohibited mothers from killing children with disabilities, it also affirmed the killing of the children by the nation. At the same time, the Japanese nation's efforts to employ people with disabilities were praised. This can be analyzed as a way of thinking that, while the nation should make full use of its citizens, including people with disabilities, as “war potential”, it should also kill those who are not “war potential” in the name of the nation.

□ Conclusion

In each case, the citizenry as a mass was the premise, and the gaze of biopower directed towards the contribution of citizens to the nation was present.

Considering that the control of citizens by biopower became fully realized in the modernization process, and that there was also a reflection on this after the war, the violent gaze of biopower towards people with disabilities during the war can be thought of as one extreme.

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