

“Children in the Wind”

Reexamining the Golden Age of Childhood Film in Wartime Japan

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During the late 1930s and early 1940s, Japanese critics noted a boom of excellent “children’s films.” The annual top ten movies compiled by the journal *Cinema Bulletin* [Kinema junpō] confirmed their observation. Thus, in 1937, the Shōchiku production *Children in the Wind* [Kaze no naka no kodomo] ranked number four in a list of strong competitors. In the years that followed, numerous films continued to evoke the younger generation’s experiences. Some of these works were based on novels that are now considered classics of Japanese children’s and youth literature, such as *A Pebble by the Wayside* (Robō no ishi, number two in 1938) or *Composition Class* (Tsuzurikata kyōshitsu, number five in 1938). Other movies had less well-known sources—among them *The Story of Jirō* (Jirō monogatari, number six in 1941)—but were successfully released well into the “dark valley” of the war years.

The blossoming of the genre coincided with societal and legal debates that questioned the suitability of regular cinema programs for children and youth. These discussions informed the preparation of the film law that was adopted in April 1939 and enacted in October of the same year. Based on this law, the Ministry of Education began to screen entertainment programs for unsuitable films. Thereafter, girls and boys under the age of fourteen were no longer admitted to a significant share of domestic and foreign productions that featured “romance,” “gambling,” “sword wielding,” or had a “bad influence on the juvenile mind” (“Officials will taboo” 1939).

Given the commercial importance of young audiences, it seems plausible to assume that these developments encouraged the production of suitable motion pictures and thus ensured the success of children’s films. However, contemporary

reviews held that *Children in the Wind* and similar works were not specifically targeted towards young spectators. The frequently used term “children’s film” (*jidō eiga*), they explained, referred instead to motion pictures that featured young protagonists and treated the topic of childhood for a predominantly adult audience (see Kon 1941: 18).

The question then arises as to why adult audiences should take such an interest in stories about the life of the young. Writing several decades later, film historians identified the outbreak of military conflict following the “incident at the Marco Polo Bridge” in July 1937 as a major cause. Since government institutions intensified censorship in its wake, argues Keiko I. McDonald, the “search for marketable forms of innocence” was on. Therefore, she concluded, censors in the Home Ministry have to be credited for “a little golden age of films about children” (McDonald 2000: 31). Satō Tadao equally noted a “golden age” of such movies in his influential *History of Japanese Film*, but offered a different explanation. According to him, the sudden popularity of the genre was related to easing societal tensions. After long years of internal conflicts—first caused by left-extremist and then by right-extremist terrorism—the war contributed to a new feeling of stability. The cinema programs reflected this, he contends, by the appearance of a great number of childhood and romance movies (Satō 1995: 10).

Even a cursory screening of the relevant films suggests that these explanations are wanting in several respects. As has been noted above, most of the movies were adaptations of literary works. These works were published months or in some cases even years before the outbreak of open war against China. Moreover, reducing the obvious societal interest in the life of the young to a form of censorship evasion or escapism instead of exploring its nature seems inadequate and leaves a number of intriguing questions unaddressed.¹ Did these childhood films really only “market” innocence? Were there other reasons for the genre’s blossoming? Which social functions did these works fulfill? How were the narratives really related to the unfolding war?

The following examination of the golden age of Japanese childhood film contributes to answering these questions from the perspectives of the history of childhood and the history of emotions. It draws particular inspiration from the approach that Ute Frevert and her colleagues have employed in *Learning How to Feel* (2014). The contributions to this volume explore “emotional socialization” via children’s fiction and advice manuals and emphasize the relevance of these processes for shaping the “emotional repertoire” of modern societies (Eitler, Olsen, Jensen 2014: 2–3).

After a short excursion into the rich history of children’s representations in Japanese cinema that introduces an early work by Ozu Yasujirō, the first section turns to the “childhood boom” that evolved in 1930s Japan and intersected with print media, radio, and theater as well as cinema. This rediscovery of the early phase

in life elaborated upon the authentic psychological experience of the young and thus differentiated itself from earlier popular notions of childhood that had idealized the innocence of “children’s hearts” (Morimoto 2009: 57). The following part examines more closely three film projects that arguably drove this media boom. Finally, I will analyze the representation of the young generation’s emotional life in these and other works of the golden age of childhood film.

HISTORICAL EXCURSION: *I WAS BORN, BUT . . .*

Children in the Wind and other above-mentioned childhood films were not the first successful motion pictures that featured juvenile protagonists and their “innocence.” A good source is also the movies about the urban middle classes—commonly known as “films on the petit bourgeoisie” (*shō shimin eiga*)—produced by Shōchiku Studios. Managed by production director Kido Shirō, Shōchiku attempted to repeat the financial success of Hollywood studios in Japan. According to Kido, a focus on the everyday life of middle-class families guaranteed the interest of wide audience segments (Richie 1994: 8–9). As a result, children became an obvious topic, and many examples of this genre took a surprisingly complex perspective on the experiences of young urban dwellers of the 1920s and early 1930s.

A fine example is *Kinema junpō*’s number one production for the year 1932, the well-known silent film *I Was Born, But . . .* (*Umarete wa mita keredo*) by Ozu Yasujirō. Also titled *Picture Book for Adults*, this motion picture introduces the family of the ambitious employee Yoshii who moves to a new home in the suburbs, not far from the residence of his employer. For the two sons of the family, at first life in the new neighborhood reinforces their middle-class identity, based on the belief that ability and effort ensure advancement in society for everyone—and they do not appear as passive child-like beings living in a fairytale world. Rather, they are competent social actors who voluntarily enlist in their parents’ project of getting ahead in the world. Thus, they feel reassured when they manage to defeat the local bully and gradually rise in the suburban gang. However, it is trust in the justice of the social order that proves to be the “innocent” element in their perspective on life. This trust is powerfully questioned when they discover that their father—contrary to their belief—lowers himself to a degree that disappoints them, in order to win the favor of his employer, Iwasaki.

In the climactic scene, the local boys attend a private movie exhibition in the home of the employer, who prides himself as an amateur filmmaker. To the surprise of the juvenile protagonists, the main attraction of the movie night turns out to be their father, who plays the fool for Iwasaki’s camera. What ensues is a combined school and hunger strike that the two boys engage in against all displays of paternal authority. Finally, their mother’s persuasive power and a bout of hunger bring about a solution to the conflict. In the scenes that follow, she convinces her

boys to rejoin the project of getting ahead, by assuring them that they will become more successful than their father, if they only invest more effort.

EXPLORING THE AUTHENTIC EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE OF CHILDHOOD

When *I Was Born, But . . .* was released in June of 1932, contemporary film critics did not perceive its exploration of young psychology as part of a larger trend (see, for instance, “Shin eiga hyō” 1932: 3). However, a societal interest in rediscovering childhood in terms of its emotional experience apparently developed in the following years. A piece of evidence for this development is a series of articles by Tsubota Jōji, then an established author of children’s literature, which was published in July 1935 in the *Tōkyō Asahi* newspaper (Tsubota 1935).

In these articles Tsubota explored the portrayal of children in well-known examples of world literature and autobiographical writing including works by Chekhov, Dostoyevsky, Gide, Wedekind, and many others. While he noted that the emotional attachment of adults to their children, and in particular the love for a lost child, was a pervasive theme, he emphasized that the “inner world,” the “character,” and the “psychology” of the young themselves rarely came to the fore. The few works that did turn to the subjective experiences of children, he argued, tended to idealize their protagonists as “pure and innocent,” as was popular for a time “among the families of Japanese intellectuals.” According to Tsubota, this tendency—and he clearly referred to the “focus on children’s [innocent] hearts” (*dōshin shugi*) mentioned above—seemed sentimental and outdated (Tsubota 1935, part 1: 9). In contrast, he singled out the Japanese authors Suzuki Miekichi and Kitahara Hakushū among an impressive selection of writers, for giving boys and girls a voice in the highbrow children’s magazine *Red Bird* (Akai tori) during the two preceding decades. Since 1918, this journal had been a pioneer in emancipating Japanese children and youth literature from the strong didacticism that was prevalent until then. In Tsubota’s opinion, the efforts of Suzuki and Kitahara to publish texts by children in the sections entitled “composition” and “free verse,” moreover, went beyond the focus on innocence and contributed significantly to a psychologically more realistic portrayal of the younger generations. He contended that a selection of short works by girls and boys from *Red Bird* would make a fine contribution to world literature in terms of representing children (Tsubota 1935, part 2: 9).

In the last article of the series, Tsubota noted recent changes. With the translation of foreign works such as Jules Renard’s *Poil de carotte* (1894, translated by Kishida Kunio as *Carrot* [Ninjin], published by Hokusui Sha in August 1933) or André Gide’s *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (1925, translated by Yamanouchi Yoshio as *The Counterfeiters* [Nisegane tsukuri], published by Hokusui Sha in 1935) along with the appearance of new Japanese works such as *A Japanese* (Ichi Nihonjin)

by Sugiyama Heisuke (1925), *A Crybaby Apprentice* (Nakimushi kozō) by Hayashi Fumiko (1934), and *Towards the Truth* (Shinjitsu ichiro) by Yamamoto Yūzō (1935), qualitatively new images took shape. In Jules Renard's *Poil de carotte*, for example, an autobiographical novel about the trials of a redheaded boy who grows up in a cruelly unloving and indifferent family, children and youth were portrayed without a trace of sentimentality or "clemency" (*onjō*). Instead, they appeared as beings possessing an emotional life that was even more intricate and fragile than that of adults (Tsubota 1935, part 3: 11).

Judging from contemporary reviews, this new perspective on the experience of life by children and youth was particularly well received. In writing about the translation of *Poil de carotte*, the writer Osaragi Jirō praised it by arguing that it enabled readers to perceive the young generation in a new light (Osaragi 1933: 6). The significant attention that foreign and Japanese adaptations of the work attracted underlines this impression. In April 1934, the Tsukiji theater produced a successful stage production, and the following year, it was aired as a radio play. The release of the film version by director Julien Duvivier (*Les Films Marcel Vandal et Charles Delac*, 1932) in April 1934 was a major event. When Kawakita Nagamasa, leading importer of European productions at the time, returned from a tour of Berlin, Paris, London, Vienna, and Prague where he had seen about two hundred films, his account of the meeting with Robert Lynen, the young star of *Poil de carotte*, was covered in a national news report ("Meiga 'Ninjin' no Rinan shōnen ni au." 1934: 9).

At the same time, the publication of Japanese works that assumed the perspective of children toward their environment and attempted to represent their emotional life gained momentum. Early cases in point are the above-mentioned *Towards the Truth* by Yamamoto Yūzō and *A Crybaby Apprentice* by Hayashi Fumiko. According to Baba Tsuneo, writing for the *Yomiuri* newspaper, the serial publication of *Towards the Truth* starting in January 1935 not only captured the attention of mothers, but also reminded fathers of their own childhood (Baba 1936: 5). This novel detailed the trials of Yoshio, whose mother left the family when he was a small child. Keikichi, on the other hand, the principal character in *A Crybaby Apprentice*, had lost his father. When his mother finds a new partner, the unwanted child is sent away and passed from one aunt to another.

Film studios competed for the rights to produce screen versions. While Nikkatsu acquired the right to adapt *Towards the Truth*, Tōkyō Hassei produced *A Crybaby Apprentice*. Known for the quality of his adaptations of literary works, director Toyoda Shirō presented a much acclaimed film version of the latter work in March of 1938. A review by redoubtable critic Tsumura Hideo went so far as to speak of "the most realistic portrayal of a child in Japanese cinema to date." This referred to the performance by Hayashi Fumio, the young amateur actor chosen for the role of the protagonist (Tsumura 1938: 4).

Several autobiographically inspired works followed. Considering their enthusiastic reception across the repertoire of media, it seems justified to speak of a ‘childhood boom’ in 1930s Japan. Let us look more closely at *Children in the Wind*, *A Pebble by the Wayside*, and *Composition Class*. Their prominence within this boom is confirmed by standard works on the history of Japanese children’s literature (see, for instance, Kan 1983: 258–59).

Children in the Wind by Tsubota Jōji

The novella *Children in the Wind* was serially published in the *Tōkyō Asahi* newspaper between September and November 1936. It drew heavily on challenging events in Tsubota Jōji’s family history as son of the manager of a weaving factory in rural Okayama. In announcing the publication, Tsubota explained his particular angle on the emotional life of his young protagonists: “I have two children in mind. They are Zenta and Sanpei. I will place these two into the harsh and cold wind of our times. I wonder how they will protect themselves and their parents against this wind. They will rely on their innate cheerfulness and their pure character. The question of whether this cheerfulness will let them gain the upper hand [in the fight] against the darkness of the world is the topic of this work” (“Seisai o hanatsu shōsetsu jin” 1938: 11).

In fact, the two brothers in *Children in the Wind* are confronted with seriously adverse circumstances. They have loving parents, but their apparent economic security is afforded only by their father who manages the local factory. When he is suddenly arrested and charged with embezzlement, their mother is forced to find employment to make ends meet. While Zenta stays with her, the younger Sanpei is sent to live with the family of his well-meaning uncle. However, suffering from the separation, Sanpei causes so much mischief that he is returned to his family. The boys are happy to be reunited and attempt to take care of the household and cooking, which results in heart-warming calamitous scenes. Their mother’s desperation grows, but then she surprisingly finds a piece of evidence that proves her husband’s innocence.

Children in the Wind was read with great enthusiasm, not only by adults, but also by primary school students, as Tsubota, who received numerous student essays from a teacher in Iwate prefecture, related in the *Asahi* newspaper (Tsubota 1937: 8). A stage version by the Tokyo Children’s Theater Company (Gekidan Tōdō) was well received, and Shōchiku Studios acquired the rights to produce a feature film. The task was assigned to Shimizu Hiroshi, who emphasized the need to use child-oriented directing techniques to foster natural performances (“Eigaka junbi taidan kiroku” 1937: 8). When it was finally released in November 1937, the movie did indeed gain general recognition. A review in the *Tōkyō Asahi* newspaper praised, among other points, that the common tendency of child actors to overact and to mimic adults—citing recent films with Shirley Temple—had been

avoided. Instead, this work offered a pure image of the world of the young “as if painted with light watercolors” (Tsumura 1937: 10).

After the film *Children in the Wind* received an award from the Minister of Education in the following year, a sequel to the novel, titled *Four Seasons of Childhood* (Kodomo no shiki) was published in the *Miyako* newspaper from January to June 1938. It was equally well received in the world of literature for its entertainment value (see, for example, Moriyama 1938: 4) and a successful screen adaptation in two parts by Shōchiku Studios followed in 1939 (also directed by Shimizu Hiroshi, *Kinema junpō* rank number six in 1939).

A Pebble by the Wayside by Yamamoto Yūzō

A Pebble by the Wayside was serially published from January to June 1937. The fact that it appeared in both the Tokyo and the Osaka editions of the *Asahi* newspaper suggests that general interest in fictional works on the young generation became even more pronounced.

Set in the Meiji period, Yamamoto Yūzō’s novel introduces the talented Goichi, who lives in a family of samurai descent. The boy desperately wishes to advance to middle school in order to get ahead in life. However, his family’s poverty frustrates his one and only wish. His father, a former samurai, is involved in a ruinous lawsuit. His mother has to support the family by folding envelopes in their home, day and night, although her health suffers. Fortunately, Goichi is encouraged not only by his teacher Tsugino, but also by the owner of the local bookshop. When the latter decides to pay for his middle school tuition fees, a lucky turn of events seems imminent. However, his proud father opposes the plan and relegates his son to an apprenticeship in a kimono fabric store. While Goichi suffers from mistreatment by the family of shop owners and their employees, his mother becomes desperate and her health declines further. After she dies, Goichi runs off to Tokyo in search of his father. After many twists and turns he becomes a typesetter, attends evening courses, and finally succeeds in life by entering the publication business.

This story was also autobiographically inspired. Yamamoto’s father came from a lower samurai background in Tochigi prefecture, but turned businessman and operated a small fabric store. While he supported his son’s education, he did not grant his wish to attend middle school and sent him to Asakusa to serve as an apprentice in a small business. Only after many struggles and the death of his father did Yūzō gain acceptance to attend the First Higher School in Tokyo, where he became acquainted with Konoe Fumimaro (later prime minister) and writers such as Kikuchi Kan and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. Eventually, he went on to the German Literature Department of Tokyo Imperial University and enjoyed an early success as playwright. By the 1930s, he was also firmly established as a novelist and frequently contributed to the *Asahi* newspaper. He was known for his liberal views and openly criticized the Home Ministry’s censorship policies (Nagano 1986).

The authorship and publication of *A Pebble by the Wayside* is a fascinating story in itself. Yamamoto confidently announced a “family or domestic novel” (*katei shōsetsu*) for all ages revolving around the hardships and the maturation of the young protagonist, Goichi, described as follows: “He is thrown away like a pebble by the wayside. He is kicked like a pebble by the wayside. He is covered in dust like a pebble by the wayside. But sometimes, it may be that a small stone from the countryside finally arrives in the center of a big city, by being kicked again and again. Even a small stone that was stepped on all the time may end up on a roof, before one knows it, and look down on the people who pass by” (“Gantan yori rensai” 1936: 7). This tale of hardship may seem conventional, and the key to its success was, again, its novel perspective. *A Pebble by the Wayside* assumed the viewpoint of the boy Goichi, and attempted to represent his emotional experience, while simultaneously celebrating the individual, driven to fulfill his potential.

Yamamoto’s agreement with the *Asahi* newspaper stated that the next part of *A Pebble by the Wayside* would appear in the second half of 1937. However, early in July, open military conflict with China broke out, and publication of the novel ceased. Reportedly, the general suspicion entertained by military institutions towards the newspaper influenced the decision. Soon thereafter, Yamamoto was approached by editors of the women’s magazine *The Housewife’s Companion* (*Shufu no tomo*), who were interested in continuing the publication. Instead of moving on to the second part, Yamamoto followed the suggestion of the editors and rewrote the novel from the beginning. However, confronted with the demands of censorship officers, he abandoned writing the second part (Yonemura 2004: 136–37).

Nevertheless, within weeks of its publication *A Pebble by the Wayside* became popular among Japanese readers. Their reactions suggest that Goichi’s story was perceived as typical of Japan in the late 1930s, although it was set in the Meiji period. This is evidenced, for example, by a meeting of educators and businessmen in western Japan to discuss the “case of Goichi” in the Osaka *Asahi* Building in March 1937. During the ensuing discussion the owner of a large fabric wholesaler estimated that tens if not hundreds of thousands of young Japanese were in Goichi’s situation. Moreover, he attested that abuses such as receiving a new name, or having to do work for the children of the family were not uncommon. The participants further raised issues such as how to deal with the educational zeal of apprentices or the benefits of night schools (“Goichi no baai” 1937: 4).

In December 1937, newspapers reported that the Ministry of Education had concluded an agreement with Nikkatsu. In an unprecedented move, it decided to coproduce a film adaptation. The ministry explicitly initiated the project as a contribution to the “Movement for the Spiritual Mobilization of the Nation” (*Kokumin Seishin Sōdōin Undō*), which supported the government’s war effort.² It was planned that this first “Ministry of Education Film” would not only be released in commercial cinemas, but also be shown in nationwide public meetings organized

by the National Film Education Association and especially in schools (“Monbushō eiga ni” 1937: 11).

To support the ministry’s goals, Nikkatsu mobilized significant resources. Director Tasaka Tomotaka assumed the responsibility for the project, choosing a characteristic approach to representing children on screen. “I am confident that I have portrayed the children well,” he noted during a roundtable discussion, “although I do not have any myself. I did not treat Goichi as a child, but as a young human being” (“Eiga ‘Robō no ishi’ zadankai” 1938: 3). He was joined by internationally known star actor Kosugi Isamu as teacher Tsugino. Young Goichi was played by Katayama Akihiko—the son of director Shima Kōji, a childhood film enthusiast as well—who convinced observers and critics alike. If anything, *A Pebble by the Wayside* was received even more enthusiastically than the preceding childhood films had been. Critic Tsumura Hideo reported that Japanese cinema was elevated by this “epic masterpiece.” During the above-mentioned roundtable discussion joined by filmmakers and writers—including Hayashi Fumiko and Tsubota Jōji—the representation of children as social actors in the world of adults was praised (“Eiga ‘Robō no ishi’ zadankai” 1938: 3).

Composition Class by Toyoda Masako

A literary sensation led to another film on childhood, which ended up among *Kinema junpō*’s top ten (number five in 1938). In the summer of 1937, the publisher Chūō Kōron released a volume with autobiographical sketches by Toyoda Masako, then the fifteen-year-old daughter of a day-laboring tinsmith in the Katsushika district of Tokyo. Soon an English version followed (Toyoda and Iwadō 1938). The descriptions of everyday life by the young inhabitant of this poor area of Shitamachi were written when she attended a local primary school between the age of nine and eleven. Masako’s composition teacher, Ōki Ken’ichirō, had taught her “to see things for herself, to judge them for herself, and to express her true thoughts in her own words” (Toyoda and Iwadō 1938). Realizing the quality of her short texts, Ōki sent them to the children’s journal *Red Bird* for publication. While the efforts of its editor Suzuki Miekichi and the literary education movement had led to many publications by young authors from rural Japan, Toyoda’s essays differed because they allowed contemporary readers rare glimpses into the authentic experience of life among the urban poor (“Tsukiji no butai ni” 1938: 11).³ As the translator of the English version noted: “The young author pictures not a world peopled with fairies or goblins, as might be expected, but a nook of the community where men and women are not well dressed but real, and children, far from good mannered, play and scrap as they do in real life” (Toyoda and Iwadō 1938: 12).

Toyoda Masako’s stories do not revolve around fictional events, and her descriptions outline adverse living circumstances. Her family lives in a tiny house near factories in “the slums of Tokyo”: mother, father, and the three children socialize, eat, study, work, rest, and sleep in a six-mat room. The family lacks the most

essential items such as clothing; the father is among the laborers who gather every morning in front of the city employment office. Frequently, the Toyodas subsist on only a handful of rice each day, carefully trying to conceal their poverty from their neighbors. “If I had not had my lunch at school,” writes Masako, “I should have had nothing to eat.” Even on New Year’s Day, she has to attend the school ceremony in old clothes—much to her embarrassment (Toyoda and Iwadō 1938: 88).

Masako’s “unpretentious child-like innocence” attracted interest beyond the realm of publishing. She was invited to read her stories on national radio, and the theater company Tsukiji Shōgekijō prepared a stage version that scored “one of the recent dramatic ‘hits’” (Toyoda and Iwadō 1938: 11; “Japanese Modern Drama” 1938: 8). In the following year, Tōhō Studios decided to produce a screen version. Veteran director Yamamoto Kajirō chose a documentary approach to the adaptation, which featured the young actress Takamine Hideko in one of her first major roles, and this scored a hit as well. However, despite all of the media attention attracted by this sincere daughter of a day laborer from Shitamachi, Toyoda Masako went on to work in a factory after graduating from primary school. Her teacher received the royalties for the first edition of *Composition Class* because the book had been published in his name. Only later did Toyoda start a career as a writer, and in 1942, she was sent to China to report on the local situation for “the women at the home front” (Toyoda 1942: 4). In any case, her much publicized meeting with her onscreen impersonator Takamine Hideko, who was “brought up as a spoiled child” by wealthy restaurant owners in Hakodate, demonstrated the radically different courses that childhood and youth could take in wartime and early Shōwa Japan.⁴

INNOCENCE AS RESILIENCE

As we have seen, these three influential childhood projects—the literary works and their screen adaptations—received significant societal attention for their authentic representation of children’s emotional experiences. Considering this fact, it is striking that most of the young protagonists are confronted with seriously adverse living circumstances. More often than not, their families are defunct, and they are burdened with having to bring about an improvement in their situations themselves. Here I examine the portrayal of children’s challenges and the way they deal with them in more detail. In particular I want to highlight the characteristic nature of their innocence, which seems to be relevant for contemporary adults’ everyday life as well.

Many other works that are associated with the golden age of childhood film in wartime Japan equally featured scenes of emotional hardship. An example is *The Story of Jirō* (*Jirō monogari*), authored by Shimomura Kojin, an educator who, among other positions, served as director of the Japanese High School in Taipei and later joined the Greater Japanese Youth Association (*Dai Nippon Seinendan*).

Although Nikkatsu Studios released a movie version by Shima Kōji only in 1941, the first installments of the story had already been published in the journal *New Climate* (Shin fūdo) in 1937. As the title suggests, the story revolves around Jirō, who is the second born of an established family living in a farm village in Saga prefecture, Kyushu. Shortly after his birth, Jirō is given to a foster home because his mother is sickly. There he is raised by Ohama, previously his older brother Kyōichi's caregiver. At first, Ohama is not pleased with the prospect of having to give up Kyōichi and even feels antipathy towards the "little monkey." Nevertheless, after agreeing to the "exchange" of children, in part for economic reasons, she soon builds a strong emotional relationship with her new foster child. Jirō's happy days come to an end, however, when he must return to his birth home. The story focuses on his experience of isolation and alienation thereafter.

In all of the examples mentioned above, adults cause the prevailing adverse living circumstances. In examining the psychological effects of such circumstances on children, authors and directors created impressive scenes. Thus, when Goichi in *A Pebble by the Wayside* understands that he will not be able to attend middle school, while some of his less talented but better-off friends will, he loses trust and the will to live.

His desperation culminates in agreeing to a highly dangerous test of courage upon being challenged by his friends. Goichi climbs onto a railway bridge and tries to hang on to one of the timbers, while a train is approaching. Before the train reaches him, he faints. Fortunately, the driver saves him at the last minute. Several days later, Goichi is approached by his teacher, who attempts to rebuild his confidence. Referring to the meaning of Goichi's personal name, he explains: "Your name, Goichi, means, 'I am unique' or, 'There is only one like me in this world.' I do not know how many millions of people live in this world, but you, Aikawa—are you listening?—Aikawa Goichi exists only once in this world!" Then he goes on to emphasize the preciousness of life and successfully instills renewed determination in Goichi to strive to fulfill his "potential."

The Story of Jirō contains a scene that shows how much the young protagonist suffered psychologically through his parents' decision to give him up to a foster home, only to take him back in after a few years. One summer night, Jirō is put to bed in the room next to his ailing mother. Both stare into the dark with an unfulfilled need for closeness, but neither one of them is able to overcome the emotional distance. It is the son who finally begins to roll playfully from his room towards his mother's. Reaching her side, he sees tears rolling down her cheeks and realizes that she shares his need for intimacy (see also McDonald 2000: 35).

Similar descriptions of the emotional experience of hardship and coping with it are pervasive in the stories and films discussed above, just as they are in the wartime memoirs analyzed by Piel in chapter 8. Yet the "children in the wind" delineate their own sphere of existence, which is distinct from the world of adults. The young may be affected again and again by events of the other world, like a pebble by the

wayside, but the space situated between family, school, and possibly work is occupied by them alone. As most of the stories are set in villages or provincial cities, these spaces are wide and offer room for play without supervision. In representing this sphere, idyllic landscape images express the “wholesome” psychological condition of the young, that is, their “natural” innocence. The pleasure and strength they draw from play in nature is most beautifully depicted in *Children in the Wind*, *Four Seasons of Childhood*, and another film, *Matasaburō, the Wind Child* (Kaze no Matasaburō).⁵ In these films, large groups of children celebrate summer by swimming in rivers and lakes; they climb enormous trees and forage in the woods for wild grapes and other food. Animals are a constant source of joy. Insects or lizards are caught and displayed to friends. Nothing is more exciting than riding horses, but children also gladly occupy themselves with taking care of goats, cows, or a calf that can be taken for a walk.

Set in an impoverished neighborhood of the capital, *Composition Class* introduces a somewhat different picture. Children as well as adults gather around the hydrant on which the whole neighborhood depends for water. This public meeting place is not only used for washing and for discussing the local issues of the day. It is also frequented by street vendors who perform entertaining spectacles to sell their goods, such as sweet rice dumplings. Even when the children swarm out during summer holidays, the chimneys of Tokyo’s industrial areas stay within sight.

In rural as well as in urban settings, play structures or toys rarely take on importance. One exception is *Four Season of Childhood*, where Sanpei’s and Zenta’s grandfather has a swing and other attractions built on his estate for his long-lost grandsons and neighborhood children. Needless to say, the rails of bridges and other objects can be used just as well for balancing and all sorts of entertaining activities. Thus, radio broadcasts of sports events are reenacted on tatami and medals are won by swimming through futons in *Children of the Wind*. In *Four Seasons of Childhood*, strenuous endurance tests are created by heaping thick blankets on the contestants during a hot summer day. In this film, isolated efforts to show off one’s toys are short-lived, even when the host is handicapped by an injury.

It is noticeable that boys occupy this “wholesome” young sphere in most of the films. This conveys the impression that the source of future masculine virtues is defined. Boys usually appear in groups and are most happy in groups (as they are in the gangs described by Roberts in chapter 2). They run relentlessly to overcome distances, no matter how long or short they may be, regardless of whether they are injured. They communicate by shouting, whistling, or making Tarzan calls. They regularly wait for each other at meeting places or pick each other up, one after another.

Sometimes boys remain alone, because they are bullied or otherwise separated from the group and these boys play all the more imaginatively. In exploring the minds of the young, *Children in the Wind* and *Four Seasons of Childhood* carefully depict such scenes of idle, solitary play. In the latter, for example, Sanpei decides

to stay away from school. He ends up spending time at a pond where he “makes friends” with the fish and shares his lunch and many stories with them. Even his grandfather, who eventually finds Sanpei, is impressed with how trusting the animals have become.

In accordance with contemporary regulations administered by the Ministry of Education, school classes are shown separated by gender. Girls and boys meet on the way to school, and sometimes without the supervision of peers or parents. Thus in *A Pebble by the Wayside*, Goichi spends precious moments with a girl who is his friend, sharing their ambitions for future life. However, the separation of gender spheres usually persists outside of school. In *Children in the Wind*, spending time playing with girls even takes on the meaning of a punishment. Sanpei, who was misbehaving terribly at the home of his uncle, is put under the charge of his cousin and “forced” to play dolls.

Also in *Composition Class*, which is based on an original story by a young female author and features the only female protagonist among the films discussed here, girls are confined to the larger domestic sphere. On a sunny summer day when the local boys set out with long lime-tipped poles to catch dragonflies along the banks of the river, Masako and her friends remain on a blanket in the shade to read and talk within earshot of their mothers. In fact, Masako has two younger brothers and many duties around the house. She is not only one of the few girls who do not have a school uniform, she often seems to observe the jolly life in the childhood sphere from outside.

Although the “idyllic sphere” of childhood is represented as a separate social space, numerous interactions between the world of the young and that of adults are apparent. In rural regions children’s groups clearly fulfill an important social function that may be referred to—in the sense of ethnographer Yanagita Kunio—as the preservation of regional identity.⁶ In other words, they play an active role in transmitting local customs from one generation to the next. The New Year’s hut made from pine branches and other festive decorations where the local young socialize in *A Pebble by the Wayside* serves as an example. Equally instructive in this respect is *Matasaburō, the Wind Child*. Recommended by the Ministry of Education for its promotion of fantasy and creativity, it illustrates how an intrusive element—the “strange” urban middle-class boy Saburō suddenly appearing in their school—is integrated into rural life by drawing on the folklore of the region, that is, the legends that surround the annually appearing deity of the wind and his offspring Matasaburō. The village children are able to identify with Saburō by relating his alien appearance, behavior, and language to his descent from the wind deity.

Considering the time of their production, it comes as a surprise that neither war nor the military are featured explicitly in these films. Nevertheless, both have left traces in the commonsensical background of the narratives. Even in the earliest example—Ozu’s *I Was Born, But . . .*—a careful observer will notice that the classroom is embellished with a martial calligraphy. It refers to the three army

pioneers (*nikudan san yūshi*) who allegedly sacrificed their lives during the attack on Shanghai in 1932 (see also High 2003: 166). The rabbits that young Masako is so happy to take care of are closely related to the “armament expansion movement.” Their fur is in demand for “military winter gear” (Toyoda and Iwadō 1938: 40).

More importantly, however, the emotional qualities that enable individuals to endure times of crisis are molded. This is why the works discussed here devote significant attention to exploring children’s perception of the world of adults and their ability to act independently in it, an issue explored from another perspective in chapter 7. *I Was Born, But . . .* presented two boys who are innocent, but acute in their observations. Their rational analysis of how social injustice prevents advancement based on ability results in a major family conflict that drives the father, more than the boys, to desperation. Nonetheless, the film ends on a positive note, as the boys seem to accept the basics of social order and their (temporary) position in life.

Some of the later childhood films present a more complicated picture. Innocence continues to feature prominently, but brings about differing results. On the one hand, it is a source of misunderstanding. Thus, in *Children in the Wind*, young Sanpei visits his father at his company, only to find out that he has been forced to quit his position as manager. While his father is devastated and unable to speak, Sanpei very slowly realizes that there has been a serious conflict. Nevertheless, he is unable to understand how this event will affect his family. Innocent and implicitly trusting, he imagines how his father will found a new and better company. Later, he accidentally meets the policeman who is about to arrest his father and unknowingly takes him to the family home.

On the other hand, innocence and cheerfulness arm the children with a significant resilience to conflicts in the adult world. Even though such conflicts are present within the groups of boys and their course informs the way boys choose their leaders and change them, the fierceness characteristic of the way that grown-ups fight is lacking. This is evidenced, for example, in *Four Seasons of Childhood*. In the sequels to *Children in the Wind* the power struggle between the families of Sanpei and Kintarō resurges. The conflict is all the more threatening after Sanpei’s father dies, leaving behind debts that endanger the livelihood of the larger family. As collateral, the villain, Rōkai, Kintarō’s father, seizes factory and estate, including the above-mentioned play structures for the local children. Nonetheless, the boys continue their selfless friendship and thus show that reconciliation is possible. In order to restore harmony to the group, Kintarō literally endangers his life when he climbs a huge tree in search of sweet acorns. He falls and injures his leg, whereupon the group loyally takes care of him for weeks.

Finally, the young protagonists’ sincere and innocent trust in themselves and the world is presented as a great source of strength. It allows them to persevere in the face of adversity and enables them to engage in the social world as veritable actors. As has been noted above, these “children in the wind” are frequently left to their own devices. In fact, they rely on themselves to bring about an improvement in their

situation. The experiences of Goichi in *A Pebble by the Wayside* are most remarkable in this respect, but also in the *Children in the Wind* a lucky turn of events is brought about by the efforts of Sanpei and Zenta to prove their father's innocence.

CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, I would like to come back to some of the questions raised in the beginning. Why were these films on childhood so successful? Which social functions did the works fulfill, and how were they related to the unfolding war? My reexamination of the golden age of childhood films in wartime Japan demonstrates that the success of many autobiographically inspired literary works and feature film adaptations interacted with a significant societal interest in the living circumstances of the young generation. Rather than an exercise in escapism, this interest was a "rediscovery of childhood" that emphasized the emotional experience of the early phase in life.

The enthusiastic reception of many of these feature films on childhood suggests that these particular representations of the young were productive on a number of levels. Firstly, contemporary reactions illustrate that they corresponded to the experience of a significant share of the audience—that is, male and female spectators whose living circumstances during childhood had been challenging and whose desire for education had been frustrated.

At the same time, the film projects discussed above allowed spectators to develop a new understanding of the early phase of life. Thus, they invested significant energy in defining childhood as a separate sphere and stage of life that is of particular psychological relevance for personal development. In doing so, they engaged in promoting middle-class ideals—such as innocent, "childlike" children, loving relationships among the members of a nuclear family, the need to develop individuality, and the striving for success—to broader segments of society.⁷

This is not to say that the outbreak of open military conflict with China did not exert influence on the development of childhood films. However, the relationship with the war situation is more complicated than has previously been suggested. As the example of *A Pebble by the Wayside* shows, some productions were explicitly related to propaganda campaigns and educational policies of the Ministry of Education. In commenting on later works that have received little attention here, reviewers emphasized the need to create "wholesome" circumstances for the growth of the "next generation of the nation" (*jidai no kokumin*), especially in families (Tsumura 1941: 259). Most importantly, in my view, these childhood films engaged in shaping the "emotional repertoire" of wartime society. The pervasive positive reception of the focus on the inner life of the young generation suggests that they provided valuable emotional resources—"wholesome" feelings that audiences could apply to their everyday life and that authorities intended to mobilize in order to achieve political objectives.

In a society in which the socioeconomic transformations of modernity and war threatened personal and national existence, the “children in the wind’s” approach to life provided not only comfort and refuge. Their cheerfulness, their sincerity, their devotion to family, their sympathy toward their friends, their refusal to adopt material values, and their strength in the face of adversity offered the means to endure—in Tsubota Jōji’s words—“the cold and harsh wind” of their time.

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Umarete wa mita keredo [I Was Born, But . . .]. 1932. Directed by Ozu Yasujirō. Shōchiku.

NOTES

1. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Keiko I. McDonald has offered interesting readings of childhood films, in particular those by director Shimizu Hiroshi. See McDonald 2000 and 2001.
2. On the Movement for the Spiritual Mobilization of the Nation, see Havens 1978.
3. The literary education movement peaked in the mid-1930s. Owing to it, no less than 112 collections of texts by juvenile writers were circulating in 1936. See Buchholz 2000: 37–59.
4. When the Takamine business eventually failed, the family moved to Tokyo where Hideko was introduced to the film studio Shōchiku. In a short time, she became the most popular Japanese child actress of the period (“Many Young Movie Actresses in Japan’s Film Industry” 1939).
5. The 1940 Nikkatsu production is based on a story of the same title discovered in an unfinished state among the papers of Miyazawa Kenji after his untimely death in 1933. A revised version was published as early as 1934, and further editions followed during the war years. Although Miyazawa would become one of the most popular Japanese writers in the postwar period, his fame was far less developed in the late 1930s. In fact, the director Shima Kōji’s interest was sparked by only a stage version that Tsukiji Shō Gekijō performed in February 1939. See Shima 1958: 109.
6. Yanagita elaborated on children’s “ritual function” in his “Regional Customs of Children” (*Kodomo fudoki*), which was first published serially in the *Asahi* newspaper while childhood films remained popular (from 1 April to 16 May 1941).
7. Note that Momota Sōji, writing for the *Tōkyō Asahi* in 1941, described the important social function of excellent children’s literature as correcting adults’ “views on childhood” (*jidō kan*); Momota 1941: 5.

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