

Is a Japanese Standpoint Useful for Studying about America?: Child Labor during World War II Revealed in Comparative Perspective

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INTRODUCTION: A NEW PHASE OF INTERNATIONALIZATION IN AMERICAN STUDIES

It is an issue of great concern to Japanese students of American society and culture whether their foreignness might inhibit understanding of the subjects of their study, because they lack familiarity with myriad aspects of the United States that are commonly shared by their American-born or -raised colleagues. In this presentation I attempt to show how a foreign perspective, while lacking an ingrained native viewpoint, may nevertheless be a useful tool for uncovering what has been overlooked in U.S. history and, moreover, how it may even contribute to comparative and transnational historiography.

Internationalization has been one of the most important goals in American studies and history for long time. Americanists on both sides of the Pacific, one way or the other, have sought to internationalize their academic disciplines. We may say that the internationalization of American studies and history has become the consensus among Americanists worldwide.¹ It has been partly realized through the widening exchange of scholars from different parts of the world and in articles written by foreign scholars in journals published by academic associations of the United States or other countries. We even see an example of internationalization here at this meeting of the Japa-

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nese Association for American Studies. For instance, we just listened to an address by Professor Kevin Gaines, the president of the American Studies Association of the United States, who was introduced by Professor Eisaku Kihira, the next president of the Japanese Association for American Studies (JAAS). And tomorrow, at the U.S.-Japan joint workshops, Americanists from the United States, Korea, and Japan will present their papers and exchange their ideas. Indeed, these international sessions have become an integral part of the JAAS annual meetings for the past two decades. Nevertheless, these sessions have been planned and prepared mostly by the international committees of the U.S. and Japanese associations, that is, from the top down, and the other sessions and symposiums have rarely included scholars from outside of Japan; however, this year we have for the first time a session proposed jointly by American scholars and by Japanese members of this association.² Thus, we can see our association moving further toward internationalization.

Internationalization in American studies itself is not new. We cannot talk about the development of American studies in Japan without taking into account such past and present international exchange programs as the Fulbright Program, the Stanford University–Tokyo University American Studies Seminar (1950–56), the Kyoto American Studies Summer Seminar (1951–87), the Sapporo Cool Seminar (1980–95), the Nagoya American Studies Summer Seminar (2007–2011), and others. However, there is a difference in the interest in internationalization of today’s Americanists from that of the past. Until recently, the internationalization of American studies largely, or often solely, meant that Japanese scholars and students learned about American history and culture from American scholars, and this may still be true to a considerable extent today. However, for the past two decades or so, scholars of American studies and history in the United States have increasingly felt the need for internationalization, not because they are interested in spreading knowledge and understanding about American history and culture abroad but because they think it important and necessary in their own academic pursuits to learn about America from their counterparts in other countries.

What I have just mentioned is internationalization through the exchange of scholars and students, or the human exchange. Although this is a vital element of the internationalization of American studies, I do not intend here to elaborate on this kind of internationalization. When we say internationalization of American studies, I believe there are two meanings: one is the aforementioned international exchange of scholars and students, or the exchange

of humans, and the other is the internationalization of the content of American studies, or the exchange and integration of ideas. While both of these are closely connected, what I would like to discuss today concerns the latter meaning, the exchange and integration of ideas.

The new interest of Americanists in the United States in a multi-way, not one-way, exchange—in other words, their interest in learning from non-American scholars about United States history and culture through exchange—comes from a new critical attitude toward the notion that has dominated in American studies and history: American exceptionalism. In the notion of American exceptionalism, the American nation is considered different and, indeed, unique in the world, with the implication often being that America is superior to other nations. This change in ideas about the American nation has brought about a new kind of international exchange.

During the post-World War II era most Americanists embraced the notion of American exceptionalism as the organizing principle of the study of American history and culture. At that time the United States had triumphed as a democratic superpower that was believed to ensure its people and others in the world liberty, equality, and economic prosperity. However, at the time of the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements many Americans came to question the accuracy of this notion, as it was revealed that American democracy in reality allowed racial inequality, poverty, and an aggressive war with intolerable brutality. Furthermore, with the influx of immigrants from non-European backgrounds during the 1970s and after and under the more recent surge of globalization, Americans became exposed to people with differing cultures both inside and outside the United States. As American people lost confidence in their government and their national creed, on which the former was based, and began to be aware of the values of non- and un-American and non-Anglo-Saxon cultures inside and outside the United States, Americanists questioned the nation-state framework for studying history and culture in which the particular nation's value shaped the frame of reference. Among Americanists, the notion of American exceptionalism, which during the 1940s and 1950s boasted of the uniqueness, and often superiority, of the United States, gave way to the multicultural idea that placed equal value on all cultures and nations inside and outside the United States. As a result, the nation-state was no longer considered as the natural framework for studying American history and culture.³

Thus, during the last two decades, Americanists have considered how they could go beyond the nation-state boundary in their research and teaching while purging the notion of American exceptionalism. In their search for

internationalizing the study of history on some basis other than the nation-state, Americanists in the early 1990s adopted a concept designated by the term “transnational.”⁴ Soon “transnational history” or “transnational American studies” took hold of academia as a new framework for bringing the study of history and culture closer to the reality of—and possibly bringing about the ideal society for—the United States and the world.

THE STATUS OF COMPARATIVE HISTORY IN AMERICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

In efforts to understand American society in international or cross-national perspective, comparative history for long time has played an important role. Practitioners of comparative studies from Alexis de Tocqueville to today’s scholars have contributed to a deeper understanding of American society and its historical transformations in broader international perspective. However, American historians generally seem to have shown only casual interest in comparative approaches. In 1980 George Fredrickson, one of the most prominent comparative historians, distinguishing comparative history from “history that uses the ‘comparative method’ in a relatively brief or casual fashion,” lamented the sparseness and fragmentation of comparative history in the United States. By 1995 Fredrickson thought that sparseness was no longer a problem but that fragmentation remained because comparative histories in the United States had no connection with one another, with each historian studying separately unrelated topics.⁵ Fredrickson shared his misgivings with C. Van Woodward and Carl N. Degler, the eminent historians of the American South, who held a keen interest in comparative approaches and regretted its near absence in American history.⁶ Raymond Grew, a leading scholar of comparative history and the editor from 1973 to 1997 of the journal *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (founded in 1958), also wrote with disappointment about the dearth of comparative approaches in American historiography, pointing out that “preoccupation with America’s uniqueness reinforced the single most important inhibition on comparative study.”⁷ Historians’ assumption of American uniqueness explains their apathy toward other countries and consequently toward comparative history. In other words, it is American exceptionalism that hindered comparative history’s growth in the United States.

The receding of American exceptionalism from the dominant place in American historiography after the 1960s did not give comparative history an opportunity for full development. In 1995 Fredrickson concluded in his historiographical essay, “Now, far more than when I reviewed work in compar-

ative cross-national history fifteen years ago, it is possible to imagine the field as a coherent cooperative enterprise.” However, comparative history was facing a challenge from the rising international trends of transnational history and postcolonial theories.⁸ In these recent trends, historians had more interest in looking at historical phenomena free from national boundaries than making comparisons of phenomena in nations delineated by the boundaries. Comparative history and these new trends in historical studies shared an international perspective, but they were different in their attitudes toward the nation: while the former had the nation with its boundaries as given, the latter saw critically the nation as both reality and concept.

It is not my intention here to elaborate on the theoretical and historiographical debates on comparative and transnational histories. Instead, using an example from my work on American society during World War II, I will attempt to show the usefulness of foreignness in the research and teaching of American studies and history. However, since I will be arguing that foreignness has some use in the context of comparative and transnational historiography, before going into my work, I need to further clarify what I mean by comparative and transnational history.

TOWARD A BORADER DEFINITION OF COMPARATIVE HISTORY

Fredrickson stated in 1980 that “there is no firm agreement on what comparative history is or how it should be done.” This still seems to hold true today. Those interested in establishing comparative history as a discipline with a certain method and theory tend to be more rigid in definition than those who draw on comparison to broaden their view and deepen their understanding of the subject of their concern. Fredrickson himself takes a somewhat rigid definition, as Grew notes, assuming that “comparative history in the full sense . . . must deal with at least two nations for its entire length or fall below the desired standard.”⁹ Despite the absence of consensus on the definition, it is possible to find a rough agreement on what Marc Bloch, often hailed as the father of comparative history, meant regarding the use of comparison in history “as a way to discover either similarities or differences” between two or more societies, which were the appropriate numbers of units for comparison.¹⁰ It is also widely accepted that, as Bloch suggested, “a rigorous and critical use of the comparative method is possible only if we are making comparisons between societies which are geographical neighbors and historical contemporaries.” He believed that comparison of societies far removed from each other in space and time, which he stig-

matized as “comparative method in the grand manner,” would not give precise results and not be of much use “from the scientific point of view.”¹¹

My own working definition of the term comprises two meanings: comparative history as subject matter and comparative history as method and perspective. In most cases, comparative history means the former: two or more societies compared systematically and the results presented in a comparative format. Here I will focus on the second aspect of comparative perspective. There has been much debate about the method of comparative history among historians and social scientists from Marc Bloch to the sociologist Theda Skocpol.¹² Here again, I am not going into the methodical matter, but would like to pay special attention to the comparative perspective. All histories, in one way or another, may have comparative perspectives, but I propose that historians use comparative perspectives more consciously. William Sewell, a leading scholar of comparative politics and history, stating that “the term comparative history can have other meanings” than that generally defined by historians and social scientists as studies of more than one different societies located not far from each other in space and time, takes special notice of comparative perspective as another meaning of comparative history: “viewing historical problems in a context broader than their particular social, geographical, and temporal setting.”¹³

The comparative perspective is free from rigid rules of the generally accepted comparative method that, as I just mentioned, prefers comparisons between spatially and temporally close societies. Sewell does not totally agree to this rule and, suggesting the validity of comparisons between distant societies, recommends broader meanings of comparative history, including the comparative perspective. The comparative perspective, Sewell states, “provides us not with rules, but with insights. A comparative perspective thus is valuable even to historians who can make no use of the comparative method.” Grew also questions the widely accepted view of the advantage of comparison between similar cultures, stating that “there may even be a general law that the comparison of cases distant in cultural context is more likely than other comparisons to produce a fresh perspective and thus questions to explore.”¹⁴ In this presentation, I would like to give an example of comparative history, not in the restricted meaning of a historical method with a set of rules, such as rules about the numbers of units for comparison and those of spatial and temporal proximity,¹⁵ but in a broader sense of using comparative perspectives consciously in historical study.

There is another point I would like to add to my definition of comparative history. Here again I draw from Sewell’s instructive argument. He also states

that a history of “a single nation can be comparative history if comparison is made in formulating problems and if explanations of developments in that nation are tested by the comparative method.”¹⁶ However, since my working definition of comparative history concerns only comparative perspective—not necessarily the method—I would just omit from his statement the second “if” clause that limits the meaning of comparative history to a methodically proper comparison.

With this broad definition, my work may be considered within the range of comparative history and, I hope, will demonstrate the usefulness of a foreign perspective. Mine is a loosely defined comparative history, but its comparative perspective provides new insights about the single nation of the United States and produces new questions and new findings that have been overlooked by historians operating from domestic American perspectives.

COMPARATIVE HISTORY IN THE RISE OF TRANSNATIONAL HISTORY

If comparative history is so useful for studying about the United States, why did it not prevail in American historiography that was increasingly internationalized? I mentioned that the challenge to comparative history came from transnationalism, which also had an international outlook. Thus approaches of both comparative and transnational histories being international, what is the problem with comparative history in the face of transnational history? Before proceeding to an example from my work, I would like to consider the relationship between transnational history and comparative history.

In the definition of transnational history, unlike comparative history, there is some agreement among historians.¹⁷ Micol Seigel, who specializes in comparative and transnational studies of race in the Americas, defines the term “transnational history” in line with the generally agreed meaning and distinguishes it from international history, stating that while international history is “the study of nation-states interacting as such, transnational history examines units that spill over and seep through national borders, units both greater and smaller than the nation-state.”¹⁸ As I noted earlier, transnational history emerged in a new phase of internationalization that denied American exceptionalism and questioned the validity of the nation-state framework for American studies and history. Advocates of transnational history tend to disparage comparative history. Seigel calls for a “moratorium on comparative study” that is tinged with “Orientalist exceptionalism” that assumes the stereotypes of the backward non-Western world, and she urges students of race to study in a transnational perspective that is devoid of

exceptionalism and West-centered colonialist mentality.¹⁹

While not as radical as Seigel, Ian Tyrrell, one of the earliest and most articulate advocates of transnational history, is also critical of comparative history for its link with exceptionalism. He maintains that “comparative history may sometimes be seen simply as a way of making the discipline in the United States more cosmopolitan” but that this approach is “not necessarily antagonistic to exceptionalism.” Tyrrell perceives the most obvious problem of comparative history to reside in its tendency “to take for granted the primacy of the national unit of analysis.”²⁰ Indeed, comparative history’s basic assumption of the nation-state as a unit for study is likely to give in to national exceptionalism.

Fredrickson, arguing in support of comparative history, admits the nation-based comparative history has at times embraced and even “strengthened” American exceptionalism, but he defends nation-based comparative studies, pointing out that use of the nation-state as a unit of analysis “does not by itself commit the historian to historiographic nationalism or to a belief in national exceptionalism.” He states, “Nations and national identities are not facts of nature; they were socially and historically constructed, but they have become potent forces—probably the most salient sources of modern authority and consciousness. Historians, comparative or otherwise, can scarcely afford to ignore them.” He cautions that “to treat international and cross-national history as mutually exclusive would be a mistake. Nations are affected by international movements as well as by their own internal dynamics.” And he further asserts, “Acknowledging the international context does not mean disregarding the nation as a unit of analysis.” He then refers to the rise of a new and more malevolent conception of American uniqueness in comparative studies in the 1970s, which concluded that the United States was exceptional because of its intense racism.²¹ Fredrickson himself demonstrated such malevolent uniqueness of American racism in his landmark book of a comparative history of white supremacy in the United States and South Africa.²²

Tyrrell does not altogether reject comparative history. He makes a distinction between comparative history and transnational “topics,” explaining that “the former involves discrete geographical units, usually nations, the latter category reaches across nations and recognizes the interdependence of peoples.” He disapproves of the “familiar” comparative history for its use of the nation as the unit of analysis, but finds its value when a comparison is made between organizations and activities in different places within one or more countries, as some works on women’s history have done. He maintains

that “neither transnational nor comparative history is illegitimate, and the two can, perhaps should, be used together where possible, while recognizing that purely national comparisons often legitimate existing assumptions within particular national historiographies,”²³ as exemplified in American exceptionalism.

THE COMMON VIEW OF THE U.S. HOME FRONT DURING WORLD WAR II

We have had an overview of definitions of comparative history in its rigid and loose meanings. We also have seen some of its criticisms by exponents of transnational history. From these arguments it may be concluded that, despite their differences, comparative and transnational histories are not mutually exclusive and that comparative history might even contribute to the burgeoning field of transnational history.

Now, adopting the loose definition of comparative history I turn to the question of how comparative perspective can help raise new questions and broaden understanding of American history and culture. I will draw from my own work and look at some aspects of American society during World War II that can be uncovered, or recognized, if we use a comparative perspective.

The generally accepted view of American society during the war is the following. After Pearl Harbor the American people became united through patriotism and worked together to win the war. Men fought in the war either by being drafted or by volunteering, while women went to work in factories, offices, and stores out of patriotism or for money, with all contributing to the war effort. People saved such materials as metal, rubber, and petroleum. Such food items as meat and sugar were rationed. To make up for the shortage of food, people grew vegetables in their own yards. The American people were encouraged to buy war bonds. Women provided military men on furlough with recreational services at the United Service Organizations, or invited them to their homes. “Victory” was the prefix to anything that was contributing to the war effort: there were Victory Gardens that grew vegetables, Victory War Bonds, Victory Cakes that used less or no sugar, and Victory Girls who offered companionship to servicemen. “Rosie the Riveter,” the archetypal female worker in the war plant, became the symbol of women working for victory. World War II was a total war that mobilized and affected the lives of the American people more than any war in American history.²⁴

This picture of American society during World War II has been advanced by historians and in the contemporary media and government. The government in its attempt to mobilize the entire nation for the war carried out pro-

paganda on a large scale, and the media assisted the government's effort. Most people responded to the call of the government and media to work for the war, and some of them wrote in their diaries or letters about their efforts. Historians, using as their historical sources government documents and media records and, to a lesser extent, people's written materials, described American society as it was shown in these sources. Furthermore, historians naturally interpreted these historical sources by way of their own thoughts and values, which were formed by various factors including their own time period. Most historians writing about the American home front of World War II lived in the 1960s and '70s when second-wave feminism was at the peak and when married women increasingly worked outside the home. It is thus no wonder they were drawn to the image of Rosie the Riveter and chose the working women as a major subject of historical studies on wartime America. Many significant works on the wartime employment of women have been published in American women's history, American labor history, and the history of the American home front during World War II. We can learn from these studies about the experiences and lives of working women in detail and the effect their lives had on women in general as well as the American economy and society during and after the war.²⁵

Another aspect of national mobilization was the rationing and saving of daily necessities by the population. This also has been much studied by historians. Relying on these studies about mobilization, we characterize the United States during World War II as a nation where women took the place of men in the workplace and people saved, not wasted, essential materials. To put it in another way, it was production not consumption that occupied the greatest place in people's lives, and women were producers and savers rather than consumers and squanderers. And, most important, the nation was united and committed to the war effort because of patriotism.

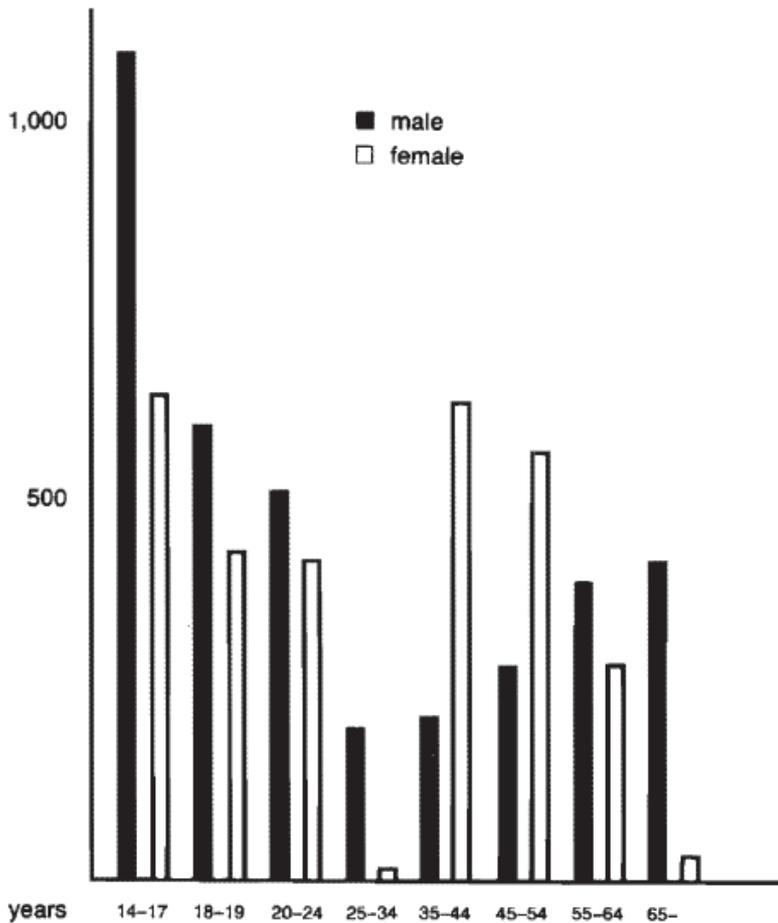
This sketch requires revision when we look at American society during the war from a different perspective, as I did in my study. First, let me start with wartime mobilization. My focus will be on working children and youths, rather than working women.

CHILD LABOR IN THE UNITED STATES DURING WORLD WAR II

"Contrary to general belief, the early withdrawal of boys and girls from school was a greater factor in the expansion of the labor force than was the increase in the number of women working," reported the Department of Labor in August 1943 on the nation's labor force since the outbreak of the

war.²⁶ The expanded labor market in the war pulled many women out of their homes, but it also took many teenagers out of school and brought them into the workplace. Between 1940 and 1944, school enrollment for those aged fifteen through eighteen fell by 1.2 million, or 24 percent, while the number of employed youths of ages fourteen through seventeen increased by over two million: an increase of over 200 percent.²⁷ The estimated increase in the labor force in 1944 was the largest for those between ages fourteen and seventeen (see graph 1).

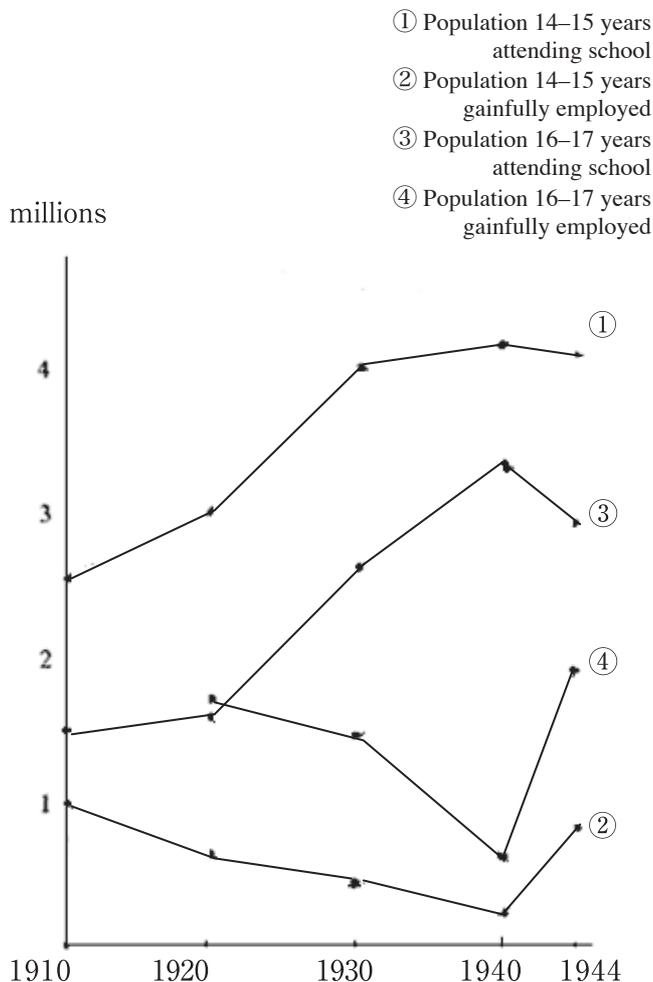
Graph 1. Estimated Excess of April 1944 Labor Force by Sex
thousands



Source: *Monthly Labor Review* 60 (Jan. 1945): 7 (table 1)

This meant that a considerable number of teenage middle school and high school students went to work instead of going to school, as the drop in school enrollment indicated. The sudden drop in school enrollment and the sharp rise in the number of working children with the coming of war (see graph 2) surprised and troubled many Americans, who believed that Ameri-

Graph 2. Trends of School Attendance and Child Labor 1910–1944



Sources: “Young Workers in the Wartime Labor Market,” *The Child* 9 (Nov. 1944): 73; “The Changing Picture of Child Labor,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 236 (Nov. 1944): 86.

can children should be in school until they finished high school and not at work. Moreover, thousands of children under the age of fourteen entered the wartime workforce illegally, and thus their numbers were not recorded. This situation upset educators, reformers, government officials, and journalists. They were dismayed with newspaper reports about a return of “child labor,” which they believed to have disappeared decades before.²⁸

One of those reports tells of the following episode: One morning in Cleveland, Ohio, after forty students in a single school fell asleep in class, an investigation revealed that all of them had been setting up pins in bowling alleys the night before. Among the variety of workplaces that hired children, bowling alleys were one of the chief employers of younger boys because most boys sixteen and older were working in war plants or serving in the armed forces.²⁹ Here is another example. Mervyn, an African American boy of sixteen living in Berkeley, California, worked throughout the summer of 1944 at the naval base at Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay. He worked nine hours a day mixing up paint, and the job carried the hazard of lead poisoning. Nevertheless, he enjoyed the job because it allowed him to be in the company of six teenage boys—and fellow workers—from his high school.³⁰

The experiences of the students at bowling alleys and Mervyn at the naval base could have been cited as “child labor” by government leaders and media reporters. These people were so upset by the sudden increase in the number of working youths of school age that they felt the need for some action. To bring students back from workplaces to classrooms, the federal government launched the “Back-to-School” and “National Go-to-School” campaigns in the summers of 1943, 1944, and 1945, but these did not result in much success. Children and teenagers kept working during the war.³¹

Work by children and youths was considered a problem and attacked by government officials and the media during the war, but work by women elicited their highest praise and recommendation. While the wartime working women have enjoyed the attention of historians, the phenomenon of child and youth wartime employment in the United States has been buried under the glorious record of Rosie the Riveter. However, this history can be uncovered if we apply a comparative or foreign perspective to the employment of women in the United States.

UNCOVERING CHILD LABOR IN WARTIME AMERICA
BY LOOKING FROM A COMPARATIVE/JAPANESE PERSPECTIVE

In Japan during World War II, women were not mobilized for work to the same extent as in the United States. There was an increase in the number of female workers, but the number of male workers also increased about as much. However, in contrast to the modest mobilization of women, students were fully mobilized in Japan. After 1944 students above the fifth grade were called to work, and those in the sixth grade of elementary school, middle school, high school, and college were all mobilized for war either as soldiers or workers. In February 1945 all classes from the seventh grade to the university level were suspended. By March 1945, 3.11 million students, or 60 percent of the total student population, worked in industries. In addition, many, including some elementary school children, served the nation's war effort on farms.³²

From the American standpoint, we may see the wartime employment of women as the norm and ask, "Why weren't Japanese women mobilized?" Then we might investigate the mobilization of the United States and Japan during the war and try to explain the reasons for the under-mobilization of women in Japan. However, if we reverse our position and look at America from the Japanese scene, we will ask, "Why were women, not children, in the United States a target for mobilization?" In my own research this very question enabled me to uncover the problem of child labor and youth employment in American society during World War II.

Having found the problematic employment of children and youths during the war, we will reconsider the meaning of a war that has widely been seen as "the good war" that brought the nation economic prosperity, and presumably, improved the status of women and minorities in society. Beginning with the fact of more women going to work on the home front as a consequence of prodding by the government and media, we may conclude that the war changed gender roles and advanced the historical trend toward greater participation by women in the labor force—and presumably more equality. However, if one's point of departure is increased child labor, the war may no longer appear so "good" retarding the education and welfare of children and youths.

The existence of child labor in the United States during World War II perhaps would have remained unnoticed were it not for a new question posed from a Japanese standpoint. This is the kind of question that can be formulated when American society is looked at from the outside. I previously

noted Grew's suggestion that the comparison of distant cultures might produce new questions to explore new problems. Jürgen Kocka the German historian remarks on the possibility of comparative approaches allowing one to "identify questions and problems that one might miss, neglect, or just not invent otherwise." He cites an example from Marc Bloch's research. Bloch, Kocha writes, had an assumption developed from his understanding of the English enclosures of the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries that something analogous should have taken place in France, though such a similar experience remained as yet undiscovered. According to Kocka, "Starting with this question Bloch revealed for fifteenth-, sixteenth-, and seventeenth-century Provence corresponding though not identical changes in the structure of landownership." Bloch, Kocka continues, contributed in this way to "a far-reaching revision of the history of the region."³³

To some extent these comments may apply to my study of American society during World War II. I started my exploration of wartime American society with a question derived from my understanding of the mobilization of school-age children and youths in support of the war effort in Japan. This led to a "discovery" of the corresponding, though different in nature, phenomenon of child labor during the war in the United States, something that had been unnoticed and that might contribute to some revision—even if not "far-reaching"—of the history of the American home front.

RECOGNITION OF CONSUMERISM IN WARTIME AMERICA

The discovery of child labor in the wartime mobilization in the United States led to my recognition of consumerism in American society during World War II. The idea of consumerism is at odds with the common view of wartime American society, as I outlined, characterized by saving and rationing of essential materials. But this view had to be reconsidered when I queried the motivation of children and youths at work. Among their possible motives, besides patriotism, family economy, and work ethic, there was the possibility of materialist acquisition. From this possibility I asked, "In wartime America, how did youths develop a materialist orientation?" As we explore further we will become aware that wartime American society was in fact a prosperous consumer society, and that recognition of this had been overlooked in the commonly accepted history of the American home front. As a consequence of asking this question, we will become more attentive to historical sources that illustrate this consumerist aspect of wartime society.

As I studied Berkeley, California, during the war, I found that most

youths took jobs out of a desire to have more money to spend on items that were extraneous to their basic needs. In wartime America, there was a resurgence of the 1920s consumerism that had been stifled by the Great Depression. During the war—and as an outcome of the war—Americans had more money to buy food, clothes, and other consumer goods, and despite rationing food was abundant and consumer goods flooded stores. Despite rationing of items such as meat, sugar, and gasoline and a need to conserve metal, rubber, and other materials for the war, Americans were able to maintain or even to raise their prewar standards of living.³⁴

During the war, easier access to money made possible by the expanded economy stimulated the shopping impulses of Americans who had struggled through shortages during the Great Depression. We may note what John Kenneth Galbraith recalled about the American home front: “In the war years, consumption of consumer goods doubled. Never in the history of human conflict has there been so much talk of sacrifice and so little sacrifice.”³⁵ During 1942 Americans spent \$20 million more on pharmaceuticals alone than during the previous year simply because people had “more money to spend.” Jewelry sales also increased, depending on local circumstances, between 20 and 100 percent. One store manager was reported to have said, “People want to spend money, and if they don’t spend it on textiles they’ll spend it on furniture; or we’ll find something else for them.” In the first six months of 1944 overall retail sales went up 8 percent compared with 1943. The average individual purchase in department stores increased to ten dollars from two dollars before the war. This trend was bolstered by the advertising industry, which in the war years saw its largest expenditures in history and enticed the public to buy various goods.³⁶ Newspapers and magazines filled their pages with advertisements for fashionable clothes, handy and stylish household goods, and other attractive merchandise.

In Berkeley, two teenage brothers were saving money alongside their father, an unskilled machinist sometimes on welfare, to buy their mother a fur coat.³⁷ A fur coat once had been, and perhaps still was, worn only by upper-class or some upper-middle-class women, and it may seem unrealistic for a working-class mother to want to possess one, but this episode gives a good picture of the working-class family in America during World War II, overwhelmed with visions of luxuries that the booming consumer society offered.

Wartime consumerism prevailed among teenagers as well. At Berkeley High School, cashmere sweaters and saddle shoes were in vogue among middle-class girls to prove their status. For boys, easier access to a large

amount of money made it no longer unrealistic to have a car of their own or other expensive items. Although there was some difference in the items that girls and boys wanted, they were all interested in buying things.³⁸ The war, by creating more job opportunities for teenagers, made it easier, not harder, for them to satisfy their materialistic desires.

Some historians have recognized the consumerism in the booming economy of the American home front, but the image of producing, saving, and rationing outweighs that of spending in the history of the American home front as generally known. Rosie the Riveter still represents American women during World War II, yet in reality more wives were consumers than factory workers.³⁹

If we only look at American society from within the confines of the national boundary, we may only see the prevailing image of a society totally committed to the war effort, but if we see it with a view from the outside in, we may perceive another aspect of society with people enjoying consumerism within a nation at war. From what we know about other countries at the time, the United States was unique and exceptional on this point, but can we conclude that this unique wartime consumerism constitutes a praiseworthy example of American superiority? How we evaluate it depends on how we explain the causes of this consumerism by considering structural, economic, political, and cultural factors. While the United States by comparison may often turn out unique and exceptional, this does not necessarily mean its excellence.

IN CONCLUSION: LOOKING AT AMERICAN SOCIETY FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

Some historians like William Sewell, Raymond Grew, and Jürgen Kocka suggested potentialities of comparative history for uncovering what has been neglected in historical study. My study of American society during World War II from a comparative perspective shows such case. Now, in concluding, I would like to state that this perspective is also transnational and that both comparative and transnational perspectives applied to my study expand the meanings of comparative and transnational histories.

As I already mentioned, my study is a loosely defined comparative history, using comparative perspective from a country distant in space and culture and focusing on the subject in one single nation of the United States. Yet, without a perspective that is foreign this study on child labor would not have been produced. Though implicit, here is a case of comparative perspective applied to history.

The perspective is also transnational in an extended sense, and the transnational perspective in this study suggests a new and additional meaning for what is generally meant by transnational history. The definition of transnational history usually centers on the “subject” of study that moves from one nation to others—“the movement of peoples, institutions and ideas across and through national boundaries.”⁴⁰ In this familiar mode of transnational history, a historian follows the subject as it moves across national boundaries, thus the study becoming transnational. In my comparative, and transnational, history the subjects of the research, Americans during World War II, stay within their national boundary. Nevertheless I would consider this study transnational because the perspective crosses the national border from Japan to the United States. Here, it is not necessarily the subject of study but the historian’s perspective that moves across national boundaries, looking into American society from the outside in.

There is another unconventionality to call this study transnational history. In transnational history as well as in comparative history we usually deal with two or more nations, but in this case I only focus on one nation. However, I characterize this study as transnational as well as comparative because of its viewpoint that is placed outside the national border and looks across the border into American society. From this angle, or more concretely from a Japanese perspective, even a study involving the one nation of the United States might contribute to both comparative and transnational historiographies. Through intellectual exchange in the forms of comparative and transnational history and via human exchange, as we see at this meeting and other venues, we will be able to realize truly internationalized American studies.

NOTES

This is a slightly revised version of my presidential speech given at the 44th Annual Meeting of the JAAS held on June 5 and 6, 2010. I thank my colleague Roger Brown for his invaluable comments on my draft of the speech.

¹ Akira Iriye, “The Internationalization of History,” *American Historical Review* 94, no. 1 (February 1989): 1–10; “Toward the Internationalization of American History: A Round Table,” *Journal of American History* 79, no. 2 (September 1992), 432–542.

² Linda Gordon and Gary Okihiro applied from the United States for participation in the 44th Annual Meeting of the JAAS with the proposal of a panel titled “People of Color during World War II.”

³ Thomas Bender, *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); John Carlos Rowe, *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Janice Radway in her presidential address to the American Studies Association in 1998 questioned the appropriateness of using the word “American” for American studies as it was in fact studies about the United States not other

“American” nations yet increasingly becoming international and transnational and proposed renaming the American Studies Association “Inter-American Studies” or “International Studies of the United States” or the “Society of Intercultural Studies” so as to move from the U.S. center and reflect its real, and ideal, content. Radway, “What’s in a Name?: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 20 November 1998,” *American Quarterly* 51 no. 1 (March 1999): 1–32.

⁴ Ian Tyrrell, “American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History,” *American Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (October 1991): 1031–55; Michael McGerr, “The Price of the ‘New Transnational History,’” *American Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (October 1991), 1056–67; David Thelen, “The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History,” *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December 1999): 965–75; Ian Tyrrell, “Making Nations/Making States: American Historians in the Context of Empire,” *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December 1999): 1015–44. See also articles in the *Journal of American History* 85, no. 4 and 86, nos. 2 and 3, the special issues on internationalization and transnationalism.

⁵ See George M. Fredrickson’s “Comparative History,” in *The Past before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), 457–59; and “From Exceptionalism to Variability: Recent Developments in Cross-National Comparative History,” *Journal of American History* 82, no. 2 (September 1995): 587–604.

⁶ C. Vann Woodward, ed., *The Comparative Approach to American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1968); Carl N. Degler, “Comparative History: An Essay Review,” *Journal of Southern History* 34, no. 3 (August 1968): 426, 428–29.

⁷ Raymond Grew, “The Comparative Weakness of American History,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 16, no. 1 (Summer 1985): 93.

⁸ Fredrickson, “From Exceptionalism,” 604; Jürgen Kocka, “Comparison and Beyond,” *History and Theory* 42, no. 1 (February 2003): 42; Micol Seigel, “Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn,” *Radical History Review*, no. 91 (Winter 2005): 65.

⁹ Grew, “Comparative Weakness,” 95; Fredrickson, “Comparative History,” 457.

¹⁰ Alette Olin Hill and Boyd H. Hill, Jr. “Marc Bloch and Comparative History,” *American Historical Review* 85, no. 4 (October 1980): 828–46; William H. Sewell, Jr. and Sylvia L. Thrupp, “Comments,” *American Historical Review* 85, no. 4 (October 1980), 847–53; Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, “The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, no. 2 (April 1980): 174–97; Michael Kammen, “The Problem of American Exceptionalism: A Reconsideration,” *American Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (March 1993): 19; William H. Sewell, Jr., “Marc Bloch and the Logic of Comparative History,” *History and Theory* 6, no. 2 (1967): 208–18. Jürgen Kocka, one of the important comparative historians today, also describes the meaning of comparison in history as discussing “two or more historical phenomena systematically with respect to their similarities and differences in order to reach certain intellectual aims.” See Kocka, “Comparison and Beyond,” 39.

¹¹ William H. Sewell, Jr., “Marc Bloch and the Logic of Comparative History,” 214–15; Marc Bloch, “Toward a Comparative History of European Societies,” in *Enterprise and Secular Change*, ed. Frederic C. Lane and Jelle C. Riemersma (Homewood, Ill.: R. D. Irwin, 1953), 496–98.

¹² Skocpol and Somers, “Uses of Comparative History,” 174–97.

¹³ Sewell, “Marc Bloch and the Logic of Comparative History,” 218.

¹⁴ Sewell, 218; Grew “Comparative Weakness,” 95.

¹⁵ Sewell, 213–15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁷ Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor, "Introduction: Comparative History, Cross-National History, Transnational History-Definitions," in *Comparison and Cross-National Perspective*, ed. Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor (New York: Routledge, 2004), xxii. <http://www.questia.com/reader/printPaginator/1028> (accessed May 15, 2010).

¹⁸ Seigel, "Beyond Compare," 63.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁰ Tyrrell, "American Exceptionalism," 1035.

²¹ Fredrickson, "From Exceptionalism," 589–91, 594. Here we see Fredrickson use the term "international" to mean transnational, and "cross-national history" to mean nation-based comparative history.

²² George Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

²³ Ian Tyrrell, "New Comparisons, International Worlds: Transnational and Comparative Perspectives," *Australian Feminist Studies* 16, no. 36 (2001): 356.

²⁴ Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981); Michael C. C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II, The American Moment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976); David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁵ For example, Anderson, *Wartime Women*; Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne, 1982); D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change* (Boston: Twayne, 1987); Leila J. Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939–1945* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978); and William H. Chafe, *The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

²⁶ "Sources of Labor Supply for the War," U.S. Department of Labor, *Monthly Labor Review*, 57 (August 1943): 212.

²⁷ Elizabeth Magee, "Impact of the War on Child Labor," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 236 (November 1944): 103, 101; *Monthly Labor Review* 59 (November 1944): 1034.

²⁸ Natsuki Aruga, "'An' Finish School': Child Labor during World War II" *Labor History* 29, no. 4 (1988): 498–99.

²⁹ "Pin Boys for Victory," *American Child* 26 (May 1944): 1, 4; *American Child* 24 (March 1942): 2; *New York Times*, May 8, 9, 11, August 28 and September 3, 1944.

³⁰ Case file on Mervyn, Berkeley Guidance Study, Institute of Human Development, University of California–Berkeley.

³¹ Aruga, "'An' Finish School'," 498–530; Natsuki Aruga, "The Mobilization of Women and Child Labor during World War II in the United States: Women's Roles Reconsidered," *Reports of Saitama University* 18 (1982): 1–16; also in Crow Working Papers no. 13 (Center for Research on Women, Stanford University).

³² Aruga, "Mobilization of Women and Child Labor," 5.

³³ Grew, "Comparative Weakness," 95; Kocka, "Comparison and Beyond," 40; Skocpol and Somers, "Uses of Comparative History," 181–82.

³⁴ Natsuki Aruga, "Patriots or Hard-Working Young Consumers?: Teenage Employment during World War II in Berkeley, California," *Saitama University Review* 36 no. 1 (2000): 45,

originally a paper presented at the 93rd Annual Meeting of the Organization of American Historians, March 31, 2000.

³⁵ Studs Terkel, *The Good War: An Oral History of World War Two* (New York: Ballantine, 1984), 320.

³⁶ Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 100.

³⁷ Aruga, "Patriots or Hard-Working Young Consumers?," 53.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁹ Natsuki Aruga, "Private Rosies and Public Housewives: The Employment of Women during World War II in Berkeley, California," in *The Public and the Private in the United States*, ed. Hitoshi Abe, Hiroko Sato, and Chieko Kitagawa-Otsuru, International Area Studies Conference 5, JCAS Symposium Series 12 (Suita: Japan Center Studies, National Museum of Ethnology, 1999), 165–84.

⁴⁰ Ian Tyrrell, "Comparative and Transnational History," *Australian Feminist Studies* 22, no. 52 (March 2007): 49.