War and Welfare Policy in Japan

GREGORY J. KASZA

The Pacific War (1937–45) marked the most innovative period in the development of public welfare in Japan, comparable to the 1880s in Germany, the 1908–14 era in Britain, and the 1930s in the United States. Wartime welfare policy set precedents that shape many aspects of welfare provision in Japan to this day. It is a cruel paradox, but war, despite its immediate, catastrophic effects on human well-being, has played a major role in the evolution of the welfare state.

Although a few trans-war theorists have stressed the continuities in Japanese public policy before and after 1945 (e.g., Noguchi 1995; Garon 1997), most studies of welfare policy have slighted the depth and durability of wartime reforms. In fact, social activists and scholars everywhere have hesitated to credit war with innovations in welfare policy. Welfare activists “cannot accept that the welfare institutions which they regard as hallmarks of human progress could possibly have derived in part from anything so horrendous as war” (Porter 1994, 193). Scholars, for their part, tend to view war as a temporary emergency, and consequently they often exclude war from general theories of the welfare state. Regular patterns of events offer the best material for theoretical argument, and at first glance war’s effects appear anything but regular. Even where war’s impact is clear, scholars often treat wars as mere accelerators or decelers of trends that ultimately derive from other factors more amenable to general explanation (Kasza 1996, 358–59).

This article examines war’s effects on the development of the welfare state in Japan. The welfare state comprises ongoing state commitments to protect large categories of people against the risks of accident, sickness, disability, old age, unemployment, and poverty. Temporary welfare measures, which are many during wars, fall outside the scope of this research. The theoretical goal is to test the standard explanations of welfare state development in light of Japan’s experience.

Most comparative research has underscored industrialization, labor politics, and ideological or cultural factors as the prime movers behind the welfare state. In Japan, however, war outweighed these elements in shaping the evolution of policy. War brought welfare innovations later in time than Japan’s level of industrialization would lead one to expect, and wartime welfare policies did not address the problems of industrialization. War sparked an upsurge of welfare measures in an era in which popular social forces were weaker than at any point in the last century. And war caused

Gregory J. Kasza (kasza@indiana.edu) is a professor in the departments of East Asian Languages and Cultures and Political Science at Indiana University.

© 2002 by the Association for Asian Studies, Inc.
the political establishment to move beyond traditional cultural norms that had long undermined public welfare initiatives and toward new values that unleashed a veritable policy revolution.

This article begins with a brief review of welfare policies before the Pacific War to fix a baseline from which to evaluate wartime innovations. There follows a survey of wartime policies related to health, pensions, public assistance for the poor, and housing, which shows that war caused the biggest advances in welfare policy before mid-century. The conclusion is that war merits a place alongside industrialization, popular demand, and political culture in theories of welfare development. To facilitate war's incorporation into theories of public welfare, I will articulate the lessons of Japan's experience in general terms to provide a set of hypotheses that might be tested in other countries.

The Status Quo Ante Bellum

What welfare policies had Japan enacted before the Pacific War? Although Japan's modern state-builders visited Germany in the 1880s and knew of Bismarck's welfare innovations, they opted not to emulate them (Ishida 1989, 256–58; Sugaya 1990, 9–10). Given their resources, they could hardly have decided otherwise. As of 1880, for instance, there were only forty-six university graduates among the 1,396 doctors who had passed the state medical exam (Kōseishō 1988b, 60). Public health insurance was thus not an option.

What steps did the Japanese take? The oligarchical constitutional monarchy that ruled into the 1910s introduced Western medicine and fixed standards for its practice starting in 1868. Officials set national criteria for local poor relief in 1874, stipulating up to fifty days of support for people too old, young, poor, sick, or disabled to work, provided they had no relations to care for them. An annual average of 20,713 people received assistance from 1891 to 1900, 17,200 people from 1921 to 1930 (Kōseishō 1988a, 815–16). The government's chief welfare objective was to fight epidemics, but the resources committed were meager and preventive measures few. The state's main strategy was to isolate the sick, a task performed by police rather than medical personnel. In 1899, tuberculosis caused 7.1 percent of all deaths, but the state did not build urban clinics for tuberculosis patients until 1914 (Kōseishō 1988b, 72). Officials provided miserly support even for wounded veterans and the surviving relatives of the war dead. The Military Relief Law of 1917, which amalgamated earlier regulations, offered help to families of the war dead only if they were unable to make ends meet (Kōseishō 1988b, 53–94). Rigorous means-testing and minimal benefits characterized most of Japan's welfare policies before 1937, reflecting a residual approach of assisting only those unable to support themselves.

The state instituted employers' liability for industrial accidents, first for workers in some state-managed industries in the 1870s, then for miners and sailors (dangerous jobs that often attract early accident laws) in the 1890s, and finally for workers in firms of fifteen or more employees in the Factory Law of 1911. The Factory Law, the enforcement of which began in 1916, was a weak measure, covering less than 5 percent

---

1 One of the Meiji leaders' advisors, Lorenz von Stein, was a champion of social policy (Rimlinger 1971, 101).
2 Some sources cite only the number of relief recipients at year's end. The figures here include all who received relief at any time during the year.
of the labor force. It placed few limits on unhealthy or dangerous working conditions; its benefits were modest in amount and duration; and the fines for violating the law were so light that some employers did so willfully (Sugaya 1990, 37–46).

The party governments of the 1920s enacted Japan’s first social insurance policy, the Health Insurance Law, which took force in 1927. It applied to workers employed for over sixty days in firms subject to the Factory Law, covering them for sickness, injury, death, and childbirth. By excluding managers, temporary workers, and workers in small firms, this measure covered but 38 percent of the industrial workforce. Employers and employees contributed equally, while the state paid 10 percent of the cost. Benefits for a given injury or illness lapsed after 180 days. There were no benefits for the worker’s family (Sugaya 1990, 63–69). The government also adopted a new Relief and Protection Law in 1929 to assist the poor. Beneficiaries rose from 26,720 in 1930 to 157,564 in 1932, the law’s first full year of operation (Kōseishō 1988a, 816–18). These two policies were the only enduring welfare achievements of Japan’s quasi-democratic regime of the 1920s, which legislated universal male suffrage in 1925.

The state invested heavily in recovery efforts after the Kantō earthquake of 1923 and provided substantial relief to rural areas during the depression of the early 1930s, but these measures did not produce ongoing commitments to protect the population against welfare risks. The one permanent welfare policy to emerge from the Great Depression was a law requiring firms of fifty or more employees to contribute 2 percent of each worker’s wage into a provident fund to be paid at the time of retirement or dismissal. Voluntary leavers got only half of this modest benefit (Gordon 1987, 270).³

How to explain Japan’s relative passivity in the welfare field before the 1930s? Research on the origins of the welfare state stresses three causes: the level of industrialization, the influence of labor, and policymakers’ values. Industrialization creates acute welfare problems and generates the financial and technological means to solve them. Industrialization does not correlate precisely with the timing or form of welfare policies, but it is a powerful statistical predictor of welfare spending, and some minimum level of industrialization is a prerequisite for modern welfare programs.⁴ Labor governments helped to forge welfare states in Scandinavia and Britain, and even where the labor movement was unable to capture power, it might still scare conservative elites into adopting welfare measures. Although various values have inspired welfare policy, many scholars aver that a belief in social rights of citizenship provides the strongest foundation for public welfare (Esping-Andersen 1990).

Japan’s industrialization trailed that of Europe before 1920, so it may be unfair to describe Japan as a welfare laggard before then. But theories that associate welfare spending with industrialization would lead us to expect more extensive public welfare in the 1920s. In 1910, the proportion of industrial workers in the labor force was about 25 percent higher in the least industrialized Western European country than

³A modification of the Factory Law in 1926 required that firms subject to the law give fourteen days’ notice or fourteen days’ pay when they dismissed workers. Firms paid nothing if the dismissal was the employee’s fault or if the employee left voluntarily. Over 1929–33, only 17 percent of workers received severance pay upon leaving their jobs (Sugaya 1990, 103–4).

⁴As Wilensky notes, “[s]ocial security programs simply do not appear without sufficient national surplus to make them a policy option, or if, as in many poor countries these programs are enacted, they remain weak paper programs or are severely restricted in coverage until such surplus is produced” (1975, 24).
Table 1. Levels of Industrialization and Urbanization in Japan in 1920, and in Three European States after Each Had Adopted Three or More Forms of Social Insurance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Work Force in Secondary Industry</th>
<th>Population in Cities of 20,000 + Residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany (1895)</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria (1910)</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy (1921)</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan (1920)</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


it was in Japan, but by 1920 Japan had closed the gap (see Table 1). Labor’s weakness and the power of conservative businessmen and bureaucrats best account for the relative lack of progress beyond that point.

Organized labor was not potent enough to take charge of the government or to frighten conservative elites into enacting welfare programs as a defensive measure. At their peak, prewar unions organized only about 8 percent of the industrial workforce. The Public Peace Police Law of 1900 proscribed certain forms of union activity. Moreover, as late as 1930, young women, most of them working on contracts of two years or less, constituted over half of Japan’s factory workers. Such a workforce did not foster a strong labor movement (Garon 1987, 13). Labor disputes were neither as many nor as intense as they were in western Europe. During Japan’s era of party governments from 1918 to 1932, strikes and lockouts averaged 457 per year, while there were 874 per year in Britain, 990 in France, and 2,332 in Germany (Nihon Tōkei Kyōkai 1987–88, 1:439; Flora, Kraus, and Pfenning 1987, 2: chap. 10). Electoral pressure from labor and the left was minimal. The first Japanese election held with universal male suffrage occurred only in 1928, and the vote for workers’ parties during the democratic period peaked at 4.9 percent in the election of 1930. By contrast, the German Social Democratic Party had won 9.1 percent of the national vote already in 1877, including 38–40 percent in industrialized areas such as Hamburg and Berlin (Ritter 1983, 31).

In most European countries, conservative elites, motivated by paternal benevolence or fear of a nascent labor movement, adopted the first welfare policies to preempt the appeal of the left (Esping-Andersen 1990, 108). This did not happen in Japan. Japanese businessmen fought the efforts of at least some officials to promote workers’ welfare. Enforcement of the Factory Law’s ban on night work for women and children, for instance, was delayed until 1929 due to resistance from business. The exploitation of women workers was extreme (Sugaya 1990, 45; Garon 1987, 15, 19–20, 29). Business people and most officials abused the rhetoric of paternal benevolence to put a cynical gloss on class interests. The traditional idea that the sovereign was responsible for his subjects’ welfare, manifest in the concept of a social monarchy in

5The proportion of the workforce in secondary industry was 18.6 percent in Japan, compared to 23.5 percent in Austria, 24 percent in Denmark, and 24.7 percent in Sweden, the three least industrialized major states in western Europe (Flora, Kraus, and Pfenning 1987, 2: chap. 7; Minami 1994, 212).
Germany, got little play in Japan. More often industrialists trotted out paternalistic ideas to obstruct welfare laws, arguing that Confucian benevolence in the factory made welfare policy unnecessary or even harmful to the warm bonds between employers and employees—this at a time when companies frisked workers as they left for home to check for stolen tools (Gordon 1985, 82–85). Officials often echoed these sentiments.

One final cause of Japan’s passivity in welfare policy in the 1920s was its minimal involvement in World War I. Mass mobilization in Europe’s combatant nations sparked new departures in social policy because wartime conditions gave the labor movement new leverage against the state. Only the unions had the organizational means to mobilize workers behind the war, and they exacted concessions for their cooperation (Lowe 1982, 108, 115, 117, 123; Becker 1986, 69, 205, 210; Armeson 1964, 6, 59–61, 70–74, 81–82, 100, 138–39). Military conscription itself was a powerful form of mass political mobilization, and European officials had to take seriously the economic needs of returning veterans, especially against the background of abortive socialist revolutions in postwar Germany and Italy. Due to Japan’s slight involvement in the war, it did not experience comparable effects on its labor movement or social policy.

The Pacific War and Welfare Policy

The Pacific War transformed the balance of forces for and against welfare reform in Japan. It also shifted the discourse about welfare policy from a focus on class conflict and the fear of socialism to a focus on the enhancement of military power. War proved more potent than class conflict in moving the state to adopt a host of new welfare measures.

What is “War”?

Defining “war” for our purposes is not simple. Many aspects of war and military affairs can sway public policy. Because the military profession is inherently dangerous and essential to the nation, soldiers are usually among the first groups targeted for public health and pension policies, regardless of actual involvement in wars (Esping-Andersen 1990, 91). The prospect of war can sway welfare policy in countries that remain at peace, and war’s impact on welfare is sometimes greater after the fighting stops than it is during hostilities. Regarding policy change during the event of war, the event contains a complex bundle of causes. It may be longer or shorter; it may involve mass conscript armies or smaller professional forces; it may or may not involve the mobilization of civilians or combat on a country’s home territory. To say that war has caused this or that is not a meaningful statement unless this complex phenomenon is disaggregated for analysis.

6 For an official early Meiji statement of monarchical benevolence toward the poor, see Kōseishō 1988b, 66. On the effect of paternalistic ideas on Germany’s welfare innovations of the 1880s and in earlier periods of Prussian history, see Beck 1995 and Dawson 1973, chap. 2–3.

7 E.g., Home Ministry bureau chief Takejirō Tokonami stated: “[i]n foreign lands, individualism is advanced. . . . In our country the family is the society’s basic unit. . . . If this family sends a person out into the world who becomes a nuisance [meiwakun], to receive help from others brings shame on that family” (Ishida 1989, 251).
What aspects of the Pacific War were most relevant to welfare policymaking in Japan? In this case, most policy changes occurred during the event of war, which lasted a long eight years (1937–45). By any standard, this was a mass war. There was general military conscription for young and middle-aged males and extensive mobilization of the civilian economy. The state corralled youth, women, workers, farmers, and neighborhood residents into monopolistic mass organizations that it designed as civilian versions of the conscript army. These bodies rationed food and clothing and placed every aspect of daily life on a war footing (Kasza 1995). Officials compelled hundreds of thousands of small businesses to disband or to merge with larger companies, forcing the surviving firms into cartels that subjected production to wartime priorities.

Japan was more an aggressor in the Pacific War than the victim of an unexpected attack. War preparations thus began before the fighting, and consequently I have noted some war-related aspects of pre-1937 policy planning. 8 Japan was winning the war at least until the battle of Midway in mid-1942, while thereafter its fortunes waned, a factor that helps to explain the timing of some policy innovations. Combat reached Japan’s homeland in the form of air bombardment in the last eighteen months of the war. The four main islands were spared the bloody ground-fighting that occurred in Okinawa, but over sixty cities were heavily bombed. Almost three million Japanese perished in the Pacific War. In sum, this was a long, mass war involving extensive civilian mobilization, intense but relatively late air attacks on home territory, and heavy loss of life among soldiers and civilians.

The traits of the society and political system affected by war are also significant factors in explaining war’s impact. Japan had a population of 73 million in 1940. The population density was a high 188 people per square kilometer. Of the labor force, 43.5 percent was engaged in primary industry, 26.1 percent in secondary industry, and 30.3 percent in tertiary industry (Nihon Tōkei Kyōkai 1987–1988, 1:48–49, 452–53). Japan’s military-bureaucratic regime was more interventionist and oppressive than most regimes of its type (Kasza 1988, 164–67). By the end of 1940, it had dissolved independent labor unions and political parties. Parliament continued to meet and to influence policy in certain areas, but it had little impact on welfare policy. The state had a sophisticated administrative apparatus manned by highly educated bureaucratic officials. Military and civilian administrators were the key figures in welfare policymaking.

To reiterate, Japan’s prewar welfare systems were rudimentary. This matters because, obviously, war could not cause the adoption of welfare policies that were already in place. How, then, did this type of war influence welfare policy in a society of these traits?

Institutional Change

The Welfare Ministry, created in 1938, was the prime mover behind wartime social policy. Chikahiko Koizumi, a career army officer and head of the Army Ministry’s medical bureau (imakkyoku), began to lobby for a new ministry in 1935. In

---

8 I have not included welfare reforms made during the postwar United States occupation of Japan, though war is relevant to some of them. Meaningful statements about the relationship between war and welfare policy require clear identification of the type of war involved and the type of society and political system affected. The effects of war upon the policies of an occupying army thus take us into a different (if also very interesting) research project.
mid-1936, the Army Minister bemoaned the poor health of military recruits in a cabinet meeting, and the army medical bureau announced that the number of young men failing their draft physicals had risen from 25 percent during 1922–26 to 35 percent over 1927–32 and 40 percent in 1935 (Sugaya 1990, 83). In May 1937, the Army Ministry proposed the creation of a ministry of health (eiseishō), but other ministries blocked this initiative. One month later, however, the army conditioned its acceptance of the new cabinet of Fumimaro Konoe upon his support for a new ministry to oversee social policy and health. Konoe needed the army’s backing to become prime minister, and his cabinet resolved at its first meeting to set up a social health ministry (shakai bōenshō).

Konoe ordered the Cabinet Planning Agency (Kikakuchō) to design the new ministry. This agency was staffed by so-called renovationist (kakushin) bureaucrats and military officers who believed that the world was moving beyond the era of freedom into the new age of the national defense state (kokubō kokka). They settled a dispute over whether the new ministry should have a physical fitness bureau (the army’s preference) or a labor bureau (the preference of Konoe and the Home Ministry) by including both, but they gave the physical fitness bureau (tairyōkokyoku) a place of pride as the ministry’s first subunit. When the new ministry’s blueprint reached the conservative Privy Council for approval, it objected to the word “social” in social health ministry and changed the name to Welfare Ministry (Kōseishō); reportedly, the Privy Councilors took the new name from a classical Chinese text (Kōseishō 1988b, 343).

Soon, however, the shift from the concept of social work (shakai jigyō) to welfare work (kōsei jigyō) in policy discourse came to symbolize the increasing centrality of total war thinking. The discourse of social work, which had long dominated thinking about welfare policy, revolved around the goal of ameliorating class struggle. The health law of the 1920s, which covered only industrial workers, exemplified social work. But the main goal of welfare work was to strengthen the nation. Welfare work was a translation of the German term Wohlfahrtspflege (Takahashi 1997, 43), one of many concepts that Japanese statesmen lifted from the Nazi glossary. Ironically, a large Social Work Conference that convened in 1940 marked the triumph of the new welfare-work thinking. Welfare work embodied a war-related, human resources (bitōteki shigen) perspective on policy. Various journal articles stressed the significance of the switch from social work to welfare work (Yoshida 1994, 162–69; Ishida 1989, 262–63, 280–83).

The cabinet approved the new ministry’s design on 9 July 1937, just two days after the Marco Polo Bridge incident enmeshed Japan in war with China, and the government christened the Welfare Ministry in January 1938. This was a momentous event. As of 1936, states in western Europe had an average of 2.4 ministries whose main duties lay in social policy (education, welfare, health, labor), but in Japan only the longstanding Ministry of Education fell into this category (Rose 1976, 264). Before war-related thinking took over in the late 1930s, health policy had been a

9 There was a backlash from elected and bureaucratic civilian officials against the army’s growing interference in politics after the abortive coup by young officers in February 1936. This lasted until the China Incident of July 1937 embroiled Japan in a major war, after which the military began to increase its influence once again. In the interval between February 1936 and July 1937, civilian statesmen stymied many military proposals, the plan for a health ministry being one of them.

10 In 1941, the Welfare Ministry’s prefectural social sections (shakaika) changed their names to welfare sections (kōseiha) or assistance sections (engoka) (Kōseishō 1988b, 369).
relatively minor chore of the Home Ministry, which also managed local government, the police, elections, censorship, and countless other public programs. Such catchall ministries are typical of early state-building. With its many duties, the Home Ministry was rarely able to concentrate its efforts or the government’s attention on welfare policy. A dedicated Welfare Ministry would be much more successful. But for the Ministry of Munitions, the Welfare Ministry was the only new ministry created during wartime, and it survives to this day.

Health

The Welfare Ministry acted on health policy immediately. The Home Ministry’s social bureaucrats had long desired to expand public health care. Their efforts to promote a new law intensified during the Great Depression, but opposition from the Japan Medical Association and from Diet members had seen several bills die without a parliamentary vote. In April 1938, just four months after the Welfare Ministry’s founding, the Diet approved a new National Health Insurance Law. Welfare Minister Kōichi Kido averred that the China war had made its passage urgent (Kōseishō 1988b, 524). The law began with modest aims. It launched a voluntary system of people’s health insurance cooperatives (kokumin kenkō boken kumiai), to be organized either in the place of residence or in workplaces not covered by the earlier employees’ health law, which remained in force. The cooperatives were to administer a national health insurance plan. If two-thirds of the residents or employees opted to join, membership would become compulsory for others in the same locale or workplace. The state provided partial funding, while the insured paid 30–50 percent of the cost of treatment. Coverage was mandatory for health and optional for childbirth and funerals. At the end of 1938, only 523,223 people had enrolled (Sugaya 1990, 90–93; Kōseishō 1988a, 869–75).

In 1941–42, as the war intensified, the national health-insurance system expanded rapidly. In January 1941, the cabinet approved a population policy and urged the spread of national health insurance to lower the death rate. When General Koizumi, ever the force behind the Welfare Ministry, finally became minister himself later that year, he devised a three-year plan to erect a health insurance cooperative in every city, town, and village. He adapted the wartime slogan of “all people are soldiers” (kokumin kai hei) into a campaign slogan of “all people should have insurance” (kokumin kai boken). Another of his slogans was “healthy soldiers, healthy people” (kenpei kenmin).

In February 1942, Koizumi promoted a revision of the National Health Insurance Law and a new National Medical Treatment Law (Kokumin iryo hō). These laws gave the Welfare Ministry sweeping powers over the medical profession. They made membership in the Japan Medical Association compulsory for all doctors and authorized the Welfare Minister to appoint its officers. The minister was also empowered to order doctors and pharmacists to participate in the health insurance system and to fix the prices of every medicine and medical procedure. The state could not have humbled the medical association, which had long opposed national health insurance, without the authority that wartime conditions provided. The doctors’ only consolation was to be represented on a commission that would advise the minister on setting prices.

The policy shift of 1942 also enabled the Home Ministry’s prefects to order the creation of health cooperatives in any locale within their jurisdictions. The goal was universal coverage, and by 1944, 95 percent of Japan’s cities, towns, and villages had health cooperatives insuring 41.1 million people (Kōseishō 1988b, 547; 1988a, 875).
Adding those insured under the 1922 law, public health insurance had expanded its coverage from roughly 3.9 million people at the end of 1937 to over 50 million, or about two-thirds of the population, at the end of 1944. These figures exclude the eight million soldiers whose health care had become the military’s responsibility.

Pensions

The Welfare Ministry also promoted pension insurance, but its evolution was more disjointed. Before the Pacific War, the main precedents were pension plans administered by mutual aid societies serving groups of state employees, including army and navy officers (Kōseishō 1988b, 554).11 The Welfare Ministry first sponsored a public pension system for seamen in 1939. Seamen had been privileged in welfare provision since the Sino-Japanese War of the 1890s, which had awakened officials to the military uses of maritime transport (Kōseishō 1988b, 533). The chief goal of the seamen’s pension was to sustain the workforce in this dangerous and critical profession during wartime. The Seamen’s Insurance Law of 1939 integrated their health and pension coverage into one package.

A workers’ pension followed in 1942, but it reflected war’s influence in a different way. Like the seamen’s pension, one goal was to keep workers from switching jobs; there were no benefits until the worker completed three years of service. But the immediate purpose of the workers’ pension was to curb consumption. Pension insurance is profitable in the short run, since workers must contribute for many years to earn full benefits. During 1942–45, this pension system generated income of 1.5 billion yen against 78 million yen in benefits paid, or a ratio of 19.5 to 1 between revenues and expenditures (Sugaya 1990, 109–10). By an inter-ministerial accord of 1942, nearly all the contributions to workers’ pension insurance went to the Ministry of Finance to help pay for the war (Kōseishō 1988b, 568).

As revised by the Welfare Pension Law (Kōsei nenkin hō) of 1944, pension insurance was compulsory for workers and office staff, including women, in businesses of five or more employees. Smaller enterprises might adopt it if their workers so petitioned and management agreed. The state covered 10 percent of the cost as well as administrative expenses, while the employer and employee each contributed the equivalent of 5.5 percent of the employee’s wages. The insurance covered old age and disability and offered a death benefit. A full old-age pension was awarded after age fifty-five to those completing twenty years of service in insured enterprises. The old-age benefit was paid until death at a replacement rate of one-third of the worker’s average salary during the period of employment. Those retiring with more than three but fewer than twenty years of insured labor got severance pay but no pension. Conscripted workers, both Japanese and Korean, and women leaving work to marry qualified for severance pay after only six months. Enrollees in the pension insurance program rose from 3.46 million in 1942 at the end of its first year to 8.44 million at the end of 1944 (Kōseishō 1988b, 558–64; Sugaya 1990, 106–10).

Public Assistance/Unemployment Relief

Public aid to the poor has always been meager in Japan’s welfare system. Logically, we would not expect a long mass war to change this, at least not until the fighting

11The post-office banks introduced voluntary life insurance (1916) and pension (1926) systems for their depositors, but these were little more than special savings plans and received no state subsidy.
ended. Mass war tends to bring full employment and thus to reduce extreme poverty. Japan suffered a labor shortage in the early 1940s. Civilian employment rose from 31 million people in 1937 to 33.5 million in early 1944, and workers were so scarce that the state drafted 3 million students over the age of ten and 1.3 million Koreans into the workforce (Havens 1978, 91, 101–4, 112). Air attacks eventually left masses of people poor and homeless, but by the time this happened, the military situation compelled officials to invest all resources in the war effort, leaving little to assist the poor. Logically, then, we would not expect that the type of war Japan fought would lead to greater public assistance or unemployment relief. The failure to adopt unemployment insurance during the war conforms to this logic, but contrary to expectations, public assistance to the poor expanded markedly.

Three factors prompted improvements in public assistance. First, mass conscription and combat led to an increase in aid to soldiers’ families, and officials modified the procedures and conditions for this aid to remove the stigma that was normally attached to poor relief. For instance, the beneficiaries did not lose their right to vote, as did ordinary aid recipients (Garon 1997, 58).

A second factor was the state’s population policy. Officials increased aid to the poor to boost the reproduction of healthy soldiers. Various public and private providers had hitherto assisted the poor with health care. In 1941, the Health Preservation Law (Iryō hogo hō) systematized and expanded this aid. The central government pledged to pay local governments seven-twelfths of the expenses they incurred to cover medical assistance for the poor and to pay half of the expenses so incurred by private bodies. Prefectural governments paid both sources another one-fourth of their costs. Officials set up a licensing system for private poor-relief organizations and fixed the criteria by which they might distribute coupons to the poor to cover doctors’ bills (Kōseishō 1988b, 369–70).

A third stimulus for improving public assistance was that the war put private relief services in financial straits. As of 1936, 83 percent of Japan’s facilities caring for the poor were privately owned and run. Amid the government’s campaigns to boost savings and to curb consumption, these facilities saw their contributions decline and began to lobby the state for more support (Ichibankase and Takashima 1981, 70–71). The result was the Social Work Law of 1938, which authorized officials to license and to regulate private relief activities. It also systematized official support for private efforts, and state aid to private relief services increased five times from 200,000 yen in 1937 to 1,000,000 yen in 1939, the new law’s first full year of operation (Kōseishō 1988b, 368–69).

Housing

The movement of workers into regions of high military production created acute housing shortages and caused the state to undertake its first construction of public housing. Officials launched a new Public Housing Corporation (Jūtaku eidan) in 1941. It is noteworthy less for what it accomplished than for the precedent it set. By the end of 1944, it had built only 95,000 residences, a fraction of the number lost to enemy air raids (Kōseishō 1988b, 371–72). But as the state’s first “business unit”

12The Mother and Child Protection Law passed in March 1937 (just before the China Incident) provided public assistance for single mothers with children under thirteen years of age, but the brief references to this measure that I have seen do not suggest a war-related rationale.
(eidan), it became a model for other public corporations. In the postwar period, it was
reborn as the more active Japan Public Housing Corporation (Nihon jūtaku kōdan).

Such were the highlights of wartime welfare policy. To repeat, this review has
focused on major policies that had a lasting impact in mainstream welfare areas;
otherwise, it would be much longer.\(^\text{13}\) The new programs described above were not
one-time allocations of funds to deal with an emergency nor were they merely
additions of funds to existing programs. These policies marked an enduring expansion
of the state’s authority and responsibility for public welfare.

Scholars commonly ignore war’s effects on domestic politics because they see these
effects as temporary—thus the many books that end their chronologies when a war
begins, or begin their analyses after a war ends. Why waste one’s analytical skills on
a short-lived situation atypical of normal times? Granted, many welfare policies
adopted during war are temporary. The evacuation of children to rural areas in Japan,
Britain, and Germany during World War II is one example. But the fact that
policymakers act in an atmosphere of crisis does not signify in itself that their
handiwork will be short-lived. Since a foreign army governed Japan for seven years
after the Pacific War, we might not expect to find much continuity between wartime
and postwar welfare policies, but even in these circumstances, war left a lasting legacy.

Japan’s postwar public health insurance system is largely an artifact of wartime
policy. Points of continuity include: jurisdiction of the Welfare Ministry; national
public health insurance (alongside the earlier employees’ health insurance program);
compulsory participation by physicians and pharmacists; fixed prices for medical
treatment and drugs; an advisory commission to help the ministry set prices; a modest
co-payment by patients; and the patient’s freedom to choose his or her place of
treatment. The Japan Medical Association regained much of its autonomy after the
war, and local governments undertook to administer health insurance for residential
groups, but most of the wartime innovations persist to this day.

Even after a thorough revision in 1954, many traits of the wartime pension system
also endured. This system continued to serve employees in firms of five or more
workers and to require twenty years of contributions for a full pension. For fifteen
years after the war, nearly all changes in the system involved the adjustment of
resources committed to it. The rampant inflation at war’s end required financial
restructuring. Rather than a purely earnings-based pension, officials set a basic old-
age benefit of 25,000 yen per month with an earnings-related supplement. The
minimum age for receiving a pension was raised from fifty-five to sixty. Premiums
and benefits rose or fell in accord with financial conditions. But the basic responsibility
officials had undertaken during the war did not change until the state adopted a
complementary pension insurance scheme for the rest of the citizenry in 1959. The
wartime practice of channeling pension funds into public investment was formalized
in the early 1950s. Postwar pension contributions have flowed into the Fiscal
Investment and Loan Program, the biggest source of state capital for Japan’s industrial
development (Johnson 1978, chap. 4).

The egalitarian ethos that inspired the wartime reforms has continued to sway
the Welfare Ministry’s thinking since the war. In 1947, the ministry devised plans

\(^\text{13}\) Among less mainstream policies was control over the food supply, which left the state
in charge of selling Japan’s rice crop for decades. Among less enduring policies was the evac-
uation of children to rural areas. Among programs affecting fewer people was the Nazi-inspired
National Eugenics Law of 1940, which resulted in 538 sterilizations of those deemed to be
genetically defective, including the mentally ill, over the years 1941–47 (Kōseishō 1988b,
349–50).
for a comprehensive, integrated public welfare system that would cover every Japanese for sickness, injury, death, childbirth, childcare, old age, and unemployment. It was known as _beiharji no nihonban_, the Japan edition of the Beveridge Report. Officials also sought to standardize health insurance for people in different occupations. In 1953, the ministry called for an integrated national pension system that would similarly supercede the many segmented systems then in force (Campbell 1992, 54–55; Sugaya 1990, 193). Between 1957 and 1961, the ministry finally won the political backing it needed to make both health and pension insurance universal, if not egalitarian. To publicize the campaign, the ministry revived General Koizumi’s slogan of _kokumin kai boken_ (all people should have insurance) and further modified it into _kokumin kai nenkin_ (all people should have pensions). Both were variations of the wartime slogan of _kokumin kai bei_ (all people are soldiers), which most adult Japanese at the time would certainly have remembered.\(^4\)

**War and Alternative Sources of Explanation**

How do industrialization, the power of labor, and cultural values compare to war as explanations of the policy changes of 1937–45? By the logic of industrialization, there should have been a bigger shift in welfare policy in the 1920s, when Japan’s industrial development caught up with that of some European states. Moreover, if industrialization were the main cause, the policies of the late 1930s should have addressed the social problems caused by industry. National health insurance, improvements in public assistance, and the measures that sprang from the pro-natal population policy were unrelated to industrialization. Only the wartime pension programs were focused on industrial workers, but officials designed these mainly to foster savings and to discourage job switching, not to secure the workers’ livelihood. To be sure, some level of industrialization was necessary to finance and to administer the new programs. But the programs were not a response to the ills of industrialization.

Though many Japanese undoubtedly welcomed the new policies, there was no pressure from below, whether from labor or any other source, to compel the policy changes of 1937–45. The military regime dissolved Japan’s labor unions and replaced them with a compulsory, state-managed Industrial Patriotic Society (Sangyō hōkokuï), whose national head was none other than the Minister of Welfare. The Home Ministry’s appointed governors doubled as the organization’s prefectural heads. Genuine labor leaders had no voice in policymaking, even in the national offices of

\(^4\)Japan today still boasts many select welfare programs for occupational groups, but due partly to the war’s legacy, this segmentation does not reflect the preferences of the welfare bureaucracy. Welfare bureaucrats have long been constrained by pre-existing programs aimed at specific groups such as public employees, workers in big firms, and seamen. Officials have rarely had the political clout to overcome the special interests (and other bureaucracies) that guard these programs, which offer above-average benefits. Once such select programs are in place, new policies must also be selective, since they are limited to groups not previously protected. But since the war, the preference of welfare bureaucrats, for the sake of social justice and administrative simplification, has been for greater equality and universalism. To a degree, the war enabled them to overcome some of the special interests and act on this universalistic impulse, at least to the extent of launching a nearly universal health care system.
the Industrial Patriotic Society itself. Much of the wartime labor force comprised women and older men who were relatively docile employees.\footnote{Workers took action to dispute managerial policies an average of 245 times per year over 1938–44. In 1939, each incident involved an average of 203 workers and in 1940 an average of 122, but over 1941–44 the average number of participants per dispute was 47. Such occurrences invited quick police intervention (Ôhara Shakai Mondai Kenkyûjô 1965, chap. 1, 14 for statistics).}

No political party played much part in generating or modifying wartime welfare policies. The government disbanded leftist parties and imprisoned their leaders. By the time the military regime forced the mainstream conservative parties to dissolve in 1940, they had already lost much influence. All significant welfare bills originated in the military-bureaucratic establishment and flew through the Diet. The Asahi newspaper reported on 31 March 1938:

The government is presenting an unprecedented number of legislative bills, starting with general social laws sponsored by the Welfare Ministry, such as the National Health Insurance Law, the Social Work Law, the revision of the Employment Service Law (imposing state management). . . . Ordinarily, capitalists and other mainstream political forces would block these assistance laws. We must rejoice that on this occasion, due to the urgency of the wartime emergency and to the focus of public attention on weightier bills, these laws have passed safely without significant opposition.

(Kôseishô 1988b, 525)

Japan’s military-bureaucratic rulers overcame the structure of class forces that had so long obstructed welfare policy, and they did so without any push from labor or the left, whom they distrusted even more than they did Japan’s business establishment.

Values had much to do with the policy transformation of the late 1930s, but they were not the values usually alleged to explain the development of public welfare in general or Japanese policy in particular. The operative values were not those of traditional Japanese culture, the class interests of business or labor, or any notion of the rights of citizenship. War brought a different set of values to the fore. Japan’s earlier social work discourse about welfare policy had reflected the desire of the elite to avert class struggle and the spread of socialism. Because neither the labor movement nor socialism presented much of a threat, this discourse produced limited progress in welfare policy. The welfare work discourse of the war era had nothing to do with class struggle or socialism. By the late 1930s, there was no independent labor movement or socialist politics to combat. The discourse of welfare work revolved around the desire to strengthen the nation’s human resources for war.

War outweighed all other factors in causing Japan’s welfare transformation from 1937 to 1945. Summarizing the lessons of Japan’s experience, the following propositions may serve as hypotheses for the study of comparable cases elsewhere. I emphasize again that “war” here refers to the type of lengthy mass war described above.

1. War requires healthy soldiers to man a conscript army, thus extending the state’s health concerns to much of the adult male population. Mass conscription compels the state to confront the health problems of draftees, while mass war makes the state the health provider for a sizable minority of its subjects.

2. Mass war generates a concern for the long-term production of more soldiers. Even though Japanese officials did not believe that the Pacific War would last long enough to
engage the children of the early 1940s, the event of mass war caused them to adopt a long-term population policy that led to improved public health care and poor relief, much of it aimed at women and children.

3. Mobilization of the civilian economy for war requires welfare measures to secure a healthy, stable workforce. Since, during war, young and middle-aged men serve in the military, concern for civilian workers forces officials to consider the welfare of women and the elderly, who labor in their place. This concern influenced both health policy and pension policy in Japan, the latter partly designed to discourage job switching. Policies regarding the health of conscripts, the long-term production of more soldiers, and the welfare of civilian workers embodied the human resources perspective that is characteristic of a state engaged in mass war.

4. The absence of male breadwinners during war threatens the health and livelihood of soldiers’ families. In Japan, this concern led to the expansion of public health insurance and to new terms of public assistance for soldiers’ families living in poverty.

5. War makes the military a major player in welfare policy, introducing a new element into the policymaking process. In Japan, the military’s role in welfare policymaking through the Army Ministry’s medical bureau and then the Welfare Ministry transformed official policy.

6. War requires the state to curb consumption, and welfare policies can serve this end. In Japan, workers’ pension insurance was the best example, but many lesser measures served the same purpose. For instance, official women’s groups taught their members how to prepare cheaper, more nutritious meals, simultaneously curbing consumption and offering health benefits.

7. The sense that everyone in society is contributing to the war effort (“all people are soldiers”) fosters an egalitarian sense of social justice that calls for the expansion of social services (“all people should have insurance”). As the Japanese case shows, this egalitarianism may be found in authoritarian as well as democratic regimes. In a democracy, the contribution of all to war may result in the extension of civil or social rights to citizens, but an authoritarian regime’s preoccupation with war may produce a welfare doctrine nearly as egalitarian as one based on rights of citizenship. Authoritarian rulers, too, may come to view every human being as a vital contributor to the nation’s military mission. Although in many ways Japanese subjects enjoyed only an equality of subservience, war did provoke Japan’s authoritarian regime to institute an egalitarian and nearly universal system of public health insurance. The head of the Nazis’ German Labor Front, Robert Ley, also envisioned a future in which the state would provide welfare for all subjects from cradle to grave (Smelser 1988, 99, 197–98, 262–63, 274–75, 305–6). Social egalitarianism and the human resources perspective are the two central values affecting welfare policy that emerge from mass war.

8. The idea that all must sacrifice for war extends to elite interest groups like the medical profession and big business, enabling the state to compromise their autonomy and to demand their support for public welfare. War is the supreme raison d’état, for no private interests can logically take precedence over national survival.

9. The marshalling of resources for war puts financial pressure on private purveyors of poor relief and other welfare services. This causes the state to increase its regulation and funding of private welfare providers and to expand public welfare to pick up the slack.

10. The urgency and significance of war facilitates rapid institutional and policy change. The sense of urgency that accompanies war serves to justify radical innovations, and the sheer volume of war-related business makes it impossible for legislators to scrutinize every new measure carefully. It is easier to launch new state agencies than it would be in peacetime.
11. War increases employment, and it is therefore unlikely to lead to improvements in unemployment insurance (an inverse relationship between war and welfare policy).

12. Lasting, systemic changes in welfare policy during wartime are most likely to occur (a) while a country is winning the war and (b) when its home territory is not under attack. Most big welfare innovations in Japan occurred early in the Pacific War, many within the first year. When Japan’s fortunes in war began to decline in mid-1942, major innovations slowed, even though existing programs continued to expand. While Japan was winning, officials could spend time shaping their future empire, but battlefield reversals focused the state’s attention on military matters in a narrow sense. The destruction and loss of life that resulted from air bombardment were obstacles, not boons, to lasting change in welfare policy. In Japan, only the construction of new public housing increased its pace due to the bombing. Virtually all the major innovations in public welfare policy preceded the air assault on the Japanese homeland. The chaos and deprivations of combat on home territory render systematic policy planning impractical. Officials respond to such a situation with one-time emergency measures, not permanent programs. While the army’s responsibility for soldiers’ health increases sharply with mass war, neither combat injuries nor illness affected the adoption of new welfare policies in Japan. Thus the aspect of war that would logically seem to require new welfare programs most directly, namely the rise in the number of injured and sick people, did not have much effect on policy.

These statements describe how a particular type of war influenced welfare policy in a particular type of society and political system. Most refer to a welfare problem or challenge posed by a lengthy mass war. The precise manner in which officials respond to these problems will vary with the traits of their society. In a country at a lower level of economic development, for example, the state might respond with more modest programs. In a country that boasts more extensive prewar welfare policies, the state might increase benefits rather than create new programs. A country under attack early in such a war might devise lasting policy responses to these welfare problems only after the conflict ends. There are few case studies of war’s impact on welfare policy, but there are at least two that illustrate the range of possible responses.

Richard Titmuss conducted the first significant analysis of war’s relationship to welfare policy in Britain.\textsuperscript{10} Once technological improvements in weaponry had expanded the practical size of armies in the nineteenth century, British statesmen, too, came to view people as human resources for war, leading to a new concern for public health. In the blunt phrase of Michael Howard, “mass production of these weapons made necessary mass production of men” (1976, 121). Mass war caused many of the same welfare problems in Britain that it did in Japan, such as the poor health of conscripts during the Boer War and the plight of soldiers’ families during World War II. World War II produced a sense of social egalitarianism in Britain that similarly inspired new welfare initiatives in the form of the Beveridge Report. Though devised during the war, Beveridge’s recommendations were implemented only afterward. This confirms the hypothesis that countries that are losing battles or under attack, as Britain was during much of the war, are unlikely to adopt lasting welfare innovations until their home territory is secure. Titmuss’s work has inspired others to explore further the connection between war and welfare in Britain (Johnson 1968).

Theda Skocpol’s research shows that the United States’ Civil War also had a profound impact on welfare policy. This case is less comparable to that of Japan. The

\textsuperscript{10}His foremost empirical study was in 1950, but he spells out his general theses regarding war and welfare more clearly in 1976.
war occurred before the birth of the modern welfare state. Moreover, as a civil war, it did not produce the same egalitarian ethos, since the government offered no benefits to those on the losing side. Nonetheless, war’s impact on welfare policy was substantial. State pensions for Civil War veterans of the Union Army constituted the first major welfare policy of the United States and colored American perceptions of welfare for decades. Veterans’ benefits brought into being supportive institutions such as a Bureau of Pensions with over two thousand employees and a veterans’ interest group, the Grand Army of the Republic, which enrolled over 372,000 members. In 1893, the state spent a full 41.5 percent of its income on pensions for 966,012 veterans (1992, 111–12, 120, 127–29). Civil War pensions fostered the notion that the proper purpose of welfare policy was to reward the morally deserving, not to assist workers or the elderly or other economically vulnerable groups on the basis of need. This viewpoint hampered the development of more universalistic welfare programs in the United States well into the twentieth century. Skocpol’s study, like that of Tittmuss, highlights war’s impact not just on policy in a narrow sense but on institutional structures and ideology, which were also transformed in wartime Japan.

Monocausal explanations of the welfare state are untenable (Carrier and Kendall 1977) and, as I have indicated above, war offers only a partial explanation of the emergence of Japan’s welfare system. But it is clear that war deserves a place alongside industrialization, class conflict, and culture in any general theory of welfare development. War has not been a mere accelerator or incidental factor in the evolution of the welfare state, but one of its primary causes.

The fact that a long mass war may influence welfare policy in somewhat different ways from country to country is no obstacle to war’s inclusion in general theories of public welfare. In some ways, the argument for war’s effects on welfare policy parallels the more popular argument that industrialization causes the emergence of welfare policy. Scholars who explain public welfare as a byproduct of industrialization argue that industry creates predictable welfare problems that elicit solutions in public policy. These problems include dangerous working conditions, an unhealthy urban living environment, and the breakdown of traditional forms of community welfare (Ritter 1983, 2–3). A long mass war, too, creates predictable welfare problems such as the need for healthy soldiers, the plight of soldiers’ families, and problems of employment that arise during transitions to and from a war economy. Industrialization theorists also contend that industrialization makes possible solutions to the welfare problems it creates by improving medical technology, facilitating more sophisticated administrative organizations, and creating the economic surplus needed to finance welfare programs. War, too, creates the means to solve some of the welfare problems it fosters. Wars are notorious for breaking down legal and financial barriers to the expansion of state authority. Wars (like industrialization) increase the state’s administrative capabilities and foster new rationales for welfare policy, such as the view of subjects as human resources and a sense of social egalitarianism. Neither war nor industrialization occurs in exactly the same way everywhere but their effects on welfare policy are still far from random. If properly dissected for analysis, even complex phenomena like these can provide the raw material for a sound theory of the origins of the welfare state.

Scholarly writings offer some vague affirmations of the link between war and welfare. The German historian Leopold von Ranke warned against giving the masses military training, “for he who serves the state with his life has also a claim on it for his support” (Rimlinger 1971, 101). Joseph Schumpeter used the term “social imperialism” to describe the state’s attempts to win support for imperialistic wars by
extending welfare benefits to the masses (Porter 1994, 158). Similarly, Harold Lasswell foresaw that the world was moving toward a “warfare-welfare” state in which officials traded social security for patriotic support (Wilensky 1975, 70). Gösta Esping-Andersen (1990, 100, 115) has observed that the size of welfare states after World War II cannot be predicted from prewar data, and he describes that war as “a watershed for pension development.” Asa Briggs (1961, 223) avers that “the experience of war seems to have been as relevant as the appeal of socialism in determining the practicability and the popularity of introducing comprehensive welfare proposals.” The problem is that these general affirmations of war’s impact have rarely been accompanied by careful research into the subject, and for this reason war has remained little more than an afterthought in the most influential general studies of welfare development.

Most of today’s full-fledged welfare states have experienced mass wars, and their war-related policies have influenced policymakers in many other countries that have not been involved in such wars. There is every reason to believe that future inquiries into war’s effects on welfare will support, not contradict, the evidence of war’s importance that has been documented in Britain, the United States, and Japan.

List of References


NOGUCHI YUKIO. 1995. 1940-nen taisei: saraba “senji keizai” (If the 1940 system persists, we have “wartime economics”). Tokyo: Tôyô Keizai Shimpôsha.


