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Research Article

Kōmei School and the Path to Compulsory Education for Japan's Children with Disabilities

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Abstract

Kōmei School was the first public school for children with physical disabilities in Japan and emerged from reformist, child-centered influences during the 1920s to early 1930s. This work examines the school's history to reveal the place of children with disabilities in Japan's compulsory school system. Administrative exemptions for decades blocked children with disabilities from "compulsory" education, denying them access to school. Kōmei School was established to provide opportunities to a few of many young Japanese individuals with physical challenges and proved to be a source of innovation. However, "abled" Japanese schoolchildren in compulsory schools were considered future national resources, and children with disabilities were not. Consequently, abled pupils were evacuated from Tokyo and other cities to safety in the 1944 mass evacuation policy, while Kōmei's children with mobility challenges were abandoned to face air raids in Tokyo. Under a regime that assessed children as nascent military resources, the nationality of Kōmei's pupils was denied, and even their humanity was questioned. After the war, children with physical disabilities remained devalued by the rapidly growing economy. As a result, the designation "compulsory" that would secure their right to an education, require their attendance in school, and guarantee that government would assure their place in school was not codified until 1979.

Keywords: Schoolchildren; Disability; Compulsory education; War; Evacuation of schoolchildren; Special needs education; Modern Japan

Introduction: modern education and students with disabilities, 1868–1945

Disability scholar Mark Bookman observed that "As Japanese authorities touted the efficacy of 'modern' inventions and devalued 'traditional' ideas between 1868 and 1937, they erected barriers for people whose bodies and minds did not fit in their visions of a 'new Japan'" (Bookman 2021: 14). This work reveals that compulsory education was one such innovation that became a barrier. Kōmei School was denied compulsory status, and its pupils were denied admission to accredited compulsory primary schools. Children with mobility impairments were denied the status of school-children. This study of Japanese children with disabilities contributes to the understanding of disability and schooling in modern Japanese history. It explores Kōmei School's history as the first public institution for children with mobility challenges from 1932–1979, when it gained the "compulsory" designation, codifying government commitment to education for youth with disabilities and establishing public education as a right for its pupils. The analysis unveils trammeling assumptions about children with physical disabilities that delayed the extension of that right to education.

Japan's modern education system began in the Meiji period [1868–1912] with leaders intending to unleash the potential of the citizenry. The 1872 Education System Order (*Gakusei*) sought practical education for individual success. Furthermore, the directive even proposed a place for children with disabilities who needed individual assistance: "*. . . haijin gakkō arubeshi*" ["schools for cripples (*haijin*, discarded people *sic*, disabled people) should [exist, be established]," a proposal based on the understanding of special needs schooling in the West (Monbushō n.d. b). However, Japan's modern national schooling abandoned the early concept of individual improvement and shifted to creating compliant, useful subjects (Duke 2009). Japan's primary school system therefore abandoned the *Gakusei's* early idealistic proposal to include children with disabilities. Japan's first compulsory schooling law (Ministry of Education n.d. b) in 1886 discarded an individual child's right to education. A child's schooling became instead a parental obligation to the state (Horio 1988: 81).

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The public school system counted state priorities over individual needs, a trend incompatible with progress for disability education. Children with physical or intellectual conditions requiring attention or assistance were considered substandard in body and mind and regarded as problems for, not assets to, the empire. Therefore, school authorities excluded children with disabilities from compulsory schooling by issuing exemptions and impelled their parents to accept them, effectively blocking many would-be pupils from school (Hatano 2008; Koyama 2011; Hashida 2018). School entry thus became one of those official barriers established, as Bookman found, in the cause of modernity. People with disabilities whose bodies did not meet the state's authorized criteria (Bookman 2021) were rejected from school on the basis of their physical condition (Hatano 2008; Koyama 2011; Hashida 2018).

The 1900 Third Elementary School Ordinance for the first time waived public tuition fees nationwide. The law sparked an increase in compulsory school enrollment, but it also became a formidable tool that excluded children with disabilities, stipulating that they be exempted or waived from attending school (Monbushō n.d. b). Local mayors were instructed to determine that a child with physical or cognitive challenges was unable to attend. Local education boards then issued exemptions absolving parents of the legal duty to see their children attend but also blocking the child from school (Hashida 2018: 100). This provision left children with disabilities isolated, ostracized, denied instruction, and bereft of friends.

Children with disabilities in the past often spent short, solitary lives confined indoors with no schooling and scant companionship (Japan Broadcasting Corporation [NHK] 2014).[1] Superstitions stigmatized them as victims of bad karma, and families typically hid them from public view. Japanese parents and children with disabilities faced prejudice, discrimination, and ostracism from officials and neighbors in their communities (Hashida 2018: 105). Parental shame conformed with school officials' ambitions to reject children with disabilities. This situation was the historical mechanism preventing children with disabilities from enrolling in school, and it continued even into the revised postwar school system (Hashida 2018).

Nevertheless, an opportunity for children with disabilities appeared. A brief progressive movement during the late Taishō through early Shōwa periods advanced a new appreciation of pupils' characteristics and autonomy and placed the learner, not the teacher, centerstage (Saitō and Imai 2004), (Yamasaki 2018). Progressive education encompassed aims of individualized, active, comprehensive instruction in contrast to the standardized, group-indoctrinating classes employed in the late Meiji period compulsory system (Yamasaki 2018; Lincicome 1999). Moreover, the 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake disaster drew attention to young casualties. Interest in individuality and children's rights grew (Monbushō n.d. b). This New Education Movement rejected authoritarianism, dictatorial teachers, passive pupils, and instruction by rote memorization.

Kōmei School: origins and challenges

The Taishō era's enthusiasm for school reform drew attention toward special needs education (Monbushō n.d. b). National legislation in 1923 commanded the establishment of schools for those with hearing and seeing disabilities in each prefecture. In 1931 the Tokyo City Education Bureau found 1,200 school-age children with physical disabilities, one-third of whom had been rejected with deferments or exemptions from compulsory school without ever attending (Ishikawa 1982). Tokyo City School Superintendent Fujii Toshitaka was experienced with Taishō period normal [teacher-training] schools, the New Education Movement, and child-centered schooling. Fujii was deeply impressed by US schooling for children with disabilities during a 1929 tour and urged the Tokyo assembly to approve a specialized school (Matsumoto Y. 1982). Growing numbers of pediatric patients sparked an appeal from within Tokyo Imperial University's orthopedic surgery department for a facility that could provide both treatment and education (Hanada 1997).

However, by 1932, fiscal stress combined with rising militarism to gainsay the liberal Taishō era school movement. The spending for a school of children with mobility impairment faced opposition. Many city politicians considered children with disabilities unworthy of investment. Progressive challengers needed ideological compromises to engineer city council approval against a countercurrent of criticism. The first city council vote rejected the proposal (Hanada 1997). The prevailing view was that, if such funding were available in a depression, it would better be spent on "ordinary" children (Hanada 1997). Nevertheless, key supporters gained election to the city assembly and lent support (Ishikawa 1982; Hanada 1997), providing the margin for approval of a physical needs facility. Tokyo's mayor backed the school, which he named Kōmei (Matsumoto Y. 1982), the first public institution for compulsory-school-aged children with mobility impairments in Japan and East Asia (Hanada 1997). The school's first campus is seen in Figure 1.

The school's founders were compelled to formulate a bifold objective, balancing their humanitarian mission to provide individuals with mobility restrictions with the chance to go to school with an ideologically approved goal of preparing pupils as national human resources (Ishida 1946: 320). The Taishō period's teacher-initiated progressive turn in schooling had a minimal effect on education bureaucrats, however. Kōmei gained accreditation as a "miscellaneous school" but not a (compulsory) primary school, bespeaking limits to its political support. Primary enrollment was mandated and almost universal in Japan. Nevertheless, students with disabilities were still not required to go to school nor was education promised to them. Instead, they were often blocked from compulsory primary enrollment, and the government still refused to guarantee the provision of facilities, personnel, materials, and equipment to teach them.

[1] The 2014 NHK documentary focused on children for which Kōmei School was established. However, confining an embarrassing family member was an officially sanctioned practice dating to the Edo period. For example, those suspected of mental illness or even recalcitrant children were caged at home, which was officially sanctioned until 1950 (Kim 2018).

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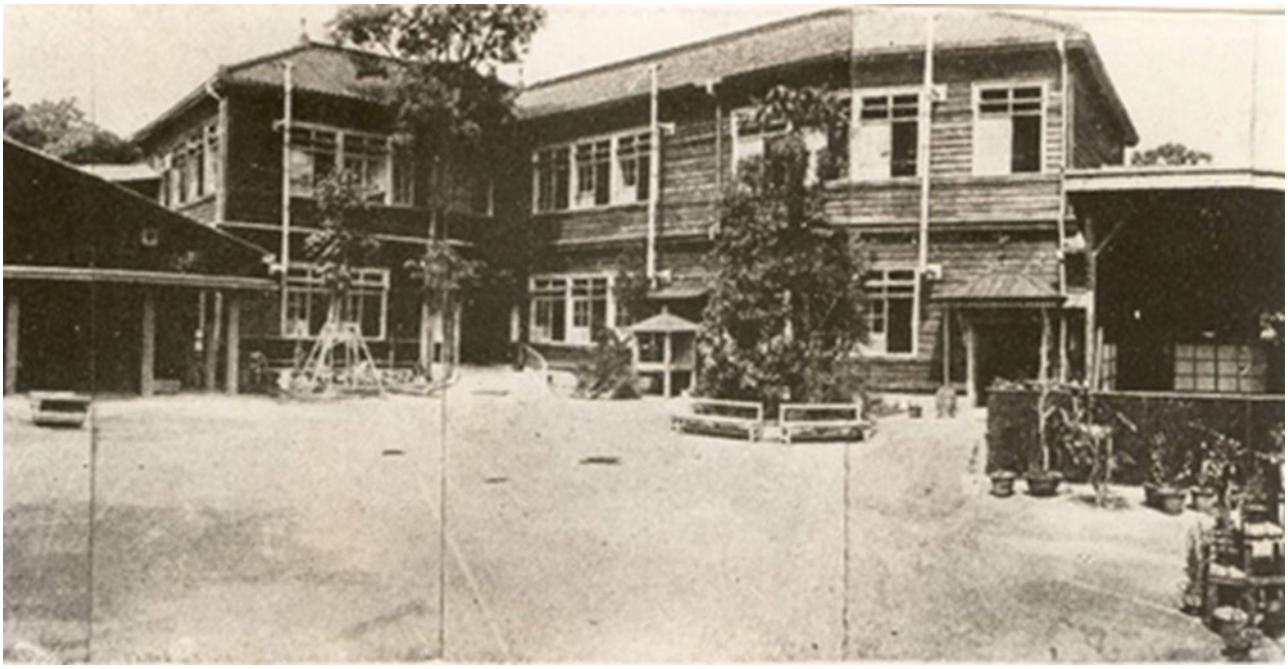

Figure 1. Kōmei School's original Azabu, Tokyo, campus in an unused former primary school when it opened in 1932.

Having survived a contentious political test, Kōmei School opened and admitted children with illnesses such as cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, polio, and tuberculosis of the spine (Matsumoto S. 2005) who were blocked from public compulsory education by government-issued exemptions. Kōmei School uniquely provided academic, vocational, and health services to 34 children who would otherwise have been unable to go to school.

City officials and Kōmei staff remained wary of prevailing prejudice against children with mobility challenges. A news article revealed contemporary bigotry that equated physical and intellectual difficulties, explaining that Kōmei entrants "... are called crippled [*fugu* physically disabled] (but)... completely different from those with low IQ [*teinō*]; they simply have a motor function disorder..." (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 1932). The Education Ministry's advisory Education Council proposed more special (but not compulsory) schools for children with physical and mental disabilities and considered compulsory education for pupils with seeing and hearing disabilities. The Ministry abandoned the ideas owing to fiscal issues that also faced Kōmei School. Another report asserted that 10% of the students were of genius level and several were accomplished in art or music (*Asahi Shinbun* 1935a), aiming to tamp down widespread popular conflation of children with intellectual and physical challenges. The school's first principal, Yūki Sutejirō (1932–1939), sought an anachronistically humanistic child-centered approach during wartime (Shimizu 2018).[2]

Kōmei School admitted pupils already familiar with rejection from the existing public school regime (*Asahi Shinbun* 1935b). Hanada Shunchō (1925–2017), a prolific author and activist with severe cerebral palsy, testifies to the unwelcome exclusion from compulsory school that many children with disabilities faced. As he reached the entering schooling age of 6 years, school staff issued an unwelcome exemption denying him entry to compulsory primary school, *jinjō shōgakkō* (NHK 2014). Kōmei School then provided an opportunity, and Hanada enrolled at the age of 9 years. His recollection attests to the institute's significance in the lives of children with disabilities in the 1930s: "I was isolated, so when Kōmei School opened, I thought I was saved. I was overjoyed. The joy of being released from an isolated world. Kōmei was truly a beacon of light [Kōmei is written with Chinese characters meaning light]" (NHK 2014). At Kōmei, previously denied and disappointed children were able to study and play as normally as possible (Ishida 1946). It provided lodging, academic and vocational instruction, nursing, and physical therapy (Minato-ku n.d.).

Kōmei faculty offered children with disabilities new experiences. One rare innovation at the time was sewing for both girls and boys as a therapeutic exercise and a vocational skill (Kōmei Gakkō 1935). Pupils took part in a summer "forest school" to a hot spring in 1937, a popular excursion for health and learning (*Asahi Shinbun* 1937a).[3] The inaugural principal, Yūki, also instituted an original lifestyle education program in 1937 to cultivate social awareness in often isolated students with disabilities (Asahi Shinbun, 1937b). This research finds that Yuki's class presaged by decades a similarly targeted '*seikatsu* (life, lifestyle)' life studies course integrated into the curriculum for grades 1–2 from 1989 (MEXT 2015). The campus moved to Setagaya Ward, then relatively rural, in 1939, as seen in Figure 2. Wartime self-

[2] As Kōmei School's first principal, Yūki Sutejirō proposed replacing the then-common, now pejorative term *fugusha* (cripple sic., physically disabled) with *shitai fujiyū sha* (physically disabled, lit. disabled in the limbs), a term Tokyo University professor Takagi Kenji suggested (Shimizu 2018: 142).

[3] These school travel activities became a model for the 1944–1945 evacuation of urban schoolchildren (Johnson, 2009).

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Figure 2. Kōmei School's Setagaya Tokyo campus constructed in 1939.

sufficiency joined pedagogy in May of 1943 as the small plot of seedlings expanded to a 5,000 m^2 field cultivated for foodstuffs and a livestock barn was built. Pupils with mobility difficulties planted and harvested crops, maintained fields, and cared for the animals as part of their education and exercise. Kōmei School pioneered education for children with mobility challenges who had been abandoned by the *jinjō shōgakkō* compulsory school system, and in cases surpassed the standard public curriculum.

Kōmei School and its pupils in wartime

During the 1930s, education nationwide was driven by the wartime imperatives of total war, modernization, rationalization, and standardization. Kōmei's expensive child-centered individual instruction clashed with national ideology defining children as strategic resources of the state. The school opened in 1932 during a worldwide depression as invading Japanese forces were turning Manchuria into a colony. The third principal (1942–1958), Matsumoto Yasuhira, complained, "...the dark shadow of this militaristic nation had been stalking and creeping around Kōmei School even before the school opened" (Matsumoto Y. 1982: 166). Former students have testified to experiencing oppression and derision during the long era of conflict (NHK n.d.).

A recurring cavil pursued the school—critics denying the value of children with disabilities: "Tokyo's finances are insufficient to pay for crippled (*fugu, sic.*, physically disabled) children. If we have that kind of money, we should focus on educating gifted children. That would be much better for the country" (Matsumoto Y. 1982: 166). Minor infractions amplified official censure. Municipal inspectors said the institute was "...a useless school that eats nothing but money" (Matsumoto Y. 1982: 168), and pupils were frequently called a nuisance (Matsumoto Y. 1982: 167–168). Children with disabilities were assumed to be cognitively substandard, accused of consuming excessive resources, and denigrated as unhelpful in civic duties.[4]

Kōmei School's leaders defended the institution and attempted to carve out a place in Japan for their pupils and other vulnerable people with disabilities. Principal Yūki argued against the prevailing view that children with disabilities were useless. While affecting official prowar dogma (Shimizu 2018: 140), Yūki stayed on his original message to the press: People with disabilities have abilities and can be contributors (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 1932), (*Asahi Shinbun* 1935a). Yūki offered a formula to fit disparaged people with disabilities into the category of Japanese citizens and humans: "The goal of the sacred war was building a new East Asia and world-wide propagation of the imperial way..." in which "the 'productive capability' of disabled people...should be proposed to the world" (Yūki 1939). However, children with mobility impairments were denigrated by Japanese society in wartime, excluded from the category of "little citizens" or "the "junior nation" (*shōkokumin*), who were the vanguard of "abled" children upon which the nation's future depended.[5]

[4] Children's civic duties started with collecting scrap metal and cleaning public areas and then expanded to preparing water buckets and tools and assisting with fire-fighting as the war approached (Johnson 2009: 185–186; Johnson 2016).

[5] The term *shōkokumin* translates as "national children," "little citizens," or "junior citizens." It might also be "the junior citizenry," or "junior nation." The word is found from approximately 1878. During the Sino-Japanese War from 1937 to 1945, it began to describe Japanese children, primarily boys, as the national rear guard of incipient soldiers on which the nation relied. A wartime primary school book reads: "Let us, as the bright junior nation of Japan, build a strong 'Rear Guard Classroom'" (Sōmuta jinjō shōgakkō 1938: 2). On *shōkokumin*, see Mikuni (1994: 142–3) and (Johnson (2009: 84–86).

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Students with disabilities and conscription

The war mobilization system and its demands, modernization, rationalization, and standardization dominated education (Saito and Imai 2004). Kōmei School and its pupils endured increasing wartime animosity against disabilities. Male military conscription and labor service for both girls and boys[6] drew unfriendly attention toward children with disabilities. Incessant state propaganda emphasized national unity and positioned pupils with mobility challenges as outsiders, calling them " . . . idling freeloaders and nuisances" (Shimizu 2018: 145), castigated as "un-Japanese" (*hikokumin*) (Akiyama 2006), "useless rice-consuming vermin," and "a waste of food" (Matsuda n.d.; ZKSS 2004.)

The government mobilized youths with visual disabilities as military or hospital masseurs, and students with hearing disabilities were drafted to work on military construction projects or clothing factories. That is, children with audio and visual disabilities were considered useful contributors to the war effort, in contrast to children with mobility challenges, who were waived from labor service and belittled as worthless. Children disparaged because of their disabilities feared their futures in such society, and some, overwhelmed by propaganda, longed for ways to contribute (NHK 2014; Kamoshita 1945). An underclass representative's address to graduating Kōmei pupils called for them to leave the institution as "Kōmei School's kamikaze squad" (Kamoshita 1945: 207). Of course, there was no chance that these pupils would face military service. The young speaker was emotionally overcome with enthusiasm to offer his life in response to indoctrination permeating the culture, textbooks, and media. Propaganda recruited Kōmei School to be "junior citizens," but the state rejected them from such status owing to their physical limitations.

The national campaign to ready children for service threatened the bodies as well as minds of children with disabilities. Approaching adulthood, individuals with disabilities were humiliated, cursed as faking draft dodgers, scorned as unpatriotic (Matsuda n.d.; Hayashi 2022: 113–114), and beaten, and some subjected to mutilation[7] (Fujii 2022: 33–4) regardless of gender. Abled schoolchildren also suffered physical abuse at school even though corporal punishment had been banned since 1879. Girls with mobility problems did not face abusive military conscription, but they were not spared their teachers' beatings at school (*Shinbun Akahata* 2007). There is no record of violence at Kōmei. Other people with disabilities or their caregivers were refused assistance and threatened by menacing officials (*Yahoo News* 2015).[8] State agents tasked with defending the state and its citizenry denied children with disabilities the dignity of a human life.

The 1941 National School Ordinance put Japan's primary pupils on a wartime posture as schools became propaganda training camps. Kōmei was established under the "miscellaneous" school accreditation and nominally became the Tokyo Municipal Kōmei National School in April 1941 (Monbushō n.d. b). However, the ordinance retained disability the sole basis for exemption from mandatory school; in other words, disability remained a criterion to deny a child from a seat in compulsory school (Hatano 2008: 49). Kōmei thus remained the only fully accessible public school for children with physical challenges.

Evacuation to safety for some

The 1944–1945 mass evacuation of urban schoolchildren halted special education initiatives, and the special classes to assist pupils with mildly challenges who had managed to enter compulsory school dissolved (Monbushō n.d. c.). Wartime discrimination worsened against people with disabilities and others considered physically or mentally inferior (Arakawa 2017: 13).

The national cabinet authorized the evacuation of school-aged children from urban areas in June 1944 in anticipation of enemy air raids. In all, 400,000 children participated, but the program ignored children with physical disabilities, including those from Kōmei[9] (Henmi 1998; Johnson 2009). The temporary migration of urban primary school children encompassed over 30% of compulsory school-aged pupils from designated areas.[10] Children deemed "not suitable" for the program included those with asthma, children with a history of bed wetting, "sickly" children, children with mobility challenges, and those who needed assistance (Teito 1994: 234–239). This would exclude Kōmei's pupils.

Furthermore, Tokyo's prefectural and ward authorities refused to help, in contrast to their support for other primary schools (Matsumoto Y. 1982: 179–180). Most Tokyo schools for children with hearing and visual challenges were also evacuated (Shimizu 2018). The Tokyo Education Bureau indicated that, owing to " . . . the special characteristics of [its] pupils," Kōmei was denied approval for evacuation from Tokyo and instead was instructed to stay " . . . in the equivalent to an evacuation campus . . . " at the main Setagaya school (Tokyo-To 1996: 82). A Tokyo education

[6] Male individuals were conscripted for military service from the age of 20 years, falling to 19 years in 1943 and 18 years in 1944. Labor service would start as early as 14 years for both girls and boys.

[7] The magnitude of wartime prejudice and discrimination against those with disabilities is evinced by the 1940 Nazi-emulating Eugenic Protection Law intended for so-called racial protection. The aim was eliminating those with disabilities and certain diseases to prevent the birth of "defective" (sic. disabled, alternatively abled) people. Despite postwar amendment and modification, the basic goal and rationale remained Japan's policy until as late as the 1990s (Okamura 2019). The 1940 National Eugenics Law authorized surgical sterilization of people considered carriers of malign genetic diseases or conditions, with or without consent, and 454 victims have been counted. The postwar law added Hansen's disease, a bacterial infection not transmitted by pregnancy or birth, to conditions for which sterilization would be inflicted. Unwanted sterilization was carried out on 16,500 victims between 1948 and 1996, most held in psychiatric and Hansen's institutions. I have found no evidence of Kōmei pupil or alumni victims.

[8] Then, children with disabilities and their caretakers report death threats and rumors. Kōmei Principal Matsumoto Yasuhira responded to persistent rumors that he was provided and/or kept cyanide to euthanize children with disabilities upon enemy invasion: "Definitely not. But there was a coldness in the eyes of the public that gave rise to such doubts and fears" (Shimizu 2018: 136).

[9] Other pupils with special needs were also neglected during wartime. A postwar survey included 108 special needs schools, children with visual disabilities (39 schools), pupils with hearing problems (29 schools), children with intellectual disabilities (5 schools), pupils with mental illness (1 school), pupils with physical disabilities (1 school), and ill students (3 schools). Nearly 30 schools managed to evacuate (27.8%), and 59 did not (54.6%), with 19 schools whose statuses are unknown (17.6%) (Shimizu 1994).

[10] About 60% of the target population took shelter with rural kin.

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Figure 3. Kamiyamada Hotel (Chikuma City, Nagano Prefecture), a refuge for Kōmei's pupils from May 1945 to May 1949.

official denied Matsumoto's appeal for funding to evacuate, adding, "If you don't listen obediently to the city hall on a daily basis, this is what you get" (Matsumoto Y. 1982: 179). Denied assistance, an exasperated Principal Matsumoto asked, "Are physically handicapped pupils a nuisance? A burden?" (Matsumoto Y. 1982: 179).

Confined to the Setagaya campus, Kōmei children took refuge in air raid shelters in the schoolyard as bombing attacks continued. Prejudice ran high against children with disabilities who were not eligible for future military or labor service. The common attitude toward those caring for children with disabilities was disgust at spending funds on them (Arai 2016). As pupils and teachers encamped at the school (June 1944 until May 1945), visiting teachers confronted Matsumoto, accusing him of frivolously playing with the children with disabilities during a war. They demanded the campus be closed and given to the government (Matsumoto Y. 1990: 193). At that point, thousands of Tokyo's teachers were already stationed in safer rural areas on national orders with schoolchildren in their care, but Kōmei's faculty and children were confined in Tokyo in the line of fire, repeatedly taking shelter.

After witnessing the March 9–10, 1945, firebombing conflagration to the east, Matsumoto himself sought a safer place to move his pupils. As he did, a teacher at another school said to him, "What's the point of educating children who are useless to the country? They're un-Japanese (*hikokumin*)" (*Mainichi Shinbun* 2010: 14). Japanese individuals with disabilities were frequent targets of the wartime disparagement, for example, *hikokumin*, meaning "nonciti-zen," "unpatriotic," or "un-Japanese." Matsumoto at last found a refuge for Kōmei pupils at Kamiyamada Hotel in Nagano Prefecture [See Figure 3], arriving on May 15, 1945 just 10 days later, Kōmei School's Setagaya Ward campus was largely destroyed, and the Azabu branch campus was demolished during air raids (Ishikawa 1982).

Extended evacuation: 1945–1949

The war ended in the third month of Kōmei School's evacuation, but their Tokyo school being in ruins impelled them to remain in Nagano. US occupation forces assumed control, but little changed for Kōmei. Transportation, education, and other authorities convened at the Kamiyamada Hotel in October 1945, planning the recall of 200,000 Tokyo children stranded in 14 prefectures back to the metropolis (Ishikawa 1982). Ironically, the conference did nothing to facilitate Kōmei pupils' return to their bomb-damaged school, although they were also lodged at the hotel. They were first denied any government assistance to evacuate to safety and then excluded from the policy to return evacuee schoolchildren to Tokyo.

The first evacuated schools returned to Tokyo on October 10, 1946, and most came back by late November. The official evacuation concluded March 31, 1946, but much of Tokyo was still rubble and ashes. With no means to repair Kōmei's bombed school facilities and dormitory, Tokyo's Education Bureau instructed them that pupils should stay put in rural Nagano.

Schooling and physical therapy were unavailable elsewhere, so pupils with disabilities joined the school at the Nagano hotel location anew. Kōmei students remained excluded from the compulsory system, but the institute opened a 3-year middle school at the Kamiyamada lodge in April 1947 as Japanese compulsory school expanded to encompass 6 years of primary and 3 years of junior high. Matsumoto, prevented from government assistance to return or rebuild, considered a permanent place in Nagano for children with disabilities to learn and work in the future (Henmi 2003).

The evacuation program had nationalized healthy children's bodies, deploying them to areas of safety as incipient human resources. Ironically, some "abled" elementary pupils were stationed in public sanitariums originally built for treating ailments, but Kōmei's children with disabilities were

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Figure 4. One of four annual Kōmei graduation ceremonies that were held while evacuated to Kamiyamada Hotel.

detained behind in the city. Pupils were castigated as "unpatriotic," "non-Japanese" "wastes of rice." Pupils of Kōmei School who had physical challenges were denied assistance to evacuate from Tokyo although the campus faced air attacks in Setagaya.

The state valued healthy schoolchildren as a strategic resource in wartime and sent them to safety at their "battle stations" as human resources (Henmi 1998) when enemy bombers approached. The faculty itself finally managed to move Kōmei School students 3 months before the war's end. Education authorities slighted Kōmei's pupils with disabilities in both evacuation and return (Henmi 1998). Government policy in wartime favored and rewarded people considered useful to the state and neglected or excluded those who were deemed useless to the war effort, and that trend continued in peacetime (Fujii 2022).[11]

As the war ended, Kōmei School remained encamped in rural Nagano Prefecture on government instructions and at a loss for funds to rebuild. Schooling continued there until May 1949 within the Ministry of Education-initiated group camps for war orphans (Ishikawa 1982). Some returnees or new enrollees were schooled in rough conditions in the bomb-damaged Tokyo campus. Government funding arrived in August 1948 after staff and parents' association entreaties (Matsumoto S. 1993). A new Tokyo campus dormitory was completed in April 1949, and children remaining in Kamiyamada Hotel returned to Tokyo on May 28, 1949. Four classes had graduated from the school in exile when classes restarted in Setagaya on June 1, 1949 [See Figure 4] (Ishikawa 1982).

Wartime antipathy toward people with disabilities had necessitated Principal Matsumoto's struggle to protect his pupils in the late stages of the conflict. The negative wartime stance toward children with disabilities lingered in peacetime; the children with physical disabilities were excluded from the ranks of compulsory students destined to contribute to Japan's economic recovery as well.

The 1947 Fundamental Law on Education established equal opportunity as a tenet of education in Japan.[12] Furthermore, it made special schools for hearing and visual schools compulsory. Tellingly, youths with those conditions had been mustered to wartime national service at the age of 14 years. The state considered them useful. The pupils at schools for those with mobility issues, in contrast, were denigrated as useless in war and then overlooked in peace.

The School Education Act authorized separated schooling in Japan on the basis of disability status (Stevens 2013). From 1947, compulsory education became 6 years of primary and 3 years of junior high school for most children, including those at schools for those with visual and hearing disabilities. As aforementioned, Kōmei School inaugurated a junior high school on its own in that year that admitted eight students. The Act's Ch.2 Art. 18 reads:

> "... with regard to children whose custodians are obligated to enroll them in a school (hereinafter referred to as "school-aged child" or "school-aged student") but who are deemed to be unable to be enrolled in the school due to health impairment, incomplete development, and other unavoidable circumstances, the municipal board of education may postpone or exempt the custodian of such children from the obligation." (Ministry of Justice 1947).

In this way, it remained legal for school authorities to exempt the children with disabilities from schooling that was otherwise compulsory (Koyama 2011).

Fiscal issues were blamed as the obstacle to expanding the statutory mandate. Implementation of the 1956 Special

[11] Disability pensions are still more generous to those who were disabled at work accidents than from other causes, based on the principle of having contributed to Japan (Fujii 2022).

[12] Consult Stevens (2013: 104–111) for a concise analysis of postwar disability policy toward children and schooling in Japan.

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Measures Law for the Development of Public Schools for the Handicapped, which was to increase special needs schooling, was supposedly hampered by insufficient funding (Murata 2010). The Education Ministry tautologically explains: "... because the establishment of schools for the disabled was not mandated [by the national government], the way to financial support from the [national] government remained closed, and no prefectures were willing to establish new schools for the disabled fully at their own expense" (Monbushō n.d. e). However, unprecedented economic growth points to priorities, not shortfalls. Per capita gross domestic product (GDP) grew annually at an average 7.1% from 1945, when the war ended, to 1956, the year the Special Measures Law for Handicapped Schools was passed (Okazaki 2015), and frequently achieved over 10% GDP/gross national product (GNP) growth annually (Yoshioka and Kawasaki 2016). Kōmei primary and junior high schools became Tokyo Metropolitan Kōmei Special Needs School (*yōgo gakkō*) in 1957 and started admitting school students from 1958, but the primary and middle school remained outside the national compulsory system. Furthermore, the Education Ministry insisted that allowing children with visual, hearing, physical, or mental disabilities into an abled class would mean "... the education of the majority of children and students in the class who are not mentally or physically abnormal (*sic* disabled) cannot help but be severely hindered" (Monbushō 1961). Schooling stayed noncompulsory for children with physical and intellectual challenges, as the provision of legal exemptions continued.

Nevertheless, education for children with physical and cognitive disabilities approached a transformative event—compulsory status. At that point, General Tatsumi Eiichi, a central figure whose wartime policy separated the abled from those with disabilities, unwittingly offered a clue as to its delay. As Tokyo Air Defense Chief Tatsumi initiated the national school evacuation plan by plotting surreptitiously in direct contradiction to his commander Prime and Army Minister Tōjō Hideki's vehement opposition. Tatsumi was dubbed "The man who saved 400,000 Japanese, The forgotten great benefactor of the mass evacuation of schoolchildren" (Hosaka 1993: 50). In 1972, he described the policy he launched in 1944, exposing a decidedly utilitarian evaluation of children's lives. His central role in wartime policy toward children and his comments as postwar educators inched toward expanded compulsory school merits an extensive quote:

> Evacuation, which began with schoolchildren, gradually progressed to civilians, factories, government offices, and schools ... Therefore, the many lives and materials that were saved through evacuation became a valuable resource after the end of the war, helping Japan recover from its defeat in the war. Thinking that I was able to contribute to the reconstruction, I feel a deep sense of relief (Tatsumi 1972).

Others among the policy and academic communities later concurred (Ikezumi 1987; Fukuya 1987). The evacuation program was implemented with health criteria that excluded children in the conditions of Kōmei's pupils. The children that the evacuation measure saved were considered precious hands and minds and lauded as contributors to national regeneration, but the wartime leaders continued to ignore those with disabilities.

"The junior nation" (*shōkokumin*) was re-envisioned in the new postwar 9-year compulsory system as a strategic resource for Japan's future. The school system that made pupils into wartime strategic resources was retooled for postwar economic growth to create a new product from schoolchildren, economic human capital (Saito and Imai 2004; Kamata 1984). The high-economic-growth system demanded an ableism hierarchy. Vocational education and training was provided only to those who were able to contribute to the growth regime (Takahashi S. 2001: 161–163). In the post-occupation era, a democratic move to eliminate discrimination and inequality in education was countered by the ableism hierarchy demanded by the high-economic-growth system (Takahashi S. 2001: 161–163). This policy was propelled by Japan's rapidly growing economy and subsided with ebbing growth in the 1970s (Saito and Imai 2004).

Education enhanced human capital; compulsory school (for children deemed "able") lengthened, and increased numbers and percentages of youths continued through secondary education, providing a significant impetus in the expansion of Japan's postwar economy until its wane in the early 1970s (Miyazawa 2017). But the expansion of compulsory schooling to children with physical disabilities was ignored until the rapid growth subsided. The government included children with physical and cognitive disabilities under the compulsory schooling system in 1979, eliminating the persistent deferral/exemption policy. This new provision, as the Central Council for Education confesses, was enacted to continue a doctrine of separation, teaching abled children and children with disabilities disparately in contrast to the international move toward integration (Chūō kyōiku shingikai 2010), supported by scholars and advocates in Japan as "normalization."

Before special needs schools became compulsory, many children with disabilities experienced rejection by traditional or special schools (Watanabe, Suzuki and Takahashi 2017: 4). The government admitted that, "Before special schools were made compulsory, there were a lot of children with disabilities who were rejected ..." (Ministry of Education 1989). Political struggles over whether to require the attendance of pupils with disabilities at "traditional" (abled pupil) schools, termed "inclusivity," or at separate "special" schools (for pupils with disabilities) complicated the establishment of a compulsory mandate. The government codified its preference in 1979, requiring the attendance of children with disabilities at new special needs schools instead of restaffing and refitting primary schools attended by abled children. Many concerned parents and teachers championed this decision, and the Education Ministry justified it as economical (Bookman 2021). Teachers and scholars identify the 1979 amendments to the School Education Law as acknowledging that children with physical and cognitive challenges have a right to schooling, by making special schools compulsory (Watanabe, Suzuki, and Takahashi 2017: 4; Anderson 1981; Nakamura N. 2019).

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Kōmei School's past and schooling for individuals with mobility challenges today

The history of Kōmei School and the experience of its pupils reveals evidence of a tacit but persistent division of schoolchildren in national schooling policy based on expected utility to the state. As public schools were tasked with strengthening a national identity during war, the government withheld the compulsory schooling designation from children with physical disabilities, considering them useless. Abled postwar children were reimagined as upcoming human resources for the surging economy, but expansion of compulsory school for children with disabilities was overlooked until growth waned.

The history of Kōmei School and the experiences of its pupils expose official perspectives on Japanese childhood and disability, revealing consistent discrimination against children with physical disabilities and a rigid disinclination to expand compulsory schooling to pupils with mobility challenges. Kōmei was established by progressives in the fields of education, medicine, and local politics who recognized the need for a school for children with mobility difficulties. However, staff and pupils faced relentless prejudice and opposition as official priorities turned from humanitarian to military concerns. Children with special needs were neglected in the wartime school evacuation, excluded from "the junior nation" (*shōkokumin*) of abled schoolchildren upon which the nation's future was thought to rest. The human dignity of children with disabilities was denied (Hirata 2010: 29). The *Kokumin Gakkō* National Schools system made schools training grounds for future military resources, which relegated many pupils with physical disabilities to the status of un-Japanese (*hikokumin*), and their conscientious caretakers were belittled as unhelpful shirkers (Akiyama 2007; 2006; Matsumoto Y. 1990; 1982). However, staff and graduates such as Hanada Shunchō persevered to see compulsory status approved.

Kōmei School today is 1 of 18 Tokyo Metropolitan Special Needs Schools for the Physically Disabled (*shitai fujiyū tokubetsu shien gakkō*).[13] The school is intensively and expertly staffed in technologically equipped state-of-the-art facilities for group and personal instruction. It provides national curriculum and requisite healthcare treatment for children from compulsory primary and middle grades through high school. It has dormitory facilities and transportation for children who need it.

Parents may now choose to send their children to special needs schools or abled schools, against the direction of education administrators. Some parents select standard schools, but they not infrequently require separate classrooms and attendants, which diminish the experience that guardians wish for their children with disabilities (Sakamoto 2022). An examination of Kōmei School's history reveals a legacy of innovation, a record of increasing opportunity, and historic official resistance to expanding compulsory schooling and inclusion.

[13] Lists of Metropolitan Tokyo and ward public special needs schools for those with auditory, visual, physical, health, and cognitive concerns can be found here: https://www.kyoiku.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/school/special_needs_school/school_list. Some schools have multiple purposes. Kōmei addresses physical and health needs.

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