When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan.
By Lori Watt. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Asia Center, 2009. Pp. 264.
ISBN 10: 0674033426; 13: 9780674033429.
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doi:10.1017/S1479591411000313

The trend in academic publishing has been towards slim, succinct volumes that put forward a clear, readily transmittable thesis to the broadest possible audience and, by this measure, Lori Watt's recent study of postwar *hikiagesha* 引き揚げ者 ('repatriates') from the collapsed Empire of Japan is a success. Based on thirteen oral history interviews over the course of one year, some published accounts, and many published government records, Watt ably shows how the *hikiagesha* became a significant subject in the postwar narrative of Japan's wartime experience. The primary argument, as she explains at the end of the introduction, is that *hikiagesha*-qua-trope was a discursive space for articulating anxieties about the ramifications of the end of empire, and what she reveals later in the book, especially in Chapters 3 and 5, is how that phenomenon might have affected the *hikiagesha* themselves.

This is undeniably an important topic for Japanese modern history, and it is remarkable that so little dedicated attention (from scholars writing in English) has been devoted to it until Watt's monograph. Most English-language research focuses on Japanese soldiers trapped abroad, despite the preoccupation the Japanese themselves have for the tragedy of the non-combatants; indeed, state support for veterans and civilian bombing victims (*onkyū* 恩給) is handled by the same office as that for the *hikiagesha*. During my own research trips, I have read and listened to countless "repatriate" narratives; in Japan, it may be that their experience is one of the best-documented, second only to domestic victims of firebombing. Watt's book therefore might be seen as the fourth in a series of monographs that take a similar approach to postwar social history and war memory in Japan: James Orr's *The Victim as Hero*, Franziska Seraphim's impressive *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan*, and Lee Pennington's upcoming manuscript *Casualties of History* (on wounded veterans in Japan).[1] By focusing primarily on women and children, Watt's work has added an under-studied subject category to the social history of the end of the Japanese empire (although, as she rightly points out, this is also a construct of the postwar construction of archetypal "repatriates"). The only problem is that, for the most part, the book is focused primarily on an examination of government policy and popular discourse, and not as much on the writings of the *hikiagesha* themselves.

The book's evidence (mainly media and government publications) and argument (that the *hikiagesha*, in narrative, are a placeholder for postwar collective anxiety) are well matched, but I felt a hunger for more reflections of the individuals who were trapped by the collapsing empire, in their own words. In particular, the monograph lacked archival research that might turn up more self-published and manuscript accounts. As Gerald Figal pointed out in a study of *jibunshi* ('self-history'),[2] these "little histories" (as described by Carol Gluck) are absolutely essential to understanding the patchwork of language (and experience) that underlie, and are eventually disciplined/consumed by, the master narratives that come to replace them. This might have been accomplished by an extended analysis of

1 James Orr, *The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press, 2001); Franziska Seraphim, *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945–2005* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

2 Gerald Figal, "How to jibunshi: Making and Marketing Self-Histories of Shōwa among the Masses in Postwar Japan." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55:4 (1996), pp. 902–933.

Watt's oral history interviews, with a particular focus on the language used by the *hikiagesha*. Do *samizdat* and manuscript accounts resemble the published ones? In *hikiagesha* "self-histories," were there important divisions between children and adults, men and women, soldier and civilian? Where did the *hikiagesha* learn to describe their personal pasts? Watt sometimes combines evidence from state, mass media, and personal accounts, which is necessary to pen a comprehensible and concise narrative, but it would have been useful to more fully disaggregate and independently address the types of text in a more extended fashion. Therefore, the complicated process by which individual *hikiagesha* self-histories became cogs in the machine of a collective memory is sometimes difficult to discern; admittedly, this is an arduous task for any social historian.

The monograph's organization shows that Watt approached this subject very carefully, but, in my view, at the expense of the *hikiagesha* experience. For example, in the first chapter, Watt provides the necessary historical background behind Japan's multi-ethnic, pan-Asianist empire up to the end of the war, and the challenges that it presented to the invading Allies. Clumsy American attempts to (re-)create the boundaries of early Meiji ignored over half a century of historical change in East Asia, even if, as she argued in the book's conclusion, it ultimately saved lives. In the second chapter, she successfully showed how various organizations – the Japanese government, SCAP, the Chinese Nationalist state, etc. – introduced a confusing array of terms to refer to those from the Japanese home islands who were residing in the former empire. At this point in the book, there is a brief examination of *hikiagesha*-focused newspapers in the early postwar period, which is enlightening, because it introduces, however briefly, the organized attempts of Japanese expatriates to speak with a common voice (although, the process behind defining this voice was unclear). The fourth chapter focuses on representations of the *hikiagesha* in popular discourse, such as film and literature. Watt presents a compelling view of how the mass media constructed an image of the *hikiagesha* for popular consumption, setting a script for how past experience might be narrated.

The most stimulating sections of the book, in my view, are the ones that engage directly with *hikiagesha* writing, particularly those who were not professional writers, filmmakers, or other sorts of public figures. Although it constitutes a minority of the analysis in Watt's study, it is tantalizing material. In Chapter 3 (and pp. 188 to 189), there is a brief engagement with Tsukada Asae's account of her experiences in Manchuria. The latter half of the third chapter touches the surface of a very promising discussion: exactly how were the accounts of the *hikiagesha* used by the mass media in postwar Japan? Moreover, I wanted to know the extent to which the *hikiagesha* controlled this process, if at all. The dialog between the state/mass media and the *hikiagesha* undoubtedly transformed the manner in which the latter came to articulate its experience as a community; Watt begins this sort of "cross-examination" of the *hikiagesha* (pp. 165–66), but only to conclude the chapter. She returns to the individual narratives in Chapter 5, which offer the best analysis in the monograph; here, the book exposes how the contradictions within repatriate discourse affected the lived experience of *hikiagesha* by using personal accounts and interviews. It also traces the brief history of a movement to compensate the *hikiagesha* for their losses due to the empire's destruction, in which Watt engages with her oral history informants once more (p. 176). Throughout the chapter, it is clear how discursive trends, such as those describing former imperial subjects, directly transformed real lives, for better or for worse. It is compelling social history.

When Empire Comes Home is a succinct, readable, and clear presentation of some of the major issues we must confront when analyzing the *hikiagesha* experience: changing state definitions of citizenship, mass media interpellation of subjects, the emergence of political consciousness amongst historical actors, and grassroots organization leading to political change. Nevertheless, the monograph's short presentation is also its biggest flaw – a more comprehensive study of the *hikiagesha* is sorely needed. Primary sources in Russian, Chinese, and possibly Korean must eventually make their way into our understanding of these events. Most importantly, any future study must make broader

use of Japanese self-published and manuscript accounts, as well as wide-ranging oral history interviews. These sources should be at the center of any future work on the *hikiagesha* experience, and be extensively analyzed. Watt's book has successfully presented some of the major themes and will be immensely useful for those who want a quick and clear introduction, but we still need a large, sweeping study of the social history of Japanese repatriation at empire's end.