TAKAHASHI Minejiro and Seven Thousand Military Letters

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This paper looks at the life of educator TAKAHASHI Minejiro, born in the poor village of Fujine in the Tohoku region of Japan, and attempts to shed light on the three eras—Meiji, Taisho, and Showa—in which he lived, as well as on his involvement, as a village educator, in the Russo-Japanese War, the Manchurian Incident, and the War of the Pacific.

Three key concepts that need to be kept in mind with regard to Minejiro are: "poor farming village", "youth education", and "military enthusiast". Minejiro's relationship to these key concepts can be seen in his diary, which he kept for sixty-six years until his death, in the SHINYU (True Friend), which Minejiro continuously issued for thirty-seven years, in over seven thousand letters sent to him via military mail from former pupils, and in the two volumes of local history, the compilation of which was his lifework.

Minejiro grew up being told stories about the horrors of famine and peasants' revolts, which repeatedly occurred since the days of clan rule, and learning the history of the Tohoku villages which, since their defeat in the Boshin War, were alienated from the Meiji government. He worked his way through a school of teachers' course and became a teacher, putting his energies into the education of the youths of the village, but the dark shadow of war was close at hand. Minejiro had served in the Russo-Japanese war and was acutely aware of the miseries of war and its effect on families. Therefore, he made his pupils do military drills so as to make it easier for them when they were called to the battlefront and sent copies of SHINYU, containing news of the village and their families, together with encouraging letters to the soldiers. At times, Minejiro's exceptionally cooperative attitude towards the military was misconstrued, causing him to be called a "military enthusiast".

The War in the Pacific ended in defeat for Japan on August 15, 1945. With Japan's defeat, Minejiro, who until then had put his faith in politics and the military to the extent of being called a "military enthusiast", suddenly found himself questioned with regard to his responsibilities as an educator and his cooperation with national policy. With the loss of his former pupils in the war and the denunciation of his former actions as an educator, Minejiro experienced heavy grief. After the war, Minejiro devoted himself to social welfare activities, holding memorial services for those former pupils who died in the war and looking after bereaved families and deprived children. One might conclude that this was his way of accounting for his war-guilt and one way of taking responsibility for his own choices in life.