[Editor's Note: Kazuko White's paper, "One Man's Evolution Through War Time", submitted circa 1979 at Mira Costa College, CA, underwent minimal technical corrections (marked by "[ ]") to preserve the author's original narrative flow.]

One Man's Evolution Through War Time

by Kazuko White

Idealism is characteristic of youth. Many spirits are broken through reality's shattering of ideals, and many persons succumb in selfish ways to corrupt allurings. However, a few people confronted with the width and depth of their political and social environment take a responsibility upon themselves to maintain and practice their ideals of "goodness". This responsibility weighs especially heavily in war time. The intensity of war time experiences is a catalyst in the education and maturation of a man. Eight years of war had a profound effect on one individual, Kazuyoshi Ishii, who became an educator and a strong believer in individual freedom.

Kazuyoshi, the first son of a small local-area ruler, was born on February 11, 1914, in the town of Onomichi in Hiroshima Prefecture. Son of the Sonchō, the mayor, Kazuyoshi entered the world as an heir to his family's long-held role as ruler of the area. There, he graduated from Onomichi Ichiko (Onomichi First College). His father, strongly interested in his first son's education, sent Kazuyoshi to Tokyo for further education, hoping his son would attend Teidai, Tokyo Imperial University. To this day, graduates of Teidai, presently called Todai, have held positions of great responsibility throughout Japan, especially in the bureaus and ministries of the government. Against his father's wish, Kazuyoshi entered Tokyo Gaigodai, Tokyo Foreign Language University, obtaining his degree in 1937.

During his college years in Tokyo, he came in contact with two significant political incidents—one in 1933, called 5.15 (May 15), the other in 1936, called 2.26 (February 26). Both

were revolutionary movements involving assassinations of high governmental officials, the prime ministers and cabinet members. Led by idealistic nationalists, the revolutionaries were mostly young officers of the Kenpeitai, The Imperial Army. Kazuyoshi, a college student at the time, was strongly influenced by fiery young national reformers who were concerned with the country's confused and gloomy conditions.

After World War I, young people of Japan especially were affected by the fall of autocracy in Europe, followed by waves of democracy, socialism, and communism. Japan was in the process of westernization. At the same time, there were problems of overpopulation and corruption in the government. With eighty million people in an area barely the size of California, Japan could not adequately provide for its population. Corruption and bribery of government officials and massive unemployment worsened the situation. In fact, much of the Diet's time was taken up by discussions of the graft. Instead of attempting to solve the country's pressing problems, these officials often literally fought among themselves over the scandals. These gloomy conditions led the people of Japan to lean toward the well-disciplined military group.

In the meantime, the Imperial Army was steadily gaining its strength by guarding Japanese businesses in Manchuria, largely solving the overpopulation problem. A few years later, the Imperial Army occupied Manchuria under the guise of friendly economic expansion of the Manchurian Rail Way Co., built by Japanese. Along with these facts, the army was taking over the national government, leading Japan to isolation from the West, which resulted in her breaking away from the League of Nations. This rising power of the military and its expansionist program threatened China so much that China ended the long ten-year civil war between Mao Tse-Tung, Communist, and Chiang Kai-Shek, Nationalist. China was united in order to prepare its defense against Japan. In July 1937, unknown assailants shot a number of times at the

Japanese army camp at the Manchurian border across from the Chinese camp. In spite of the friendly relationship between the camps, the two countries declared war on July 28, 1937.

That same year, graduating in April, twenty-three-year-old Kazuyoshi began working for the Teishinsho, the Department of Foreign Communication in the Imperial government. A few months later he felt the urge to go to the front line of the war in order to serve the country more forcefully. In August 1937, he volunteered to join the Imperial Army in a battalion which was ready to leave for China at once. Impatiently, without waiting for his commission form to come, he sailed to China full of ambition and patriotism. He had cleverly avoided a confrontation with his father by not waiting for the form. He knew that his father would not approve of his son going to war. By the time his father had received the notice of his son's commission in the Imperial Army, Kazuyoshi was far away in China.

Kazuyoshi eagerly believed the Army's slogan: "Save the fellow Asian from communists and expand your country with good intention." Nevertheless, his battle experience in the next four years changed his personality considerably. During these four years as an Imperial soldier, his force fought in areas from the Russian border in the north to Indochina in the south. In spite of his army's victories, he felt confused about his army's motives, having experienced the hard reality of war. Behavior such as the respected army's illegal acts of atrocities (the slaughtering of nearly 300,000 civilians) made him question his and his army's humanism. Many of his troops and friends were killed and replaced as parts of a monstrous machine. He, as well as the other soldiers, suffered: hiding behind one little wild flower; looking for anything edible with bloody hands and feet; rolling and pounding his body on the ground, even burning his skin, to get huge jungle leeches off; fighting with deadly diseases; killing many humans; facing uncountable deaths; and witnessing the [brutality] of fellow Japanese, especially of those he once had

respected. He was confused and lost from what he had believed all his life. During these four years (1937-1941), he often thought of the Emperor and Shintoism, idealistic nationalism and brutal officers, and the philosophy of Japanese men and Buddhism.

Many of his fellow soldiers died in the name of their Emperor without questioning. Kazuyoshi thought of the philosophical concept of cause and effect derived from Buddhism: One's past life or ancestors' behavior affects one's fate or karma in his present life. One has very little control or purpose of existence in this world as one individual. A person has true individuality after he reaches eternity; therefore, death is an honor. Because death is an honor, death justifies all events surrounding it. These beliefs gave soldiers the strength to face the difficulties stoically and to calmly accept death.

Kazuyoshi thought about another theological concept of contradiction. Buddhism taught harmonization of right and wrong together as one whole matter. Many of the soldiers, including Kazuyoshi, sought to harmonize these contradictions—right and wrong, God and man, spirit and object, or honesty and treachery. To them, everything or everyone could be good and bad as one whole at the time of choice. Therefore, they felt that their contradictory actions or behavior could be justified in this way. Yet, Kazuyoshi could not forget the old saying, "As a man sows, so will he reap."

By the time Kazuyoshi was in the thick jungle of Indochina in 1940, his belief was not as concrete as it had been three years before. He was troubled by the thoughts that he could not find the answers to: why good Japanese philosophy was brutalized and their brutality was philosophized. The army was ordered by the Imperial government to exhibit the honor and glory of Japan, not brutality, and to protect and patronize all Oriental countries and their people. Instead, the army slaughtered hundreds of thousands of fellow Orientals, and disgraced the

sacred honor of the Japanese under the name of the divine Emperor. Kazuyoshi's idealistic respect and admiration for the Imperial Army was crumbling away as time went by.

Back in Japan in 1940, hostility between Japan and the United States grew worse, though neither one wanted a war. Each government's effort to avoid a war was desperate. Since America wished Japan to stop its expansionist program, the Imperial government came to a decision to withdraw all the troops from the Indochina area. Thus, Kazuyoshi was sent back to Japan in 1941, and his career as a professional soldier was ended.

Quickly, he got out of the Imperial Army and started to work for the Teishinsho (the Department of Foreign Communication) again. He told himself then that he was not going to become a soldier ever again if he could help it. Since the government exempted the first son of a family from war affairs, it worked conveniently for Kazuyoshi.

On May 11, he married a woman from a much higher class than his, ignoring the strong objections from both families. During his college years in Tokyo, he had become a very good friend [of] her elder brother, Yasuo Kikuchi, who, at the time, was a student at the Shodai (Tokyo Business and Administration University). Through their friendship, Kazuyoshi became acquainted with fifteen-year-old Fumiko Kikuchi. She had written to him many times, as a sister of Kazuyoshi's best friend, while he was on the front line during the war. Fumiko was the youngest child of [the] Kikuchi family, who owned the land of nearly half of Hiroshima City. While Kazuyoshi's family was politically active, Kikuchi's family withdrew [from] their political position shortly after the fall of the Tokugawa monarchy. Even though her family became strictly business people, a strong Samurai spirit remained, especially in her mother. An extreme stoicism, through strict discipline of body and emotions, was clearly apparent in Fumiko's mother. Evidently, both Kazuyoshi and Fumiko contained the courage and compassion

to follow their emotions and to achieve the fruition of their love for each other. Both of them always believed sincerity is the golden treasure which will win almost everything.

Contradictory to their happy life, Japan was moving toward its destruction. The Imperial military (especially the army) was entrenched in a totalitarian dictatorship which declared war on December 8, 1941. Fluent in German, English, and Chinese, Kazuyoshi was assigned to high-ranking officers of Kenpeitai (Imperial Army) as a translator, maintaining his first job at [the] Foreign Communication Department.

In February 1942, Kazuyoshi was sent along with his wife to Shanghai, China as the head auditor for Kachu Denkitsushin (China, Japan Cable Co.). This company was called The Great Eastern Cable Co., operated by [the] British and Swedes before Japan took it away from them. There, unwillingly, Kazuyoshi became involved with the intelligence force, along with being the head auditor and interpreter. But consciously, he never allowed himself to become involved too deeply in any of his work. Again, he was facing the brutality and treachery of war, witnessing the process of people learning to hate. He loved his country above all, and served well. At the same time, he hoped the war would end soon; otherwise, he thought, Japan would not exist much longer.

Finally, the war ended with Japan's unconditional surrender in August 1945, and revenge to Japanese brutality took its turn in China. Wisely, Kazuyoshi had sent his wife and daughter (born in Shanghai) back to Japan in March of that year, risking the chance they might never see each other again. Knowing brutality would show its hand, he preferred his wife and daughter chance the dangerous voyage rather than to face the humiliation of defeat. Fortunately, they made it back to Japan safely.

After August 15, 1945, Kazuyoshi hid from the Chinese and waited for a chance to return to Japan. He talked of that time as the time of starvation and development of extreme awareness. Luck was on his side, he thought, because there came a chance to go home without being captured. In February 1946, coming back to a ravaged Japan, watching his wife's very rare tears, and picking up his frightened daughter, he promised himself that he would not leave his family again. [For] the next two years, he concentrated on farming and hunting to feed the family of four [, following the birth of their second daughter].

Money meant nothing then, unless you could find some farmers to sell you food. Nearly everyone was starving and many died. Even those with enough land to produce food lacked manpower. The situation—the emotional stress, the humiliation of defeat, and the physical stress of starvation—made many people act less than human.

In 1948, requested by the board of education, Kazuyoshi became an English teacher at a local high school. During the next ten years, he was asked over and over by the government to work for them [in] Tokyo. Instead, he chose to teach English at a local high school. Power, fame, and money meant very little to him. Later, after refusing the invitation to teach at a college, he thought [that] at a high school he could influence young people with what he had learned during the war, and perhaps prevent another war from occurring.

At the age of fifty-six, he died, still a principal of a high school. Saddened by his death, five thousand people, mainly his students and many local people, came to his funeral. He lived a life [exemplifying] personal freedom, sustaining his idealism until the day of his death, saying: "Aiding the government was unsatisfactory, but teaching the young is a true evolution".