

# Student Life During Wartime

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The year 2020 was the seventy-fifth anniversary of the end of World War II. The 1964 Tokyo Olympics had ended when I reached the age of discretion, with no experience of war or of the period of rapid achievement of reconstruction and high-level economic growth that resulted in Japan being called the “miracle of the Orient.” However, I grew up always listening to my grandparents and parents, who did experience all that, talking

about the war period and then Japan recovering from burnt-out ruins to become an economic power and leading nation of technology. My mother and father's houses both burned down during the Tokyo air raids of 1945. I grew up free of that kind of suffering, but because my parents' talk of food shortages during and after the war deeply affected me, I am still unable to leave any food that has been put in front of me on my plate.

The Koa Institute of Technology, which is the predecessor of the Chiba Institute of Technology, was established in 1942 as a six-year university under the former imperial system, with three years of university preparatory classes and three years of regular courses. The university welcomed its first 160 students in June that year.

Teikoku Kyoiku (the 1942 December issue of), a representative monthly educational publication of the period, featured the Koa Institute of Technology as a university with its own educational policies. For example, at the time, the Koa Institute of Technology

university was the only one among schools with university preparatory curricula or imperial system high schools to offer music as a regular subject. As such, even though it was a technical institute, the Koa Institute of Technology had a test for perfect pitch in addition to tests pertaining to academic subjects such as math and English as part of its entrance exam. This was similar to the instrumental performances on entrance exams for prestigious colleges at England's Oxford and Cambridge universities.

Students of the Koa Institute of Technology read Goethe's Faust in the original language in German class after they enrolled in school. They took part in Japan Symphony Orchestra performances of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, conducted by Joseph Rosenstock and held at Hibiya Public Hall. They also performed Ode to Joy in German in a chorus together with students from the Tokyo Conservatory of Music, the predecessor of the Kunitachi College of Music. Even though it was in the midst of World War II, all the students dressed formally and dined at

famous restaurant "Matsumoto" with the teachers to learn about table manners—essential information for people who would occupy leadership positions in society—and viewed the Leonardo da Vinci exhibition at Ueno Royal Museum.

Comprehensive, specialized science and technology education and foreign-language training was also given. The syllabus of that time featured six or seven lecture or seminar segments from Monday through Friday—with no free time in between—and four on Saturdays. At the time of the university's founding, the education offered was truly designed to train the best of the best so that they could contribute to world culture through technology and equip them with sophisticated, specialized skills and a rich liberal arts education, as advocated in the university's founding principles.

However the war also had various effects on universities. Daily commodities were tight from the time of our establishment. Rice was also distributed in small amounts, and dining out was also

apparently difficult. Along with classes, university students apparently had military drills, military academy training camp drills so that they could become technical officers, and labour unit mobilizations, among other things. The length of the period until graduation was also shortened. They were forced to relocate the school's buildings after leaving the Tamagawa Gakuen area, and there was no hope of improving the facilities or classes as the war situation turned increasingly unfavourable. The university students in science and technology—as well as those training to become faculty—were apparently spared from going to the front. That did not include students who had exceeded the age of military deferment, however, and some students of the Koa Institute of Technology were also drafted.

A member of first graduating class of the Koa Institute of Technology looked back upon his school-days at the age of ninety: "My university life began with preparatory studies that started as the tide of the World War II began to change. My time as an

undergraduate student ended as the war situation turned catastrophic and finally to defeat, at the height of the hardships that culminated in extreme social chaos. The six-year course of studies scheduled at the time the university was established ended in five and a half years of destitution and austerity. While I could not pursue what I wanted to study most, I vividly remember after graduation that by enrolling in the Koa Institute of Technology I had led a student lifestyle strangely different from university students of the time in general. I memorized Karl Busse's poem *Über den Bergen* (Over the Mountains) in German, and that being able to recite it from memory even seven decades on made it all the more nostalgic. "

What a wonderful student lifestyle he led. I think that the students of the time applied themselves to their studies and to possible joys of youth, reacting dispassionately and earnestly to the developments of the times even amidst hardships and inconveniences during the World War II.

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