

Shadow Supply Chains of Escape in Japan: A Logistical Analysis of Voluntary Disappearance

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Abstract

Voluntary disappearance, a phenomenon known as *jōhatsu* in Japan, transcends the notion of impulsive flight to represent a sophisticated logistical strategy. The relevance of this topic lies in uncovering a marginal form of social organization founded on the meticulous planning of erasure and invisibility. By adopting a novel interdisciplinary approach that combines logistics management and social sciences, this article investigates the shadow supply chains enabling individuals to carefully orchestrate their withdrawal from society. Such an analysis sheds new light on the dual role of logistics management—not merely as a mechanism for controlling and directing product flows but also as an instrument of dissent and silent resistance through social withdrawal. The study opens promising research avenues that invite a deeper exploration of the material and symbolic infrastructures underpinning voluntary disappearance in Japan. Furthermore, it encourages expanding the concept to encompass other contemporary manifestations of withdrawal, especially in today’s increasingly hyperconnected and highly surveilled societies, where invisibility itself becomes a form of strategic agency.

Keywords: Dissidence, Japan, *jōhatsu*, logistics, social withdrawal, shadow supply chains, surveillance society, voluntary disappearance

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1. Introduction

A country renowned for its security, social order, and the stability of its institutions, Japan is home to a silent but deeply revealing phenomenon of internal tensions: that of the *jōhatsu* (蒸発), literally the “evaporated,” an object of fascination for many European countries (Le, 2025). Every year, tens of thousands of Japanese choose to voluntarily disappear, leaving their homes without warning, abandoning family, jobs, and sometimes their identities to rebuild their lives elsewhere in complete anonymity (Bestor, 2000). This radical gesture, often misunderstood outside Japan, is part of a complex cultural context where shame, particularly that linked to personal or professional failure, plays a decisive role (Lebra, 2004). The importance given to social harmony and conformity to collective norms intensifies the pressure on individuals, sometimes leading them to choose withdrawal as the ultimate form of control over their existence. Voluntary disappearance is facilitated by discreet but effective logistics—specialized companies, tolerant neighborhoods, the informal economy—which allows the “evaporated” to blend into gray areas, often off the institutional radar. Far from being marginal, the phenomenon questions the mechanisms of normalization and forms of silent resistance in a society where visibility is standardized, and deviance stigmatized. Consequently, *jōhatsu* represent a unique analytical prism for understanding the fractures of a Japanese model that prioritizes order, performance, and transparency at the expense of individuality (Nakamori, 2017).

What stands out about the “evaporated” is not disorder but precision. These individuals do not vanish in chaos—they are deliberately, methodically erased. Each disappearance follows a set of calculated steps, executed with near-professional discipline. Evaporation is not an impulsive reaction, it is a structured operation grounded in strategic decision-making: covert relocations, often at night; undeclared work; deliberate avoidance of administrative systems; and, at times, the fabrication of alternative identities (Mauger, 2025). This discreet infrastructure recalls the “invisible forms of circulation” analyzed by Tsing (2005), designed to elude formal infrastructures and oversight. Behind many disappearances are specialized actors offering tailored services: erasure of digital footprints, guaranteed discretion, and even the severing of social and familial ties. This is logistics in reverse—where the objective is not visibility or traceability, but systematic concealment. It mirrors the shadow networks described by Nordstrom (2007), where efficiency depends not on openness, but on invisibility. The logistics of evaporation fundamentally disrupts mainstream conceptions of flow and value: it draws on the same managerial capabilities—planning, coordination, control—but mobilizes them to produce

absence, not presence. As Andreas (2011) argues, opacity is no longer a weakness but a strategic resource in the architecture of illicit globalization.

This article examines the phenomenon of *jōhatsu* through a lens largely absent from academic discourse: the shadow supply chains that enable voluntary disappearances. The objective is not merely to document a singular social behavior, but to analyze the organizational structures that make such disappearances possible. The second section maps the contours of voluntary disappearance in Japan, tracing its cultural roots, estimating its elusive scale, and outlining its diverse manifestations. Disappearance is neither marginal nor incidental; it reflects deeper, systemic social dynamics and enduring pressures. The third section demonstrates that these disappearances are underpinned by a coherent set of operational mechanisms—what can be described as a “shadow infrastructure”—that mirrors, in many ways, the principles guiding the management of visible flows. The fourth section interrogates the implications of this logistics in reverse: what does it mean to organize for invisibility rather than transparency? How do practices of disappearance illuminate current tensions between autonomy and control, between compulsory presence and chosen absence? The fifth section offers a conceptual reframing, drawing on the work of Foucault (1991 [1978]) and Scott (1985) to explore resistance and counter-power. In doing so, it invites a rethinking of logistical facilities not solely as a system for enabling visibility and efficiency, but as a strategic art of withdrawal, concealment, and refusal.

Methodology

The profoundly taboo nature of the *jōhatsu* phenomenon in Japan—particularly its function as a “marker” of a dark side of society—denies researchers access to reliable statistical evidence, with existing estimates of disappearances diverging significantly. Given these constraints, the present study relies exclusively on secondary sources, combining: (1) peer-reviewed academic scholarship; and (2) in-depth journalistic investigations. Searches were conducted using JSTOR and Scopus, supplemented by archival material from *The Guardian*, *Time*, *Newstrail.com*, and *Asahi Shimbun*, as well as specialized works in English and French. The corpus was assembled using the keywords “voluntary disappearance”, “*jōhatsu*”, “informal logistics”, and “shadow supply chains.” Thematic analysis followed a three-pronged framework: (1) sociocultural motivations for voluntary disappearance; (2) logistical and informal organizational structures enabling disappearance; and (3) theoretical and managerial implications. Journalistic accounts were incorporated as illustrative empirical material to enrich conceptual interpretation. This methodological orientation is consistent with established scholarship on the value of secondary data when primary collection is constrained by privacy or cultural sensitivity (Clarke & Cossette, 2016). The approach entails inherent limitations: uncertain data quality, possible selection and measurement biases, absence of control over original collection protocols, and partial sociocultural contextualization in journalistic investigations. As highlighted by Baldwin *et al.* (2022), secondary analysis carries risks related to reliability, validity, data integrity, and misinterpretation. To address these challenges, the study applied explicit inclusion criteria, maintained full transparency regarding methodological constraints, and framed tables as qualitative syntheses aimed at distilling central insights rather than asserting quantitative correlations unattainable under current data conditions.

2. Culture of Shame

Each year, between 80,000 and 100,000 people voluntarily disappear in Japan without leaving a trace, according to estimates from private investigators and family associations. These disappearances largely escape official records, as relatives frequently choose not to report them—silence being a culturally conditioned response to perceived shame. This statistical opacity is not accidental; it reflects a deeply ingrained social vision rooted in norms of discretion, self-effacement, and emotional control. *Jōhatsu* is not an anomaly or deviance—it is a culturally sanctioned form of exit, embedded in a society governed by rigid expectations of conformity and performance (Allison, 2013). Far from an impulsive rejection of social ties, voluntary disappearance operates as a calculated response to the intolerability of visible failure. Family disgrace, job loss, or personal collapse are often framed as irreparable. In such cases, withdrawal becomes a form of symbolic atonement. Table 1 presents a typology of these disappearances, highlighting their relative frequency and, in some instances, their altruistic intent: to disappear is to spare loved ones the burden of failure. This rationale echoes Borovoy’s (2005) findings on how self-erasure in Japan operates as a normalized response to social strain. *Jōhatsu* should not be mistaken for resistance or rupture—it is a seamless extension of Japan’s social order, where the ultimate act of conformity may lie in choosing invisibility over disruption.

The practice of *jōhatsu* exposes the profound difficulty contemporary Japan faces in accommodating individual agency within a society where social harmony (*wa*) is paramount. Voluntary disappearance is not merely a

physical act—it is also a psychological strategy for self-preservation. *Jōhatsu* often intersects with other forms of social withdrawal, most notably *hikikomori*, a condition in which individuals—primarily young men—retreat into prolonged isolation in response to overwhelming social expectations or perceived failure (Mauger, 2025). As Teo (2010) demonstrates, *hikikomori* frequently emerges from unresolved emotional wounds, including peer humiliation, group rejection, or unrelenting academic pressure, all exacerbated by rigid social norms. Iwakabe (2021) further argues that voluntary disappearance is an organized response to shame, whereby individuals choose symbolic erasure over public disgrace. Like *hikikomori*, *jōhatsu* can be read as a form of “social euthanasia:” a deliberate act of self-effacement meant to protect family honor or avoid becoming a burden. These behaviors reveal a deep tension between the appearance of societal cohesion and the silent suffering of individuals stripped of legitimate avenues for emotional expression. They underscore the structural limits of a social model that prioritizes conformity and self-effacement at the expense of recognizing vulnerability. As Tajan (2015) shows, such dynamics are central to understanding Japan’s broader crisis of social withdrawal—a phenomenon not marginal, but systemic and increasingly visible through practices of disappearance and isolation.

Table 1. Typology of Evaporation in Japan

Reasons for disappearance	Common places of disappearance	Relative importance of disappearance type
Debt avoidance (e.g., loan sharks, gambling losses)	Urban peripheries, low-cost housing, shared apartments	<i>High</i> – one of the most frequent motivations for evaporation
Domestic violence or family breakdown	Women’s shelters, distant rural areas, hidden networks	<i>Moderate to high</i> – particularly among women and children
Social shame or failure (e.g., job loss, exam failure)	Capsule hotels, under-the-radar accommodations	<i>Moderate</i> – varies by age and gender
Escaping legal trouble or criminal involvement	Remote countryside, offshore islands, informal communities	<i>Low to moderate</i> – requires significant logistical effort
Desire for a new identity or starting over voluntarily	New urban areas with high anonymity, informal labor	<i>Low</i> – rare but culturally significant
Elderly seeking to disappear (e.g., loneliness, burden perception)	Mountainous regions, uninhabited zones, forests	<i>Low</i> – but emotionally and symbolically important

Source: The author.

The *jōhatsu* phenomenon lays bare the blind spots of the Japanese social contract, particularly the State’s failure to accommodate vulnerability and provide visible alternatives to flight—or even suicide. Japan consistently ranks among the OECD countries with the highest suicide rates, especially among older men and young adults (OECD, 2024b). In this context, disappearance often becomes an act of survival. While historically dominated by male cases, *jōhatsu* now increasingly include women escaping domestic or familial violence, often due to the absence of effective institutional support. These voluntary disappearances expose a chronic lack of accessible psychological and social infrastructure. In a society where silence is valued and seeking help is perceived as weakness, invisible violence takes root—the violence of a system that leads individuals to believe they are no longer worthy of existence in the eyes of others. Recent studies confirm that low social capital and limited community ties significantly increase suicide risk, particularly among the elderly (Nakamura *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, post-COVID data underscores the persistence of systemic failures in mental health and crisis prevention systems (Okada *et al.*, 2024). As Chimeka (2023) notes in the US context, the homeless are not simply unsheltered—they are excluded from a system that is too rigid to respond to fundamental needs. Similarly, *jōhatsu* reflect a latent indictment of a social model that values conformity over care. Yet a crucial question remains: what logistical practices enable successful evaporation in an era of hyperconnectivity and ubiquitous surveillance?

3. Mechanics of Evaporation

Voluntary disappearance must be understood as a highly organized logistical endeavor—one that mobilizes human, technical, and organizational resources to sustain social invisibility, sometimes for decades. Far from being impulsive or improvised, the *jōhatsu* phenomenon is grounded in meticulous planning and the precise coordination of people, goods, and information. Central to this process are the *yonige-ya*—“fly-by-night” operations specializing in clandestine exits—who serve as key actors in shadow supply chains (Hincks, 2017). These companies orchestrate nighttime relocations with exceptional speed and discretion, leaving behind no visible trace. Their logistical expertise includes route selection engineered to bypass surveillance systems, avoid densely monitored zones, and circumvent locations where individuals might be recognized by family or acquaintances. The careful management of time and space reflects a deep understanding of urban and institutional constraints and involves systematically erasing or neutralizing administrative and contractual

footprints. As Cresswell (2010) and Sheller (2014) argue, clandestine mobility depends on intricate networks and operational knowledge specifically designed to evade capture and social visibility. In this light, disappearance emerges as a calculated “politics of invisibility,” where trajectories are deliberately mapped through urban space in ways that circumvent institutional control. What appears to be an act of withdrawal is a controlled logistical process governed by tacit rules and sophisticated expertise—all aimed at minimizing exposure and eliminating the risk of identification.

Yonige-ya companies operate according to a discreet yet rigorously structured business model, closely resembling European logistics service providers that specialize in highly niche sectors, such as automotive or microcomputer industries (Fulconis *et al.*, 2016). Pricing depends on multiple factors: distance, volume and nature of goods, urgency, and the level of risk associated with disappearance—a flight to escape usurious lenders or an abusive spouse demands far more resources and precautions than a voluntary departure motivated by personal rejection of social conventions. Client acquisition rarely involves visible channels; it relies instead on word of mouth, anonymous online forums, or intermediaries among local establishments—bars, guesthouses, and temporary employment agencies—known for their tolerance of individuals seeking to vanish. Hincks (2017) reports that some disappearances are orchestrated within hours, using small teams of fewer than five, unmarked vehicles, and carefully planned routes that avoid surveillance cameras and high-density control zones. The capacity to combine rapid execution, absolute discretion, and logistical precision positions *yonige-ya* companies as true orchestrators of a shadow supply chain, where every phase—from planning to post-departure monitoring—aims to eliminate traces that authorities or relatives could exploit. Stravinsky (2025) details the “standard” operational procedures: confidential consultations, nocturnal relocations with anonymous vehicles, secret accommodations, informal employment arrangements, and systematic erasure of digital footprints, reflecting the increasing sophistication and professionalization of the industry.

The logistics of evaporation extends well beyond the initial disappearance, which resembles a form of first-mile management (Giménez-Palacios *et al.*, 2022). It involves the sustained organization of a covert existence that demands ongoing adjustments and contingency planning—frequently punctuated by failures, such as involuntary reappearances (see Table 2). *Jōhatsu* individuals survive outside formal institutions by mobilizing an informal infrastructure that supplies access to unregistered housing, off-the-books employment, and cash-based financial transactions (Mauger, 2025). This logistics in reverse system who maintain networks of compliant landlords, discreet employers, and intermediaries operating in the shadows of the formal banking sector. Disappearance, far from being chaotic, reflects a socially rationalized process built upon tacit norms and expert local knowledge. The geographic repositioning of the vanished—into rural zones or abandoned industrial neighborhoods—reveals a strategic form of spatial avoidance akin to the tactics described by Goffman (2009) in her study of surveillance in the Philadelphia ghetto. These zones, neglected by state infrastructure, mirror what Adeniyi & Dhakar (2021) describe as the interstitial spaces of globalization: marginal, yet resilient. From a logistical standpoint, these practices demonstrate a form of supply chain resilience—a capacity not to recover visibility after a disruption, but to sustain invisibility through adaptive networks, redundancy, and local embeddedness. Finally, the “engineered absence” relies on severely reduced mobility and digital silence. Such forms of organized discretion align with emerging theories of subaltern urbanism, which frame life on the margins not as passive exclusion but as intentional withdrawal from regimes of hypervisibility and technological surveillance (Graham & Wood, 2003).

Table 2. Logistical Aspects of Disappearance in Japan

Logistical dimensions of disappearance	Key success factors of disappearance	Failure factors of disappearance
Planning escape routes and timing, including nighttime departures and avoiding surveillance zones.	Meticulous advance planning, including scouting locations and minimizing witnesses.	Hasty departures that increase the likelihood of being seen or traced.
Securing financial means and shelter, often through cash savings or help from “night movers” (<i>yonige-ya</i>).	Having financial reserves and connections with professionals specialized in disappearances.	Insufficient funds, reliance on traceable banking methods, or inability to pay for services.
Managing digital and communication silence—disconnecting from mobile phones, email, and social media.	Complete communication blackout and abandoning traceable devices.	Continued use of digital tools that generate location data with known people.
Choosing remote, depopulated areas or anonymous urban environments to avoid recognition.	Selection of locations based on low population density, or transient communities.	Staying in familiar or densely populated areas increases the risk of recognition.
Navigating the bureaucratic system to avoid detection—e.g., not updating residence registrations.	Understanding of legal loopholes and use of aliases or cash-based lifestyles.	Mistakes in paperwork or accidental contact with government or health systems.
Avoiding modern surveillance, including CCTVs, face recognition, and mobile tracking.	Knowledge of surveillance blind spots and counter-surveillance strategies.	Ignorance of how surveillance works or reliance on public transport with tracking.

Source: The author.

It becomes possible to map the shadow supply chain underlying the *jōhatsu* phenomenon by adapting the classic stages of business-oriented product logistics to the goal of concealing individuals. The *procurement stage* encompasses acquiring essential resources: untraceable cash, specialized expertise in administrative avoidance, and the engagement of a professional *yonige-ya* company capable of orchestrating every phase of the disappearance with precision and discretion. The *manufacturing stage* entails executing the disappearance itself: nocturnal relocation completed within hours, systematic elimination of physical traces such as documents and personal belongings, and digital footprints including phones, online accounts, and connected devices, along with neutralization of potential contact points within the previous social network. The *physical distribution stage* leads to placement in an anonymous environment, whether a depopulated rural area or an urban neighborhood where rapid residential turnover prevents lasting identification or traceability. Finally, the *after-sales service stage* ensures sustained invisibility via informal networks providing housing, undeclared employment, protection, and continuous material support. Transposing business logistics concepts onto the *jōhatsu* is not merely metaphorical; it underscores the organizational effectiveness of shadow supply chains capable of producing both opacity and a radical rupture with a Japanese society characterized by hyper-connectivity.

The existence of shadow supply chains constitutes a central paradox of *jōhatsu*, emerging within an environment saturated by social and technological surveillance. Japan is widely recognized as a hyper-modern society, where traceability systems, video surveillance, and algorithmic data analysis are deeply embedded in urban governance and administrative operations (Murakami Wood *et al.*, 2007). Ubiquitous facial recognition cameras, biometric identifiers, and interconnected digital infrastructures enable near-continuous monitoring of individuals across both public and private domains. In such a context, orchestrating a voluntary disappearance requires a high degree of logistical sophistication. *Jōhatsu* must elude not only conventional control mechanisms but also complex digital systems designed to detect anomalies in data flows and behavioral patterns—a dynamic increasingly present in many other countries as well (Paché, 2025). Evaporation, therefore, demands strategic avoidance of surveillance checkpoints, the construction of multiple identities, and the erasure of exploitable digital and physical traces. These practices align with what Lyon (2018) terms “counter-surveillance tactics,” wherein individuals modify their behaviors to evade algorithmic detection. Similarly, Mann & Ferenbok (2019) describe the rise of a “surveillance resistance infrastructure”—a layered system that blends technical expertise, informal solidarity networks, and granular knowledge of local environments. Within this framework, the logistics of evaporation function as a form of reverse social engineering, engineered not to enhance transparency but to cultivate and preserve opacity. This inversion remains underexplored in management scholarship, yet it exposes the inherent limitations of even the most advanced surveillance regimes and challenges prevailing assumptions about total visibility in contemporary societies.

4. Vanishing Strategy

Voluntary disappearance is often mischaracterized as an impulsive act, when in fact it represents a deliberate and meticulously orchestrated vanishing strategy. Far from being a spontaneous flight, it entails rigorous planning

and precise navigation of complex logistical and administrative processes. Central to this strategy is the construction of a new identity—an intentional severing of prior social ties and societal expectations in a culture where failure carries intense stigma. This reinvention is not merely symbolic: it demands integration into informal networks to secure unregistered housing, off-the-books employment, and financial resources that operate outside conventional systems, all of which are essential to sustaining long-term invisibility. Such a process requires considerable expertise, discretion, and psychological resilience, as the evaporated must continuously manage the tension between maintaining anonymity and ensuring social survival (Mauger, 2025). As Oluwatosin & Ifedolapo (2018) demonstrate in their analysis of workplace gender discrimination, withdrawal can function as a deliberate and strategic response to hostile normative structures—opening a space for autonomy where inclusion is structurally denied. In this sense, the vanishing strategy can be interpreted as an act of empowerment: a purposeful reappropriation of one’s life trajectory that resists dominant norms by rewriting existence outside institutional frameworks. This perspective compels us to move beyond reductive portrayals of fugitive populations and recognize the complex social intelligence embedded in voluntary disappearances. In a hyper-modern surveillance society, such disappearances are not only possible but increasingly relevant, with implications that extend well beyond the Japanese context (Wacquant, 2007).

The *jōhatsu* inhabit a paradoxical in-between, marked by physical absence and logistical “presence,” that exemplifies a discreet but potent form of resistance. Their disappearance is not a wholesale withdrawal from society, but rather a tactical reconfiguration of spatial and institutional relationships. By avoiding administrative interfaces, traceable financial systems, and devices linked to identity, the *jōhatsu* circumvent the very infrastructures through which behavioral control is exerted. However, their absence is never total. They remain minimally connected through pseudonyms, public Wi-Fi, temporary accommodations, or anonymous transactions—strategies that allow for survival while sustaining invisibility. This practice embodies what de Certeau (1984 [1980]) defines as *tactics*: everyday acts by which marginalized individuals navigate and subvert dominant systems without directly confronting them. Rather than engaging in frontal resistance, the *jōhatsu* manipulate the cracks in Japan’s highly monitored society to carve out autonomous zones of life. Their logistical ingenuity—ranging from identity management to the spatial avoidance of surveillance—constitutes a form of what de Certeau (1984 [1980]) calls “*making do*,” resisting power not by opposing it, but by rerouting its pathways. Japanese legal ambiguity, which does not criminalize disappearance *per se* (Manabe, 2008), further enables this tactical dissidence. Within the broader “surveillant assemblage” (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000), these individuals operate in the interstices of regulation, embodying what Martin & Mitchelson (2009) describe as a “geography of evasion.” The *jōhatsu* thus transform disappearance into a spatial and logistical art form—an embodied critique of conformity, enacted not through protest, but through precision.

It is crucial to underscore that the agency of the *jōhatsu* remains inherently ambiguous. While the vanishing strategy constitutes an act of emancipation and provides strategic control over one’s life, it simultaneously exposes individuals to new forms of precarity and reliance on informal networks, sometimes bordering on organized crime. Securing undeclared housing, unofficial employment, and the financial resources required for sustained invisibility inevitably generates significant vulnerabilities, diminishes social protection, and subjects the individual to the constraints and risks imposed by those controlling these resources. Similar vulnerabilities have been documented across multiple national contexts, as highlighted in Kalleberg & Vallas (2018) and corroborated by the recent OECD (2024a) report, and Japanese vanishers are no exception. Withdrawal from formal institutions reinforces social isolation, restricting opportunities for upward mobility or future reintegration. Layered onto this structural fragility is the persistent psychological strain of negotiating material survival while balancing autonomy and dependence. In effect, disappearance can supplant one form of institutional oversight with another, relying on opaque informal mechanisms that ensure invisibility at the expense of security and stability. Acknowledging this duality reveals disappearance as a complex navigation of autonomy, precarity, and relational vulnerability, exposing the inherent limitations of interpreting the vanishing strategy solely as an emancipatory practice.

5. Discussion

Shadow supply chains associated with evaporation raise a disquieting question: what if logistical performance could serve not to facilitate visibility, but to enable disappearance? This reversal of perspective compels a fundamental rethinking of logistics management. Traditionally tied to the visibility of flows, operational transparency, and data traceability, logistics here becomes the instrument of a meticulously orchestrated withdrawal. The *jōhatsu* phenomenon exposes a largely overlooked dimension of management: the possibility of organizing not for presence, but for controlled absence. Within Foucault’s (1991 [1978]) critical framework, such logic can be interpreted as a form of “counter-conduct”—a response to contemporary mechanisms of

governmentality that regulate life through the administration of bodies, trajectories, and identities. Complementing this, Rodman's (2018) contribution on cultural resistance highlights how marginalized groups contest dominant power by creating alternative identities and spaces outside institutional frameworks. Disappearance thus becomes an act of resistance against a power structure that seeks to see everything, predict everything, and optimize everything. Far from being a neutral or strictly operational discipline focused on the efficient movement of goods, shadow supply chains emerge as a malleable political technology—mobilized not to integrate, but to evade. Voluntary disappearance is therefore not a breakdown, but a calculated act of erasure and discretion, in which invisibility functions as a strategic goal. In this light, shadow supply chains offer a way to reconfigure the very objectives of organization in a world saturated with surveillance and control.

The conceptual shift highlighted in this article reveals that tools of coordination, planning, and optimization do not solely amplify presence but can also generate opacity, silence, and absence. In this sense, *jōhatsu* embodies a rejection of contemporary hyper-visibility—manifested through algorithmic surveillance systems, performance imperatives, and demands for transparency. As Nikoloski & Paceskoski (2023) argue, contemporary economic globalization is fraught with profound contradictions: while it claims to streamline exchanges and connect individuals, it simultaneously produces fragmentation, instability, and marginalization—vulnerabilities that some exploit to evade dominant norms. The figure of voluntary disappearance thus resonates as a form of *silent dissidence* within our societies of control, where subordinated groups deploy informal organizational practices often invisible to the gaze of power (Scott, 1985). *Jōhatsu* fits within this tradition, not by vocally protesting but by evaporating like steam rising from hot baths (Mauger, 2025). Yet disappearance is logistically orchestrated, relying on networks, skills, territorial intelligence, and a nuanced understanding of systemic weaknesses. It represents political action through erasure—an action devoid of explicit demands but rich in critical significance. This withdrawal fundamentally redefines performance by substituting the pursuit of visibility with a deliberate political strategy that deftly circumvents conventional mechanisms of power and domination.

In this regard, shadow supply chains of escape expose the inherent ambiguities of managerial rationality. They compel us to rethink logistics not merely as a tool of efficiency, but as an ambivalent system capable of producing both order and its deliberate dissolution. This dual capacity fundamentally challenges the ideals of control underpinning contemporary managerial societies: how does an organization respond to those who refuse to be organized? How does a society governed by data, performance metrics, and transparency react to individuals who choose withdrawal—not as failure, but as a conscious strategy? Positioned at the intersection of Foucault (1991 [1978]) and Scott (1985), shadow supply chains emerge as a form of existential resistance—an assertion of autonomy through intentional invisibility. This echoes Scott's (1985) notion of everyday forms of resistance, where marginalized actors subtly undermine dominant power structures through practices often invisible to those in control. Furthermore, following Latour's (2007 [1996]) actor-network theory, shadow supply chains illustrate how technical systems and social actors co-construct spaces of both control and evasion, highlighting the fluid boundaries between agency, technology, and organization. They bridge domains often kept separate: the technical and the intimate, optimization and dissent, structured planning and evasion of institutional order. Thus, voluntary disappearance is not an outlier but a critical marker of deep social contradictions. It reveals that logistics management does not always serve presence, and its capacity to orchestrate absence may represent its most subversive function—challenging the very foundations of social and managerial control.

However, interpreting voluntary disappearance solely through the lens of resistance risks obscuring a deeply ambivalent dimension: in many cases, *jōhatsu* arises less from outright rejection of a social order perceived as oppressive than from an intimate, highly personal compulsion to conform by withdrawing to preserve that very order. It becomes, paradoxically, an ultimate act of compliance, pushed to the point of self-erasure to safeguard collective harmony or to protect relatives from shame, stigma, and the social consequences of public failure. Far from being unambiguously liberating, disappearance may represent the extreme *internalization of social norms*, whose irrevocable imprint—as Nishimura-Poupée (2024) underlines—takes root in the earliest years of schooling, whereby individuals consciously orchestrate their invisibility as a form of self-sanction. From this perspective—verifiable only through systematic study of a representative sample of those who vanish—*jōhatsu* discloses a dual nature: on the one hand, it enacts radical autonomy and the reclamation of one's trajectory through escape from imposed controls; on the other hand, it embodies silent submission to dominant, widely accepted values, even to the extent of disappearing voluntarily in order to avoid becoming a symbol of radical protest, as Japan witnessed in the late 1960s (Eiji *et al.*, 2015). Recognizing this tension prevents romanticized readings and compels a more nuanced interpretation, in which disappearance simultaneously functions as a strategy of emancipation and an act of internalized conformity, thereby exposing the full complexity of a culturally embedded practice.

6. Conclusion

This article offers an original interpretation of the Japanese phenomenon of *jōhatsu* by analyzing it not merely as a social or psychological fact, but as an organized and structured logistical process. While existing literature primarily emphasizes cultural factors, social shame, collective pressure, and the psychological dimensions of voluntary disappearances, the analysis presented here demonstrates that the act of disappearing also entails a complex set of deliberate and operational decisions. The careful selection of the moment of departure, the mobilization of specific networks, the engagement of professional or informal intermediaries, and the strategic management of resources and means required for disappearance together constitute a coherent logistical undertaking. This perspective significantly expands the conventional definition of logistics management—traditionally focused on the visible, efficient movement of goods and information—by incorporating the capacity to engineer invisibility, obfuscation, and avoidance. In this light, *jōhatsu* illuminate the structural tensions between visibility and opacity in contemporary societies, revealing alternative forms of social and individual organization in which voluntary disappearance becomes a radical, yet calculated, method of negotiating one's position within a normative system. Ultimately, voluntary disappearance should not be seen as mere withdrawal, but as a sophisticated logistical act imbued with agency, resistance, and strategic intent.

At the managerial level, shadow supply chains of escape pose a fundamental challenge to dominant paradigms that prioritize transparency, traceability, visibility, and real-time control—core principles of contemporary organizational management. They compel us to acknowledge and examine a set of skills and strategies long undervalued or overlooked in management studies: the mastery of discretion, the capacity to operate at the margins, the ability to navigate informal environments, and the competence to manage the profound uncertainties that invisibility entails. These organizational practices should not be dismissed as mere acts of deviance, clandestinity, or retreat; rather, they reflect pragmatic and deliberate responses to contexts in which visibility may expose actors to heightened risk, surveillance, or subjugation. The phenomenon of *jōhatsu* prompts critical questions: can the management of invisibility be understood as a legitimate and effective managerial resource? Are current frameworks of governance adequately equipped to integrate silence, ambiguity, and dissimulation as strategic levers? These questions open a necessary and innovative field of inquiry—one that urges scholars to rethink organizational dynamics beyond the sole value of transparency. By foregrounding resistance, adaptation, and evasion, we may better understand how organizations and individuals act in increasingly complex and saturated institutional environments where disappearance can itself be a powerful form of agency.

The reflections presented in this article, exploratory in nature, open numerous research avenues that warrant deeper investigation across logistics management and the social sciences. Empirically, future studies should aim to better understand the material, social, and symbolic infrastructures that enable voluntary disappearance: clandestine or informal transport networks, hidden labor markets, and specialized actors often operating at the margins of legality, institutional norms, and social conventions. Precisely mapping shadow supply chains would offer critical insights into how marginality is structured, sustained, and reproduced within contemporary urban space. Theoretically, the concept of logistics of evaporation could be extended to encompass other forms of strategic withdrawal, including voluntary digital disconnection, survivalist movements, and alternative lifestyles rooted in spatial or informational invisibility. There is no doubt that interdisciplinary perspectives—combining logistics, sociology, urban studies, and political theory—could provide a powerful analytical framework for interpreting organizational forms grounded in fragmentation, autonomy, and tactical flight. Ultimately, the study of *jōhatsu* does not seek to romanticize or trivialize voluntary disappearance, but to recognize the existence of a hidden organizational architecture whose operational effectiveness is both intentional and remarkable. Such an approach is essential for grasping the paradoxes, frictions, and blind spots of hypermodern societies—whether in Japan or elsewhere.

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