After Heroism: Must Real Soldiers Die?
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In 1876 the Japanese government installed an Army Medical Inspector General as the central authority for the physical examination of conscripts, then all men at the age of twenty. This move by the Japanese state and, by extension, the imperial armed forces established the notion that membership in the body politic hinged upon true manhood, then manifested only in men who could and were willing to fight.

Today’s military is no longer tied in with the body politic in the manner of the imperialist state. Members of the Japanese armed forces labor in the name of a state that is prohibited from waging war. Manhood and masculinity are no longer intertwined with military values as the military trains for battle so that it would not use those skills, prepares for war so that it would not happen, and ultimately proves its ability if it remains unnecessary.

Despite this state of affairs that has characterized more than sixty years of Japan’s recent history, the notion remains powerful in international (as well as some domestic) debates about Japan’s potential military roles, that full membership in the community of (real) men and full membership in the international community of normal states remains contingent upon a military with not only violent capabilities but also the willingness to use them for war-making.

In this paper, I examine the immediate repercussions of the concern with the normalcy of the Japanese state and its military for individual soldiers, for their sense of what constitutes a “normal soldier” and a “real man.” Ultimately this article is about potency: the power to define militarized masculinity.