

9 The spirit to take up a gun: militarising gender in the Imperial Army

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An anonymous voice in the March 1935 issue of *Rikugun gahō* (*Army Pictorial*) found that it was time for the ‘sons of the empire’ (*kōkoku danji*) who were engaged at the front to be joined by women ‘ready and willing to defend the home front in order to overcome the nation’s crisis’.¹ In these times of modern war, the author wrote, women’s weak spirits on the home front would be more dangerous to the state than to the enemy (Anon 1935: 86). This appeal points to the main focus of this chapter. I argue that Japan’s Imperial government sought to wage war by entrenching a gendered dichotomy which positioned men exclusively as warriors on the battlefield and women as mere supporters and providers of comfort on the home front. As the war dragged on, however, the same government officials found that they needed to use Japanese women where allegedly they did not belong. In this chapter I will describe how the government negotiated these ideological contradictions. I will also argue that this gender dichotomy is a historically constructed concept that has served ideological purposes beyond Japan’s war efforts and continues to underpin configurations of gender and the nation-state to this day.

I will begin by describing the discursive and practical efforts, throughout the modern era, to establish the military’s role as the primary institution for the shaping of a modern understanding of manhood and masculinity. Subsequently, I will highlight configurations of hypermilitarised womanhood as partly a product of the attempts of the Army Ministry and its agencies to manipulate gender constructions with respect to femininity and women. Such manipulation occurred in an effort to increasingly parallel women’s roles on the home front with those of soldiers on the battlefield, to establish at least the possibility if not the reality of women as combatants at the front line, and at the same time to reinforce their ‘otherness’ as women.

Wayne Farris (2006: 254) notes that it has been established that ‘several females donned armor and fought in battles for the Mōri and Shimazu clans, and even for Hideyoshi in premodern Japan’. Historiographies of modern wars, however, have portrayed women primarily as victims of a patriarchal and militaristic system. Historians of Japan since the 1980s have challenged this view from several perspectives and have argued that Japanese women had

not necessarily been the victims of the war, nor had they been without agency. Kanō Mikiyo (1995), a pioneering historian of women in wartime, suggests that women were highly militarised and aggressively active in the war effort on the 'home front'. The notion of the 'home front' had apparently been conceived during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) but had only achieved its full meaning in Japan's conflict with China during the Asia-Pacific War. The approach taken by Kanō and other historians is important to the study of gender, nationalism and empire building, as it provides a more complete picture of Japan's war effort and of the ties between militarism and the efforts of women to achieve full citizenship. However, it leaves intact the gendered order of men as combatants at the front and women as supporters at home.

In this chapter I build on these earlier accounts of women in wartime by problematising wartime gender ideology from a different angle. I argue that the leaders of the Imperial Army (officially founded in 1872, with mandatory conscription for twenty-year-old males implemented in 1873 and dissolved at the end of the Second World War in 1945) knew that gender stereotypes could be used to stabilise troop cohesion. This was similar to military organisations in other countries (Addis *et al.* 1994; Addis *et al.* 2000; Addis *et al.* 1998; and Turpin 1998). I will argue that, with the help of an emerging mass culture under increasingly tight state control, the military took full advantage of that potential. In order to shed light on the continuing manipulation of gender for ideological purposes in the military interest, I will conclude this chapter with a brief postscript on how the Self-Defence Forces (the successor to the Imperial Army) attempted to cleanse the memory of instances of gender transgression during wartime.

Manhood and masculinity in the Imperial Japanese Army

Masculinity is a cultural construct that is always in flux. Its history is marked by continuities, transformations, ruptures and crises (Allen 2002: 191–207; Roberson and Suzuki 2002: 1–19). In Japanese history, the last decades of the nineteenth century, in particular, marked a period when masculinity was challenged in a number of ways and demanded constant work. This intense reworking and re-examining of masculinity coincided with, and was in many ways the result of, the establishment of a modern mass military, the institutionalisation of a modern health regime, and the introduction of compulsory school education, as well as various attempts at a comprehensive quantification and classification of the populace, initially by state agencies and later by independent social science research bodies (Frühstück 2003). Modern military manhood was trained simultaneously through the military conscription and compulsory education systems, both of which were introduced in the 1870s. The nation and empire building of *fin de siècle* Japan provided a powerful base for constructing a manly ideal that was imagined and represented in its most perfected form in military academies and on the battlefields of Japan's many wars between the 1870s and 1945. Military academies produced a

respectable number of political leaders and other prominent members of Japan's elite. According to Meiji government records, the first military academy was founded in August 1868 in Kyoto with the purpose of instructing 'sons of court nobles and common people alike ... in the army's military science, military drills and parading, construction and bookkeeping' (Matsumoto 1974: 174). During the following decades, military academies also offered a solid general education for men who otherwise would not have been able to afford it.

The physiological male body became a central organising principle of the nation-state, which maintained cohesiveness along class and regional lines, but not across gender. As part of its efforts to produce stronger soldiers at the explicit exclusion of women, the modern mass military became the first organisation under the control of the national government to deliberately and forcefully adopt several elements of a Western diet in order to improve the physique of its members (Cwiertka 2002: 1–30). The Imperial armed forces drilled hundreds of thousands of young men in the modern rules of public and personal hygiene. Military-style exercise became the basis for gymnastics, which were later introduced in schools as a tool to increase students' fitness (Frühstück 2003: 51–52). In short, the military pioneered and spread into the provinces a broad array of modern practices, technologies and cultural achievements, aggressively cultivating images of ideal masculinity and normative manhood in the process.

As we know from gender analyses of armed forces all over the world, militarisation produces a privileging of a certain mode of masculinity over femininity as well as over other modes of masculinity which in turn become undesirable in the process (including criminals, persons with disabilities, or others with non-normative physical characteristics). In the case of Japan, this privilege was tied to multiple manipulations of masculinity and femininity and defined through masculine and feminine, militarised and civilian bodies within and around the Imperial Army. Beyond the privileging of masculinity, however, modern military establishments also put enormous effort into creating the illusion that military manhood is clear-cut, constant, and consistent (Enloe 2000; Enloe 2004: 248–262). In many ways, the contours of this modern Japanese masculinity emerged from statistical data created and accumulated on the basis of the physical examinations conducted at the time of conscription. By documenting soldiers' willingness and ability to join the military, recruitment officers and health examiners effectively shaped the superior reputation of male populations in entire prefectures. They also classified whole communities as populated by less-than-desirable men or men who resented the military, sometimes noting that they were simple and naïve, stubborn and bigoted, lazy and effeminate (Frühstück 2003: 27–28).

Notions of masculinity constructed the ideal male body as resembling the nation in terms of its mental/political strength and its sexual/military potency. Conceptions of ideal masculinity were also reflected in comparisons with the opposites to the desired model of masculinity – the mentally deranged,

physically weak or ambiguously gendered man. These countertypes occasionally were detected and classified at the military physical examinations for conscripts. Teresa A. Algoto notes that at one examination site, a Gunma youth, for example, asked for a special examination because he was disabled. When asked the nature of his disability, he explained that he possessed both female and male reproductive organs. The physical examiners found that the potential recruit – who had appeared unambiguously a man when clothed – indeed looked ‘just like a woman’ when naked. As the youth was on the verge of tears at the humiliation of ‘being exposed in public with such a strange body’, the examiners expressed sympathy and allowed him to wrap his breasts and conceal his genitalia when he appeared at the examination room the following day. After only a perfunctory examination, the youth was immediately disqualified from conscription (Algoto 2006: 565; Miyatake [1922] 1986: 371–372). Whereas this might have been a rare case, the Imperial Army and Navy health reports documented dozens of illnesses suffered by conscripts and soldiers, while newspapers frequently reported the tragic suicides of young men who had failed the physical exam. As protectors of national security and representatives of strong and healthy manhood, soldiers with diseases were a particular concern for the state. The military administration had to pay the cost of treatment in addition to the salaries of sick soldiers; however, these soldiers were also problematic because they reflected a national body that was less than healthy.

Along with other modernisers, Mori Arinori (1847–1889), and Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909) expressed what they felt to be painfully lacking in the Japanese people – a thoroughly disciplined mind and physique. Following the implementation of the School Ordinance (*Gakkōrei*) in 1887, Mori, one of the pioneers of the Japanese education system, introduced the core goals of the education system as he envisioned it: the creation and cultivation of the spirit to defend the nation. This idea quickly became established and spread to the regions. By the time of the Sino-Japanese War in 1894–1895, the gender ideology of school textbooks, for example, shifted towards a new tolerance for and encouragement of dangerous play for boys in the hope that such games would further a sense of intimacy with and admiration for soldiers and soldiering (Yamasaki 2001: 38). Japan’s new militarised masculinity was also created, nurtured and reflected in schools, children’s textbooks and magazines (see Karlin in this volume). With the increasing emphasis on toughness and the embracing of militarist values in schools following the implementation of the School Ordinance, ‘playing soldiers’ (*heitai gokko*) was promoted in schools as well as in children’s books and magazines (*ibid.*: 41). Eventually, school textbooks began to claim that Japan’s boys were the strongest in the world and that singing military songs turned a boy into a proper Japanese man. At the height of the Sino-Japanese War in November 1894, blood-stained uniforms and real soldiers’ weapons were shown to children at school. Then the children were split up into two groups in order to enact the battles of the war and thus to ‘play soldiers’ (*ibid.*: 48). During the Asia-Pacific War,

schools collaborated in staged recreations of recent battles (Lone 2007: 75–77) and elementary school boys engaged in (simulated) rifle practice under the guidance of military personnel (Tsuganezawa 2006).

Soldiers of the Imperial Army were meant to be critical of modernisation, an attitude that was directed against what was anxiously dubbed the ‘femini- sation’ of society as represented by a range of new phenomena, including the figure of the ‘new woman’, the women’s movement, and the entry of women into traditionally male professions, as well as the modern technology which began to permeate and make the everyday lives of men and women more convenient. The new Japanese soldiers’ strongest emotional attachments were supposed to be to the Emperor and the nation, not to the family or to women, a sentiment that did not come easily to them. Hence, this notion of military masculinity began to overwhelm the mass culture for children in ways that aimed to reconcile a number of contradictions. In mass cultural venues of wartime propaganda, such as children’s books and youth magazines of the 1930s and early 1940s, soldiers were represented as fierce and proud combatants and as thoughtful young men; they were portrayed as kind protectors of (Japanese as well as colonised) women and children and as vulnerable and dependent on women’s care when injured (Yoshida 2002). Such contradictory representations indicated the wide variety of facets of masculinity that were at work in the creation of modern Japanese militarism and imperialism. In the case of representations of the Imperial Army, I find it more fruitful to speak of different ‘facets of militarised masculinity’ rather than a ‘hierarchy of masculinity’, an idea Raewyn Connell has most forcefully argued. Connell (1995: 37) suggests that it is not enough to recognise the ‘diversity of masculinity’ but that it is also necessary to acknowledge the relations between the different kinds of masculinity, the relations of alliance, dominance and subordination. These relationships, he notes, are constructed through practices which exclude and include, and which intimidate and exploit. I believe that it is important to note here that a ‘hierarchy of masculinity’ is not only based on a ‘diversity of masculinities’ but that this configuration is fluid, constantly in motion and vulnerable to situational shifts. The gender politics in and around the Imperial Army, then, suggest the establishment of the front combatant as the modern ideal of masculinity. My very brief analysis of this model above, however, also exposes the vulnerability of the soldier as an icon of modernity who has to be constantly nurtured and carefully maintained. The fact that women were increasingly ascribed the role of nurturing and maintaining the soldier does not solve the inherent contradictions of modern military masculinity, but rather contributes to the creation of yet another series of sites where this masculinity was continuously moulded. Such sites include the railway stations where soldiers were sent off, cheered on by women and children; the field hospital, where soldiers were allowed to be vulnerable, weak and immature; and back home at the carefully choreographed burial ceremonies which were designed to honour the dead and, at the same time, to contain the mourning to prevent the negative impact

on the willingness of men and women to continue supporting the imperialist project and the war.

Women to the front

Wartime mass publications praising Japanese soldiers' spirit were read by girls and young women as well, and enticed some of them to volunteer as army nurses or to become members of one of the many women's organisations whose main purpose was to support and comfort soldiers at the front in a variety of ways. Especially after the Sino-Japanese conflict turned into a full-blown war on 7 July 1937, so-called 'home front duties' and 'the defence of the home front' were declared women's tasks by the Army Ministry and other state agencies (Kanō 1995: 65; Garon 1997: 115–146; H. Cook 2005: 326–356; T. Cook 2005: 259–294). In April 1938, the National Mobilization Law (*Kokka sōdōinhō*) was implemented. The law envisioned war as predicated upon the general mobilisation of the entire populace. The notion of female virtues being manifested in 'good wives and wise mothers' was transformed, and by the mid-1930s every woman was a national subject (*hitori no kokumin*) who was supposed to join the war effort 'for the nation' (*okuni no tame*) by fulfilling home duties while men fought outside the country at the front line. Thus, the older gender division that had positioned men outside and women inside the house was expanded to the growing empire (Kanō 1995: 67). The 'good wife, wise mother' ideal had been established in the late nineteenth century, and the patriotic dimensions of womanhood were emphasised with the creation of the *Aikoku fujinkai* (Patriotic Women's Association) in 1901 (see Koyama in this volume). The foundation of the *Kokubō fujinkai* (Women's National Defence Association) in 1932, subsequent to the call for total mobilisation after the Manchurian Incident in 1931, marked the solidification of the association of women and national defence. The purpose of the association was to promote the efforts of 'women on the home front' (*jūgo no josei*), and its role was seen as disseminating the knowledge of defence and the training of women for times of crisis. Common activities included taking care of bereaved families, volunteer medical treatment of injured soldiers and bereaved families, 'comfort visits' to soldiers at train stations who were ready to be sent off to the front, the sending of hundreds of thousands of 'comfort parcels', and the writing of 'comfort letters' to soldiers at the front (Anon 1935: 88). Other goals included the nurturing of Japanese women's virtues, combating 'delinquent thought' (*furyō shisō*) and pacifism (*hansen shisō*), and raising children to be of use to the empire. Members of the association were also expected to visit the homes of soldiers who had been despatched to the front, to help out in matters of the everyday lives of the wives of such soldiers, to become their counsellors and confidants, and to ensure that the wives who stayed at home remained virtuous (Kanō 1995: 72).

Within less than ten years, ten million women had joined the association, and membership had effectively become compulsory. In 1942 all of the

patriotic women's associations were amalgamated into the *Dai-Nippon fujin-kai* (Greater Japan Women's Association). Many women were prepared to cross the ideological border between the front and the home front. In fact, when the Occupation forces conducted a survey in late 1945 to determine the level of the Japanese population's willingness to fight, they found that the fighting spirit was strongest among women, particularly young women, and schoolchildren (Partner 2007: 127–158). One such young woman was Konno Kiyoko. She accompanied adult members of the Women's National Defence Association who were eager to contribute to the war effort by working side by side with male soldiers. Growing up in the port district of Osaka, she was used to seeing off soldiers on an almost daily basis. She even boarded the ships to help the members of the Women's National Defence Association to serve tea and chat with departing troops. Pleased with her, soldiers asked her for her name and address so that they could write to her from the front. As soon as she gave her name and address to one of them, she remembers, requests came from others as well, and she 'felt like a famous actress giving autographs' (Kanō 1995: 63).

Sakata Kiyō (1917–2002) went a step further and in effect transgressed the neat gender division between male combatants at the front and women on the home front. She was a member of the Nagoya Girls' Youth Group (*Nagoya joshi seinendan*) when the *Nagoya shinbun* newspaper published its first call for volunteer women to be sent to the front. Many of the 45,000 members of the Nagoya Girls Youth Group answered the call, and those who went heard later from the soldiers at the front how pleased they were with the fact that 'the patriotism of girls back home was as passionate as their own' (Sakata [1942] 2002: 11). The volunteers underwent a physical examination, and the 200 or so women who passed then had to go through an extensive personality test. The twelve women who made it through the tests were split into two groups, and each group of six was then sent to the front in Manchuria. When Sakata was asked to go on the tour, for the first time in her life she was grateful to be a woman, as she had always felt sorry that she was not a man (*ibid.*: 17). She related her experiences at the front in 1942 in a book entitled *Onna no mita senjō* (*The Battlefield as Seen by Women*). She had sung with the soldiers, who seemed to forget for a while that they were at the front (*ibid.*: 6–7).

The war propaganda of the early 1940s demanded an even more forceful engagement by women at the front. Military nurses came to embody that engagement in its most complex form when 'men [were supposed to become] soldiers and women military nurses' (*otoko wa heitai, onna wa jūgun kangofu*) (Kameyama [1984] 1997: 81, 144; Kanō 1995: 65). One woman remembers that as a high school girl she had been hugely impressed by the Western style of the Red Cross building that had just been constructed in Kōchi in 1929. She imagined that she too would help to nurse the injured and ill soldiers as 'an angel in white' (Kameyama [1984] 1997: 165). When this girl asked her father for permission to become a nurse, he had agreed, hoping that it would

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be useful if one of his children did something for the country. Another young woman was deeply disappointed to learn that she had been diagnosed with a lung weakness and thus would never be sent to the front, but would only be able to work at an army hospital in the homeland. After repeated requests for permission to join her nurse friends at the front, she finally received the draft order on 21 January 1944. She and her entire family were so proud and excited that they ran out on the street in the middle of the night to tell their neighbours. Many people saw her off, as she was the first woman in her village to be drafted to the front (Anzai 1953: 35–37).

Becoming a nurse was not only an increasingly idealised way for women to contribute to the war effort but also one of the two most common avenues for women to pursue an independent career. Attending a teachers' college was the other. Often a woman's physical strength decided for or against the nursing profession, but throughout the Asia-Pacific War the motivations for becoming a nurse shifted. Older cohorts who had made the decision to become a nurse before the war primarily wanted to pursue a respectable profession and achieve independence from their families, and possibly from the need to marry. Some had romantic ideas about the profession. To others it had been recommended by their parents. The wartime generation, however, was motivated primarily by the desire to contribute to the war effort, and they believed that as army nurses they could do so side by side with men. Their dominant sentiment seems to have been that if they could be killed at any moment, then at least they wanted to do *something*, even though they were women. That wartime generation in particular did not so much choose to become nurses as to choose to 'contribute to the nation' (Kameyama [1984] 1997: 165). Gradually, in films and newspapers, nurses were depicted as those who – *despite* being a woman – served at the front, if not quite like men, then at least side by side with them. In advertising, art, songs and poems, nurses were increasingly idealised as 'precious goddesses' in white caps and uniforms who were, as always, kind and helpful to soldiers who had injured themselves in the name of the nation (*ibid.*: 163).

War, the massive propaganda that accompanied it, and the efforts of the Red Cross to create an image of army nurses as pure-hearted girls, contributed to the shifting image of a profession which had been viewed ambiguously due to the inevitable contact with men who were considered to be a likely source of corruption of young women's morals (Kameyama [1984] 1997: 161–162). According to Stewart Lone (2007: 65–93), as late as 1904 stories still abounded of a mercenary attitude in some local hospitals. Nurses warned incoming patients that the quality of care they received would depend on the size of the tips they offered. The wars of the turn of the century helped to give a new romanticism and respect to the job of nursing.

The Women's National Defence Association succeeded as had no other women's federation in reaching down to the village level and the lower classes, as its efforts were directed not only at soldiers' wives but specifically at unmarried women. Its appeal was partly related to the growing aspirations of



Figure 1 Red Cross nurses frequently were portrayed as icons of purity, beauty and the nation's fighting spirit. This advertisement for a cold cream is from one of the leading women's magazines.

Fujin kōron 1937, 22(7), back cover

ordinary women to undertake public roles as the nation's mothers and housewives (Garon 1997: 141; Kanō 1995: 45). The Women's National Defence Association had become one of the biggest women's organisations, partly due to the strategy of integrating women whose morals were considered questionable, such as prostitutes and waitresses. Some of them might have been coerced into membership by brothel owners, but it is plausible that they too were pleased to have the opportunity to become ordinary Japanese women who contributed to the security of the home front (ibid.: 75).

After all, during most of Japan's modern era, state agencies ranging from the Army Ministry to the Home Department had considered prostitutes essential to keep male sexual desire under control. Even social reformers who a few decades earlier had thundered against the morally corrupting alliance between the state and prostitution had changed their minds, and by the beginning of the 1940s they argued that it would be better to sacrifice a small number of women in order to save the majority from male desire (Frühstück 2003: 37–40). According to some accounts the first military brothels were established during the Russo-Japanese War. From the 1920s onwards, when Japan had control over Saipan as a result of the First World War, certain brothels were designated for military use only. Symbolically aligned with the soldiers they cared for, nurses were the first to condone soldiers' visits to such brothels. Anzai Teiko, for instance, in a memoir of her time as a field hospital nurse, found it ironic

that at the front some soldiers suffered and eventually died from syphilis, here where soldiers were severely injured and killed on the battlefield

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every day. ... The reason was that the military administration had installed field brothels where comfort women were available. So it was hard to think poorly of them. The comfort women were treated at the military hospital just like the soldiers. I could not blame soldiers for visiting the brothels in their free time.

(1953: 158–159).

As the war became more widespread, the rape and assault of local women carried out by Japanese soldiers became an increasingly serious problem for the military and the Japanese colonial regime. The growing number of soldiers with venereal diseases harmed the reputation of their regiment and the careers of commanders. As the war continued and many soldiers remained at the front for years without returning home even for short periods, the military administration became convinced that only the establishment of ‘comfort stations’ would curb the spread of venereal diseases and help to keep up the soldiers’ morale (Kameyama [1984] 1997: 234). Recruited with the ‘goal of comforting the Imperial Army’ and assembled under names such as Women’s Volunteer Corps (*Joshi teishintai*) and Patriotic Emperor-Approved Corps (*Aikoku sōshitai*), these women came from poor backgrounds or believed that they had volunteered for regular work. Most of these women were not yet twenty years old and were sexually inexperienced. From at least 1943 onwards the Imperial Army began to drive trucks into primarily Korean villages, where they rounded up between 80,000 and 200,000 young women against their will, and forced them into sexual slavery at the so-called ‘comfort stations’ (ibid.: 236; Kanō 1995: 75).

During the same time that women under Japanese rule in the colonies were forced into ‘comfort stations’, the militarisation of Japanese women also proceeded. The Volunteer Military Service Law (*Giyū heieki-hō*), which was passed in June 1945, declared that women were Imperial subjects together with the men in Japan’s colonies and could be drafted to serve at the front. Women who were ill or pregnant were exempt, as were women whose presence at home was essential to the survival of the household. In the event of their death, women were promised burial at the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo just like the soldiers of the Emperor’s army (Sasaki 2001: 121–129). The law conscripted all women between the ages of seventeen to forty into a National Volunteer Combat Corps (*Kokumin giyū sentōkai*). The Greater Japan Women’s Association was dissolved and its members reorganised into the combat corps, which was to assist and take orders from the military in the event of an Allied invasion of Japan. Female troops were not systematically inducted into the Imperial Japanese Army or deployed before the war ended (Earhart 2008: 179) but personal memoirs and oral history accounts convincingly show that some women did serve with a weapon other than a bamboo spear (Sasaki 2001: 121–147).

The legislation for a military draft for women (*joshi chōyō*) is commonly viewed as one of the last, desperate, if essentially inconsequential, acts of a

nation on the verge of defeat. Plans and preparations for the integration of women into the Imperial Army, however, had been put forward at least since the establishment of Manchukuo in 1932. In an article in the March 1935 issue of *Rikugun gahō* the infantry major and press representative of the Army Ministry, Matsui Shinji, dismissed the notion that defence and women naturally contradicted each other. Rather, he pointed out, the dominance of this supposed contradiction must be ascribed to two factors. First, Japan had not been attacked by foreign enemies since the Meiji Restoration. Second, under the influence of ‘foreign capitalist culture and liberalism’, the earlier ‘seriousness’ (*shinkensa*) had disappeared from people’s lives, and individualism and pacifism thrived instead. Promoting total mobilisation and the role of women as protectors of the home front, Matsui declared that it was no longer desirable to have women so far detached from the front and the war more generally. He also cited several Japanese and foreign historical examples of women who actually fought on the front line, ‘despite the Japanese people’s humble and gracious mentality’: the wives of the sixteenth-century warlords Hosokawa Tadaoki (1564–1646), Yamauchi Kazutoyo (c. 1545–1605) and Kimura Shigenari (1593–1615), as well as the women of Carthage and France’s Joan of Arc (1412–1431), among others (Matsui 1935: 33). Ascribing the German defeat in the First World War to the broken spirit of German women, he declared that Japan’s women must not be uninterested in issues of defence. Instead, they should recognise their duty to engage in national defence in their ‘women-specific ways’ (ibid.: 34).

Rikugun gahō was probably chiefly read by the officer and sergeant class and their wives, but other more widely read magazines also addressed the possibility of women engaging as combatants at the front. On 29 January 1941 *Asahi gurafu* (*Asahi Graphic*), a pioneering photojournalism magazine, proudly announced that the women featured on the cover had ‘the spirit to take up a gun one by one’ (*Hitori hitori ga jū toru kokoro*). The image depicted the all-female students of the Tokyo Household Management Academy (*Tōkyō kasei gakuin*) engaging in military drills, in order to emphasise the necessity and the willingness of women to contribute to the war effort.

At the Academy, the accompanying article in the magazine explained, ‘military training’ (*gunji kunren*) had been a new subject since the autumn of 1940, and was taught for two hours per week. The young women in the image, all of whom are about twenty years old and graduates of girls’ high schools, engaged passionately in the exercises. According to the article, drill sergeant Ogawa was equally committed to studying the specifics of women engaging in military drills. He reported, for example, that women’s marching skills were quite pitiful, and expressed his determination not to rest until he had trained them in proper marching techniques, the rules of group life, and the virtues of military discipline more generally (*Asahi gurafu* 1941: 19).

Captions for the numerous photographs of women participating in military drills further elaborate that the military caps, uniforms and rifles ‘look quite



Figure 2 The cover of the 29 January 1941 issue of *Asahi guraifu*.

chic on these women'. One anonymous author concluded that Japanese girls could hold their own compared to those in the USA, Germany and Italy. Another proudly announced that women had their very own style when shooting a rifle – perhaps they were slower than men when doing so, but there was not a single woman who could not properly handle a rifle. Another reporter was convinced that 'the beauty of these realistic exercises could not be denied' (*Asahi guraifu* 1941: 19).

The application of the conscription system to women was debated again when Japan entered total war, a moment that was marked by the announcement of a plan for total mobilisation (*Kokumin seishin sōdōin keikaku jisshi yōsō*) on 24 August 1937, but it was dismissed on the basis of the need to maintain the family system (Kameyama [1984] 1997: 127). In 1940 most wartime ordinances were revised and expanded. Among others, the duty to report for work in the industries that had been identified as essential to the war was expanded to include women as well as men. Men had to be between sixteen and forty years old, women between sixteen and twenty-five years old.

From the age of twenty-five they were supposed to prioritise marriage and procreation (ibid.: 125–133).

It is unlikely that any of the students from the Tokyo Household Management Academy featured in *Asahi gurafu* ever participated in armed combat, but female students in Okinawa did. Similarly to the Tokyo Household Management Academy, scholastic education at the Okinawa Prefectural Girls Higher School was increasingly replaced with military exercises following the implementation of the Guidelines for the Mobilisation of Students for the War Effort (*Gakuto senji dōin taisei kakuritsu yōkō*) in 1943. With the front line drawing closer, Okinawa's strategic value rapidly increased. The older students began to engage in rifle exercises, receive nursing training at the local army hospital, and learn how to dig defence holes (Miyagi [1995] 2002: 17–19). Following the first air attacks on Okinawa in early 1945, several girls' schools were merged into one that, after 23 March 1945, was referred to as Himeyuri or Maiden Lily Student Nurse Corps. In the autumn of 1944 school names were changed to military unit names and no further regular classes were taught. The student soldiers received soldiers' underwear, shirts, trousers and shoes, which they wore until the end of the war (ibid.: 44). These young women were organised into special units of eighty students from the second and third year whose task was to provide food for headquarters. Every day they spent hours outside in the fields tending to vegetables grown for the soldiers. They were not used to arduous agricultural work and their teachers were unsure about how to guide them (ibid.: 54).

The Maiden Lily Student Nurse Corps accompanied Japanese soldiers into battle and were eventually sent to the front by the Imperial Army to confront Allied attacks in a doomed defence that was supposed to slow the Allied advance against the main Japanese islands (Angst 2003: 142). At the time, the media did not shy away from proudly reporting that girls were fighting at the front and praising the fighting spirit of Okinawan girls in particular (Earhart 2008: 203). Miyagi Kikuko (b. 1928) was one of the very few survivors of the Maiden Lily Student Nurse Corps which had been mobilised for battle in which one in four Okinawans died. In her memoir, *Himeyuri no shōjo: 16-sai no senjō* (*The Himeyuri Girls: The Battlefield at Age 16*), she describes her participation in 52-km marches that had been designed to develop their physical and mental strength and turn the girls into 'people who would be useful to the state' (Miyagi [1995] 2002: 16–17). All girls had to ask their parents for permission to be mobilised for the battlefield (ibid.: 21). Fully expecting that her father would agree, especially considering that he was a boys' school teacher who taught his students the ethics of working 'for the nation' himself, Miyagi was shocked when her father yelled, 'We did not raise you so that you can die at the age of sixteen!' Afraid that her family would be classified as traitors, Miyagi decided to return to school in Naha despite her parents' protests (ibid.: 22–23). The girls in Miyagi's unit had been trained to carry out simple tasks in order to help injured soldiers but they had never imagined that they would have to work alongside military doctors. In the front hospital,

there were only male military doctors and male nurses (*eisei no heishi*), but no female nurses. They gave injections (a task which was often difficult because the soldiers were so thin that it was almost impossible to find a vein), moved dead bodies, and administered milk laced with potassium cyanide to soldiers with severe wounds to assist in their suicide (*jiketsu*) (ibid.: 62, 85).

On 1 April 1945 Allied troops landed on Okinawa and the battle that ensued was fierce; ultimately 64,000 Japanese and 26,000 Allied soldiers lost their lives (Miyagi [1995] 2002: 50–51). The longer the war went on the more Okinawa became the ballast that was thrown out to save the homeland. On 25 March 1945 the army hospital moved to the south while Miyagi and her unit were supposed to remain at the front line to keep back the US forces (ibid.: 78–80). Only when Miyagi and other girls from her unit were found hiding in a hole by US soldiers did they realise that the war was over. Asked to work at the US hospital, they continued the same tough work there, but Miyagi remembers that they had food and medicine and the conditions were much better than in the Imperial Army hospital. Several months later, Miyagi was reunited with her family. Her memoir, written many years later, reveals her personal experience of the almost complete breakdown of the ideological distinction between men as combatants at the front and women as supporters on the home front. Similarly to the French nurse memoirists who erased their own experiences from the public memory of war (Darrow 1996: 80–106), Miyagi confirms that the experience of war was essentially one of masculinity when she highlights the end of the war as the moment when she ‘was finally able to shed the military clothes and be a girl again’ (Miyagi [1995] 2002: 195–197).

Postscript: engendering post-war military memory

My examination of wartime gender ideology reveals that in fact men and women frequently blurred, transgressed and redefined prefabricated gender boundaries despite the efforts of the military, the mass media, and a number of militarised organisations to strictly demarcate men’s spheres from women’s and, at the same time, to homogenise men as combatants at the front and women as supporters at the home front. Some men were never drafted or despatched to the front. Men who served at the front in uniform did not necessarily engage in the war as combatants. Most men who died at the front did not die in combat but due to malnourishment and disease. By the same token, not all women stayed at home writing comfort letters, preparing comfort packages and cheering on the men who left for the front. Among them, some very young women were sold by their fathers who expected them to work in factories or in affluent urban households as maids, but instead they ended up in military brothels (Yamazaki [1972] 1999). Others sought professional independence and/or gender equity as nurses in their efforts to contribute to the war. Yet other women joined male soldiers at the front line and

participated in the war effort in ways very similar to many of their male comrades.

Today, special museums including the Himeyuri Peace Museum (which commemorates the students of Okinawa who worked as war nurses in Okinawa) and the scandalously revisionist Yūshūkan at the Yasukuni Shrine (which features women in other wartime roles) (H. Cook 2005: 326–356; Yasukuni jinja 2003) depict women's deaths 'in service of the nation'. Museums within the camps of the Self-Defense Forces, the present-day Japanese military and successor of the wartime Imperial Japanese Army, however, have almost completely erased any mention of these women from their sites of Imperial Japanese Army commemoration and documentation. In general terms, exhibits in these museums represent the attempts of local military units to address the relationship between the Self-Defense Forces and the army of their fathers and grandfathers. While an occasional photograph depicts a member of the local branch of one of the wartime women's organisations, the general trend of these museums is to resurrect the gendered order of wartime propaganda which had cast women as fertile mothers, hard-working factory employees, self-sacrificing nurses, frugal wives, and in other roles that were meant to support and comfort male soldiers. In turn, camp museums portray the ideal figure of the Imperial Japanese Army soldier as a good and fearless man whose ties are to the military and the Emperor. Women at home or at the front line are entirely absent from these exhibits, re-establishing the war, battles and the military as exclusively male affairs. This reordering of the wartime gender disorder smoothly translates into the Self-Defense Forces' language of the willingness 'to serve the population' (rather than 'the nation') and the appropriation of the old 'sacrifice' (for the Emperor) as 'service' (to the public), while keeping the gendered order of military service largely intact (Frühstück 2007).

Notes

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