Japan’s Carnival War
Mass Culture on the Home Front, 1937-1945
Benjamin Uchiyama
Japan in the Asia-Pacific War years is usually remembered for economic deprivation, political repression, and cultural barrenness. Benjamin Uchiyama argues that although the war created the opportunity for the state to expand its control over society and mass culture, it also fractured Japanese people’s sense of identity, spilling out through a cultural framework that is best understood as “carnival war.” In this cultural history, we are introduced to five symbolic figures: the thrill-seeking reporter, the mischievous munitions worker, the tragic soldier, the elusive movie star, and the glamorous youth aviator. Together they represent both the suppression and proliferation of cultural life in wartime Japan and demonstrate that “carnival war” coexisted with total war to promote consumerist desire versus sacrifice, fantasy versus nightmare, and beauty versus horror. Ultimately, Uchiyama argues, this duality helped mobilize home front support for the war effort.

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Introduction

The Circus Freak

On the morning of January 2, 1943, during the New Year’s holiday and at the height of the Asia-Pacific War, the circus came to Tokyo. Despite a food rationing system in place since 1941, two young munitions workers, Yamada Futarō and his friend Kaneko, started the day with sweet fruit jelly (mitsumame), cake (kōki), and tempura bowl (tendon), before arriving at the circus inside Kōrakuen Stadium. Above the tent fluttered a red banner which read: “Kinoshita Circus Troupe” (Kinoshita sūkasu dan). Festive music blared from hidden speakers. Inside the tent, according to newspaper advertisements, Kinoshita Circus promised exotic attractions complete with acrobatic feats and elephants.

However, just as Yamada and Kaneko were about to enter the circus tent, a policeman ran up to shoo them away. “Go home!” he shouted. “Those who don’t have tickets for today, go home!” Yamada “exchanged glances with Kaneko, bored and fed up (unzari shite).” Circus tickets were 1.55 yen apiece, which the two young men had neglected to purchase. This was the official circus: promoted by carefully watched newspapers and protected from nonpaying customers by police officers.

As they were about to leave, the two workers noticed through the dust cloud a smaller, dirtier red-curtained circus nearby. The tent was surrounded by a large crowd hoping to catch a glimpse of a “show” featuring a half-man, half-dog circus freak as the main attraction. The small stage consisted of a red curtain stretched around a shapeless figure. The curtain

3 January 2, 1943 entry, Senchūha mushikera nikki: 83.
4 (Advertisement) Asahi Shinbun, January 1, 1943.
tantalizingly went up a little before coming down again. Suddenly, as Yamada later recalled in his diary:

Ja-Jaann! A bell rang, and a young girl dressed in Chinese attire came out of the curtain. The girl stepped into a faint beam of light. Her soft and flabby flesh was a rather depressing kind of deformity.

(Of course, she wasn’t the “half-man, half-dog.”)

With no expression or emotion, she moved right and left before the curtain, with gaudy makeup oozing out.

Kaneko wanted to watch but I said it was all so obviously fake. I declined with a word, knowing that whether the freak (kikeiji) was born deformed or not, it was all just creepy. We trudged along toward Suido-ţa Station in the middle of a dust cloud.  

It might seem surprising to learn of Japanese factory workers going to the circus during the Pacific War years – a time usually remembered for economic deprivation, political repression, and cultural barrenness; a time when, as at least one scholar argues, wartime mass culture was dominated by “sentimentalism” tightly controlled by the state. In 1940, a year before Japan declared war on the United States, the New Order movement propelled sweeping state controls over all forms of popular entertainment complete with official performer licenses and certificates. And not a moment too soon, for the Yomiuri Shinbun reported in December 1940 that “ghetto theater troupes” (basue gekidan) illicitly operated in the squalid outskirts of Tokyo, moving from place to place to perform unauthorized vaudeville, theatrical plays, and sword-fighting. The newspaper urged the fledgling New Order movement to bring these troublemakers in line. The brazen performance two years later of the half-man, half-dog circus freak next to the officially approved Kinoshita Circus suggests that elements of the unofficial “ghetto theater troupe” survived in the shadows of total war. Indeed, in February 1943, the Yomiuri ran an article calling for more “cheerful” (meiro) circus performances, pointing to the prevalence of the disabled performing as circus freaks and children forced to perform in dangerous acrobatic stunts, all of which “makes one imagine many dark shadows.”

The Greater Japan Entertainment Association (Dai Nippon kōgyō kyōkai), the state-sponsored organization of theater and circus troupes, publicly

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8 “Basue gekidan’ ni, tōkyoku ga torishimari noridasu,” Yomiuri Shinbun, December 11, 1940.
vowed to “sweep away performances by *rokukubi* [folkloric monsters with long stretched-out necks], spider-girls (*kumo musume*), and other grotesque things; and, to the extent possible, redirect the crippled performers (*fugusha*) to other occupations in the wartime industries.”

This book is about the evolution of mass culture into what I term “carnival war” in Japan, reorienting our perspectives on daily life between 1937 and 1945. Although the Asia-Pacific War created the opportunity for the state to expand its control over society, it also fractured Japanese people’s sense of identity, which spilled out through a cultural framework which, this book will argue, is best understood as carnival war. Carnival war encompassed both “official” cultural practices shining in the spotlight and “unofficial” cultural practices lurking in the shadows. It requires thinking not only about the activities of official purveyors of entertainment like Kinoshita Circus, but also the “ghetto” circus, the half-man, half-dog circus freaks who echoed, mocked, and inverted the pristine, official national culture the wartime state was trying to build. Second, a study of carnival war examines the unevenness of state attempts to mobilize society for war; the dynamic, improvisational dimension to total war mobilization. It is about why the police officer and, by extension, the police agency and wartime state celebrated and protected spectacles like Kinoshita Circus while simultaneously vilifying and ignoring unofficial circus performances. Beginning in 1943, the Japanese home front began to grapple with a deteriorating war situation and worsening material shortages. Slowly but steadily, the government moved away from earlier intrusive cultural controls designed to elevate the intellectual refinement of the masses and towards a grudging patronage of pure entertainment spectacles to raise morale and wartime productivity. Finally, carnival war is a story about how Japanese people interacted with cultural practices that absorbed and deformed official ideologies – note Yamada’s eye-rolling boredom at the policeman’s high-handed demeanor and flippant dismissal of the alternative freak show as a “fake.” Part of his ability to move between official and unofficial ideology rested on the fact that high-earning munitions workers could literally partake of the “sweets” of the total war economy while other civilians struggled with material shortages and food scarcity. Mobilization, it would seem, introduced

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9 “Meirō ni naru misemono: shintai shōgaisha ya kodomo no kyokugei wo issō,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, February 27, 1943.

a new political economy and cultural life that paradoxically united and divided the home front.

The idea of carnival war challenges the view that wartime Japan was an inert, oppressive period in which the state unquestioningly ruled over most facets of daily life and in which smooth harmonious collaboration between public and private actors defined the experience of total war. In stark contrast to the lively and cosmopolitan “erotic grotesque nonsense” mass culture of the 1920s and early 1930s filled with liberated “modern girls,” dance halls, and jazz music, Japanese wartime mass culture after 1937 is usually depicted as descending into a dark morass of strict state controls, censorship, and ideologies of national sacrifice. Thomas Havens described Japan’s mobilization experience beginning in 1937 as a “dour” and “humorless” project full of “gloomy melodies” and a general “lack of exhilaration.” More recently, Alan Tansman reiterated this common view about wartime Japan: “National mobilization meant the beginning of the end of the pursuit of material comfort and pleasure – the end, that is, of the fun of urban life. The time for play was over, except, perhaps, for spiritual play.”

In exploring the intersection between imperialism and mass culture during the Japanese invasion and occupation of the Asia-Pacific region, this book contends that ordinary Japanese people shifted between their roles as loyal imperial subjects of the state who sacrificed all for nation and consumers of a transnational mass culture where desire was prioritized over sacrifice.

To study the Japanese cultural practices and attitudes amid total war requires a careful reading of the primary sources. For just as the Japanese man, woman, child (or Korean, Taiwanese, and Chinese) constantly shifted between the roles of consumer and subject, so too did artifacts of wartime mass culture. They must be read and then reread against conflicting messages and symbols that shift in meaning depending on the context. This form of analysis requires a special sensitivity to the unique “grammar” employed by Japanese consumer-subjects in order to make sense of mass cultural practices during a time of rising state authoritarianism and censorship but also cultural innovation and creativity filtered through a capitalist industrialized mass media system.

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I acknowledge the power of print media, film, and radio in the 1930s and 1940s in the construction of a “national public sphere” in Japan and its transformation into a “fascist public sphere,” which helped consolidate popular support for war. But I do not see this as a smooth and relatively seamless transition with passive consumers easily manipulated by state institutions and powerful media companies. For even within the public consensus appearing in mass media and well-documented in scholarship, many Japanese cultural producers and consumers would come to have contentious views of the objectives and meanings of the war itself. And as the war escalated and mass culture continued to evolve within the vortex of national mobilization, the home front and battlefront became simultaneously more entangled and estranged. These tensions played out in mass culture through conflicting messages over wartime solemnity versus silliness and mass sacrifice versus mass desire. In trying to capture this moving target, I utilize the critical methodologies of cultural historians of prewar Japan within the framework of the total war system. To unite these two seemingly disparate approaches – one privileging individual capacities to resist state ideologies and construct new cultural mores, the other fixated on how the massive state edifice mobilized and irrevocably transformed society for war – requires an overarching model that can incorporate both elements.

**Writing a History of Total War**

Carnival war is both a cultural history of wartime Japan and, more broadly, a cultural history of total war. To interrogate Japanese society in wartime is not simply an excursion down a familiar path of historical research but an appreciation of the broad significance of the war in historiography. Chronological frameworks such as prewar, wartime, postwar, and more recently, “post-postwar” and “transwar” all point to the centrality of the Asia-Pacific War in how scholars conceptualize and organize the fundamental contours of modern Japanese history. However, despite the importance of the war for historical periodization, scholarship has only just begun to explore what the war actually meant to Japanese people at the time.

Since the 1980s, many scholars have identified the 1931 Manchurian Incident as the start of the so-called “Fifteen Year War” as a way to

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highlight the cumulative effect of Japan’s imperialist aggression in Asia lasting until 1945. This approach has very usefully critiqued the problematically narrow focus on the “Pacific War” in older scholarship on wartime Japan. However, this book explicitly locates the start of “wartime” to Japan’s 1937 invasion of China. In this respect, I take partial exception to Louise Young’s pathbreaking monograph Japan’s Total Empire, which draws upon the Fifteen Year War framework to argue that both Japan and Manchuria mutually transformed each other through mobilization on multiple political, social, and cultural levels. While I agree that Manchuria powerfully transformed mass cultural practices on the home front, we need to know more about how the relationship between mobilization and mass culture changed after 1937 when the China War unleashed far greater socioeconomic transformations across all social strata in Japan. As the scale of mobilization accelerated following the start of the China War, that intensity in turn unleashed unexpected twists and turns in mass culture which redefined how such mobilization infiltrated down to lived experience. My exploration of Japanese wartime mass culture suggests that the empire became a bit less “total” after 1937 as the realities of mobilization clashed with a modern mass society, forcing improvisation and accommodation among state institutions. Elements of “total empire” certainly did continue past 1937 and lasted until the destruction of Japan’s empire in 1945. But to understand the relationship between mobilization and mass culture after 1937, we need to analyze total war itself, alongside total empire, as a significant historical rupture.

By moving the start of wartime from 1931 to 1937, this book aligns more closely with works which, while drawing upon the insights found in the Fifteen Year War theory, have raised skepticism over the Fifteen Year War chronology. From the perspective of economic and political history, this group of Japanese scholars have pointed out that Japan’s economic structure and political organization assumed their distinctive wartime characteristics only after Japan’s 1937 invasion of China proper.
Similarly, other scholars have demonstrated that the democratic institutions and consumer culture of prewar “modernism” in the 1920s were still strongly in force well past the 1931 Manchurian Incident, thereby suggesting that the prewar era itself was a longer and more vigorous historical phase than assumed in the Fifteen Year War framework.18

If Japan’s wartime began in 1937, what kind of “war” was it? I refer to “total war” with full acknowledgment that scholarly works have already demonstrated its methodological limitations in characterizing the Asia-Pacific War and the Second World War in general. It is true that the actual fighting of the war varied at different stages with the China War phase (1937–41) being in many respects less “total” than the Pacific War phase (1941–5) in terms of the extent and intensity of rationing, food supplies, and conscription rates. Food rationing and labor conscription on the Japanese home front, for example, did not really take effect until after 1941.19 Indeed, some scholars argue that even the Second World War does not quite hold up to the “total war” label upon close scrutiny.20

Nevertheless, carnival war reminds us that “total war” was both an actual battlefield experience unleashing drastic material changes on the

18 For example, Hara Akira contends that Japan’s war economy defined by intensive state economic controls and inflationary military spending did not really begin until after 1937. Before that, Japan’s economy was still in peacetime mode. See Hara Akira, “Japan: Guns before Rice,” in Mark Harrison, ed., The Economics of World War II: Six Great Powers in International Comparison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 224–225. Banno Junji argues that a powerful movement for “Shōwa Democracy” lasted until at least 1937 in Shōwa shi no ketteiteki shunkan (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 2004) and more directly in Jiyū to byōdo no Shōwa shi: 1930-nendai no Nihon seiji (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2009): 181–191. Sakai Tetsuya intriguingly views the political turmoil, right-wing agitation, and military insubordination of the early to mid-1930s not as signs of the impending collapse of democracy but as testimony to the tenacious power of Taishō Democracy – i.e., that it took drastic and repeated assaults by conservative, authoritarian groups well into the late 1930s to finally destroy Japan’s entrenched democratic institutions. See Sakai Tetsuya, Taishō demokurashii taisai no hōkai: naisei to gaikō (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1992). Minami Hiroshi and others found that the culture of “modernism” or an embrace of a consumerist, cosmopolitan way of life emphasizing the individual over the state, and private family over the public household began in the early 1920s and continued until the stresses of the China War curbed such trends. See Minami Hiroshi, ed., Nihon modanizumu no kenkyū: shisō, seikatsu, bunka (Tokyo: Buren Shuppan, 1982) and Minami Hiroshi, ed., Shōwa bunka (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 1987).


home front by the early 1940s and a constellation of war-inspired cultural ideas and imagery already circulating in Japanese society and elsewhere in the late 1930s. Although prewar consumer and economic life continued in many respects in early wartime Japan, the invasion and occupation of China after 1937 signaled to the Japanese that the empire was entering a new phase of modern life dominated by war. That is, while postwar scholars have rightly shown that actual conditions of “total war” did not neatly correspond to the years commonly labeled as such, we must take care to note that the idea of “total war” and all the mobilization campaigns pursued by state and society to ready the home front for total war did correspond to the years 1937 to 1945. Similar to the interwar and wartime European political figures invoking “total war” as rhetorical flourish to promote their own particular policy or sectional interests, Japanese media, cultural, military, and civilian leaders, and institutions in the 1930s and 1940s made references to “total war” and “national mobilization” to justify their actions and ideologies. Much of the discussion of “total war” in Japan was framed as preparation for an inevitable future war that would reproduce on a larger scale the trauma of the Great War in Europe.\(^{21}\) Just as the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japanese consensus that the empire must always strive to be “modern” and achieve “modernity” inspired powerful social transformations, so too did the sense of urgency of mobilizing for a future total war provide the important context for all cultural activities in the 1930s and early 1940s.\(^{22}\) In other words, “total war” or its later wartime synonym “decisive war” (kessen) became an unstressed ideological tense and shorthand for a new, unprecedented historical moment, which framed the rancorous public debates on the Japanese home front.\(^{23}\)


\(^{23}\) Kessen previously appeared in Japanese newspapers in reference to game matches or certain impressive battles overseas, as in Germany’s blitzkrieg attacks in Europe in 1939–1940. Beginning in 1941, with the growing likelihood of war against the United States, the frequency of the term noticeably increased. For example, a quick search on the National Diet Library online catalog for book titles with the word kessen yields only six entries between 1937 and 1940. By contrast, seven entries appear for 1941 alone,
These debates gave discursive power and force to carnival war, even during years when the actual fighting conditions overseas and levels of rationing on the home front did not approach the ideal type of total war. Mobilization, in turn, inspired and justified new radical state programs to reengineer society on a total war footing. While the invasion of China was initially dubbed by the government and media as the “China Incident” and not a “war” until 1941 – partly to avoid entanglement with US neutrality laws and triggering economic sanctions – the idea that Japan was entering a new historical phase defined by war was very much on people’s minds from the beginning. Thus, carnival war was a cultural phenomenon that echoed both the mobilization of society in preparation for total war and the actual “total” conditions imposed by total warfare on the home front.

To more rigorously think about the points of contact between total war conditions and total war discourse, I rely on Yamanouchi Yasushi’s total war system theory for directly bringing the experience of total war to the center of historical analysis. Yamanouchi avoids the normative assumptions implicitly inherent in much scholarship of the Second World War by provocatively arguing that all the major belligerent countries of that conflict shared the experience of war mobilization. Thus, as he argues, “the differences between Fascist-types and New Deal-types should be studied as internal parts subordinate to an analysis of societal changes brought on by total war.” Yamanouchi argues that the Asia-Pacific War was a “total war” in which the state mobilizes all peoples and resources for industrialized warfare. The resulting “total war system” transformed the home front from a highly stratified, hierarchical, and strife-riven “class society” to a more “leveled” function-based “system society.” In the name of total war mobilization, the state forcefully broke down to varying degrees class, gender, and racial barriers to better integrate subjects into the nation-state, ready to contribute to the war effort. The total war system theory emphasizes, perhaps uncomfortably so for some, the


26 Yamanouchi, “Total War and System Integration”: 2.
close connections between war mobilization and progressive features of twentieth-century contemporary society in all forms such as social-welfare policy, public health and hygiene, social egalitarianism, and mass politics. Mobilizing for total war was incredibly violent and liberating at times, and powerfully demonstrates how total war accelerated the modernization process in Japan and laid the foundations for “pacifist” postwar Japan.

The total war system theory offers an intriguing way to concretely explore the impact of total war on mass society beyond a superficial view of war as some kind of natural disaster or just another national project like industrial planning or irrigation. It reminds us again that total war was an affair of both state and society. It also raises important comparative possibilities by forcing scholars to look at wartime Japan alongside not only the usual suspects of Fascist Italy or Nazi Germany but also the United States and Great Britain through the prism of total war mobilization. The total war system theory, in short, helps scholars historicize total war itself. In this respect, I find the total war system theory much more helpful for thinking comparatively about wartime Japan and the Japanese home front than the recent revival of the “fascist” label, which is overburdened with political baggage, a lack of engagement with total war as transnational modern phenomenon, and an instinctively narrow comparison of wartime Japan with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy with little attention to the “liberal” democratic home fronts in wartime America and Britain.

The total war system theory is weakest, however, when used to explore mass culture because it presumes the state successfully and seamlessly mobilized a society along functionalist lines thereby leaving us with a triumphal narrative of the state overpowering the people to do its bidding. There are today numerous studies on Japanese wartime culture which, consciously or not, draw from the total war system framework.28

27 One study exploring how the total war system incorporated despised minorities into the nation-state can be found in Takashi Fujitani’s discussion of “vulgar racism” and “polite racism” against Korean soldiers in the Japanese military and Japanese-American soldiers in the American military. See Takashi Fujitani, Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans During World War II (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

They rightly highlight the rationality and modernity of Japan’s wartime experience but also tend to reduce the study of mass culture in wartime to an examination of state-sanctioned propaganda forging cohesive social harmony and national unity.  

We currently have works about the extent and supposed efficacy of Japanese wartime propaganda materials and ideologies, the impressive scale of censorship controls and speech suppression which, we are told, unified public attitudes toward the war through successful mobilization of nationalist sentiments.  

Often, a history of wartime mass culture devolves into a depressing list of increasingly draconian state decrees starting in 1937, with each successive new control further strangling whatever lingering creativity, freedom, or even happiness remained on the home front. In the name of war mobilization, as we now already know, the Japanese state aggressively pushed the media to promote an image of the nation as a divine land protected by the gods. By doing so, the government hoped to “uplift war morale, strengthen production, homeland defense, and safeguard food supplies.”  

Even studies which do highlight the role of popular agency and participation in the war as a kind of bottom-up history of wartime Japan inevitably returns to the well-told story about the great success of state-sanctioned wartime propaganda and policies mobilizing society for war.  

The current “state” of Japanese wartime


30 Barak Kushner, *The Thought War: Japanese Imperial Propaganda* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006); Ruoff, *Imperial Japan at Its Zenith*.

31 For instance, Sheldon Garon eloquently demonstrates that social actors actively collaborated with the state on a variety of social issues throughout the twentieth century for their own interests. However, he concedes that the relationship between the state and women activists in wartime “hardly constituted a partnership between equals,” and what influence these individuals exercised in public policy occurred only “when they embraced the modern state’s ideology of separate spheres for men and women (the ‘good wife and wise mother’).” See Sheldon Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997): 144. For details on home front resistance which may not have amounted to much beyond mild grumbling, see Samuel Hideo Yamashita, *Daily Life in Wartime Japan, 1940–1945* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2016): 155–172.
cultural history is, indeed, a history of successful state propaganda and ideologies imposed on a cooperative and passive populace.

This book does not completely refute the awesome powers and ideological apparatus of the Japanese wartime state to repress, coerce, and even inspire the masses into a semblance of national unity. However, the fixation on social leveling and harmonization by scholars of wartime Japan ignores the social fractures and social “unevenness” brought on by such leveling. That is, we are left with the policies, the goals, and the public pronouncements, but not the cultural practices and multiple lived experiences of life under total war. Ultimately, the narrative of the rise of state power and coercive social harmonization is only half the story for when we look closely at war mobilization in Japan, one sees less a “system” than a haphazard process.

Official wartime ideologies in Japan were torn between two poles: a spiritual-based “Japanism” (Nipponshugi) and the total war mobilization ideology. Both ideologies enjoyed support across elite institutions and popular interest groups, and often clashed over policy priorities during the 1930s and early 1940s. Beginning in the early 1930s, a virulent xenophobic ideology swept through Japanese political discourse, which helped redefine and restrict popular cultural activities. Although composed of many different sects, this ideology, which Akazawa Shiro calls the “Japanist” or “Japanese Spirit” ideology, rested on several consistent principles. One was the strong rejection of Marxism, liberalism, and capitalism. Another was belief in an individual’s “faith” and “spirit” in effecting political change. Throughout the 1930s, Japanist-inspired military activists sought to overthrow prewar Japan’s parliamentary system, which they saw as hopelessly corrupt and ineffective. But aside from a vague goal of setting up an authoritarian military government more closely aligned to the will of the emperor and people, the Japanist school lacked any specific and concrete vision for a new political order. By contrast, a coalition of “total war officers” and reform bureaucrats actively worked together in drafting policies to restructure Japan’s economy, political system, and social organization onto a total war footing. Their goals of bolstering state power along technocratic lines frequently conflicted with the interests of Japanist ideologues who emphasized spiritual strength over cultivating technological prowess. The inconsistencies and conflict between these official ideologies

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33 A criticism of the total war system first made by Mori Takemaro in “Senji Nihon no shakai to keizai: sōryokusen ron wo megutte,” Hitotsubashi Ronshō 131 (6): 712–713.
justifying mobilization are left unaddressed by a pure total war system framework. 34

As a broader framework to help consider the twists and turns of wartime ideologies, I utilize Takaoka Hiroyuki’s argument for thinking of war mobilization as unfolding in a series of distinct stages. 35 The first stage during the initial invasion of China in late 1937 was characterized by a temporary public retreat from leisure as all Japanese society focused on carrying out and completing a quick and easy war. The initial public excitement over military campaigning gave way beginning in 1938 to the second stage when the pace of war slows down, and a sense of normalcy in popular culture returns. At the same time, the government imposed new labor and economic controls to reassert its authority over the war’s ideological significance and to centralize economic planning. The government’s National Spiritual Mobilization Campaign called on the home front to develop a sense of urgency and self-restraint through promotion of “healthy leisure” (kenzen goraku) such as hiking, skiing, and other physical activities as more appropriate wartime pastimes. This, in turn, had sociocultural implications in mass culture as the initial linkage between desire/play and war/violence forged by the mass media continued to reconfigure how Japanese people reacted to increasing state controls over their daily lives. By 1940 and 1941, the third stage of social and political mobilization took shape with the introduction of the rationing system, neighborhood associations, the outlawing of luxuries and dance halls, and the launch of the New Order movement. This move by military officers and bureaucratic reformers to bring social and political life more fully in line with building a “national defense state” as Japan prepared for war against the United States and Great Britain triggered new cultural practices among Japanese consumer-subjects. The fourth and final stage of mobilization began in 1943 as Japan’s military advantage crumbled in the face of the Allied onslaught across the Pacific. Until the end of the war in 1945, the government gradually relaxed cultural controls to restore deteriorating public morale. Ironically, I argue, the loosening of repressive controls ultimately contributed to the decline of carnival war on the home front.

With this idea of mobilization as process more than system in mind, how do we write a cultural history of wartime Japan and total war without it becoming a history of propaganda reifying the presumed hegemonic nation-state? And conversely, how do we write such a history without

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34 Akazawa, “Senchū sengo bunka ron”; 298–301.
erasing the very real repression and extraordinary violence of total war or degenerating into a simplistic tale of popular “resistance”? The key is to think of wartime in terms of carnivalesque duality, between official and unofficial, and the sacred and profane. The operating logic of carnival war rests on distinguishing between culture and propaganda. Or, to put it another way, between cultural practice and cultural ideology.

Cultural Practice versus Cultural Ideology

One helpful clue in this endeavor may be found in Miriam Silverberg’s pioneering work on the mass culture of prewar Japan. In her call for “a new cultural history of prewar Japan,” she argued that cultural historians of modern Japan must do more than simply observe and record the new cultural practices incorporated into interwar urban middle-class life. Instead, scholars must conduct a thorough analysis of the construction of new attitudes towards these new cultural practices and how these attitudes interfaced with Japanese people’s class and national identities.36 A new cultural history of wartime Japan would similarly demand an investigation of the modern cultural practices or lived experiences of consumer-subjects that problematizes discussions of ideology. For example, as discussed in Chapter 3 of this book, it is not enough to simply note the enthusiastic patriotic rituals by civilians honoring Japanese soldiers and promoted by the culture industries. One must go on to explore what shape and form this patriotism entailed exactly and how ordinary soldiers perceived and responded to these boisterous but increasingly vacuous acts of national gratitude. Only then can we begin to understand how displays of patriotism were consumed and reproduced as cultural ideology and resisted as cultural practice.

In addition to the distinction between ideology and practice, Silverberg highlighted the dual role ordinary Japanese people inhabited in the prewar era as “consumer-subjects.” As opposed to simply “consumer” or “imperial subject,” the “consumer-subject” concept allows scholars to see the liberating possibilities and political realities that confronted Japanese people living in a modern mass culture presided over by an authoritarian state. A consumer-subject, Silverberg wrote, is someone “who interacted in the urban marketplace of a newly instituted mass culture by challenging the official state ideology of national polity through articulations of class identity, gender identity, and cultural cosmopolitanism.” This mass culture, she continued, was conditioned by not only

global market forces, industrial capitalism, and new daily life practices, but also emperor-centered state ideologies, official propaganda, and elaborate censorship.\textsuperscript{37}

It is my belief that scholars looking at the 1930s and early 1940s have so far focused too much on Japanese people’s identity as “subject” while neglecting the “consumer” equation of “consumer-subject.” Even in Silverberg’s own work on interwar mass culture, the idea of the “modern” (modan) is said to have declined in Japanese mass culture with the start of the China War in 1937. As she ultimately concludes, the “modern energies dimmed in the 1930s,” and “by 1939, the emperor system, if not the nativist statist, expansionist ideology, had clearly won out.”\textsuperscript{38} Minami Hiroshi, who was one of the first scholars to demonstrate the cultural vibrancy of Japanese modernism in the 1920s and 1930s, similarly argued that one of the major consequences of the outbreak of the China War in 1937 was the shattering of the cosmopolitan interwar “modern” mass culture. He dismissed any sign of modernity in wartime culture as mere scraps of “underground modernism,” barely breathing in the toxic air of a society mobilized for war.\textsuperscript{39} In this school of thought, there seem to be no positive connections drawn between wartime culture and the modernity of wartime mobilization, between wartime culture and the vibrant culture preceding the China War, or between wartime culture and the lively culture of postwar Japan.\textsuperscript{40}

While we have greatly benefited from the works on Japanese modernism and the total war system in getting some sense of the cultural continuities between the 1920s to 1930s and the postwar legacies of national mobilization, what I still find lacking is a more rigorous study that interrogates the intersection of war mobilization and mass culture, the relationship between cultural practice and cultural ideology, and the porous borders distinguishing consumer and subject during the era of total war. It is true that when war began in 1937, the conflict was generally accepted by the public at large as a fait accompli and an important national goal, thanks to a string of early victories, enthusiastic media coverage, and a system of wartime propaganda messages and images propagated by a sophisticated mass media. The jingoistic media promotion of an

\textsuperscript{37} Silverberg, “Constructing a New Cultural History”: 64.
\textsuperscript{39} Minami Hiroshi, \textit{Nihon modanizumu no kenkyū}: viii–ix.
emperor-centered ideology further naturalized citizen participation in the national project through a variety of patriotic rituals.\footnote{Havens, Valley of Darkness; David C. Earhart, Certain Victory: Images of World War II in the Japanese Media (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2008); Ruoff, Imperial Japan at Its Zenith.}

However, to conceive of Japanese mass culture in the late 1930s and early 1940s only in terms of state manipulation, converging social consensus, or a dichotomy of collaboration versus resistance provides us with only crude caricatures. We must study not only wartime official ideologies but also how national mobilization stimulated new cultural practices and attitudes toward these ideologies. We need to grasp how ordinary Japanese people simultaneously acted as mass consumers and imperial subjects in the context of total war. To fully understand the dynamism of wartime modernity, we must examine the intersection between imperialism (and all the cruelties it unleashes) and mass culture (and all the pleasures and desires it stirs within us). When we shift the emphasis from ideology to practice and from subject to consumer – while always remaining aware of their linkages – we can begin to see the cultural energies and sense of play that characterized a new mass culture in the late 1930s and early 1940s taking shape as Japan mobilized for total war. Indeed, the synergy between consumer and subject, freedom and repression, joy and killing must be brought into the spotlight of historical analysis. By doing so, we can begin to write a new cultural history of wartime Japan.

The Idea of Carnival

The Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin has offered the notion that “carnival” is a social force that can arise suddenly in certain social and cultural circumstances to invert, destroy, and even revive the existing order of things. Carnival is a transient moment when the normal rules of the community are suspended, and existing hierarchies are leveled. Within such volatility, new cultural practices may arise to debase, mock, and parody the strong while exalting the weak, ordinary, or grotesque as new “kings” of the community.\footnote{Bakhtin developed the idea of carnival from an analysis of Rabelais’s description of a medieval French carnival festival. See Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World [1965], trans. Helene Iswolsky (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984): 5–12. Bakhtin offers a more detailed discussion of carnival in Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics [1963], ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 2009): 122–132. For further explanation of carnival as a theoretical framework in cultural studies, see chapter on the “carnivalesque” in Sue Vice, Introducing Bakhtin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) and Simon Dentith, Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader (London: Routledge, 1994): 65–87.}
Bakhtin called carnival a “syncretic pageantry of a ritualistic sort.” It is a spectacle that eviscerates the line between spectator and performer by sweeping away hierarchy, religious piety, and other forms of social obedience. Echoing the total war system, carnival levels social barriers to create “free and familiar contact among the people” that lends itself to performances of new cultural practices subverting and inverting the status quo:

All things that were once self-enclosed, disunified, distanced from one another by a noncarnivalistic hierarchal worldview are drawn into carnivalistic contacts and combinations. Carnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid.

The new syncretic relationships or, as Bakhtin calls them, “carnivalistic mésalliances,” bring the mighty down to earth and deprive them of their symbolic power through profane, obscene rituals. These rituals culminate in the mock crowning and decrowning of a series of “carnival kings,” reflecting the driving force of carnival’s insatiable impulse to destroy and renew. Crowning a fool as an ersatz “king” already implied imminent decrowning through abuse and profanation. At the same time, decrowning a cultural figure contained signs of future recrowning. The implication here is that carnival is a “contained” form of resistance against official ideologies for, in the end, fledgling carnival kings are soon “decrowned” and the old order is always restored. Latent fears of a return of carnival, however, remain in the now-destabilized social fabric. Carnival shakes up but does not destroy the official order of things. Thus, carnivalized cultural constructs and attitudes were always ambivalent and always contradictory.

Carnival War

Carnival kings helped bring to life a mass culture that followed, stalked, and mimicked total war into a “carnival war.” Carnival war was a key historical moment when the hierarchy and social order of an authoritarian society were thrown into flux as total war mobilization and mass media became increasingly entangled and interconnected. Out of this vortex emerged a set of cultural practices, underwritten by mass media expansion and war mobilization. This unleashed new articulations of modernity in mass culture through carnival kings who were central to carnival’s

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43 The following is drawn from Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics: 122–132.
44 Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics: 123.
subversive power. In this respect, I consciously depart from Bakhtin’s view that carnival did not survive into the modern era or, if it did, only in a weakened, diminished state.46

In Japan, the industrialized violence overseas and national mobilization at home ushered in a series of culturally constructed “carnival kings” who challenged the official orthodoxy of the emperor system by offering alternative imaginings of daily life in a society dominated by war. These culturally arresting beings took shape within discursive debates and visual images found in mass magazines, newspapers, movies, advertisements, and police reports. They represented snapshots of a cultural force that locked the home front and warfront into dysfunctional union. This book examines five carnival kings: the reporter, the munitions worker, the movie star, the soldier, and the youth aviator. This is by no means an exhaustive list. Other ambiguous cultural constructs also haunted the popular imagination of wartime Japan, such as the militarized war nurse, the despised black market “broker” (burōka), and the vampiric “Red Cape” (aka manto).47

However, the five iconic figures examined here were chosen in part because of the wealth of historical documents which allows the historian to reconstruct their persona. These media-constructed icons left behind the clues to decipher a cultural world swirling with wartime ideologies. They represented the liminal quality of carnival – at once sacred and profane, exhilarating and revolting. Through contact with mass media, Japanese people as imperial subjects and mass consumers interacted with these media icons to make sense of total war in daily life. The “carnival kings” combined a prewar sensibility toward transnational social mores free of the restrictions of national “tradition” and shaped by the capitalist system, with a wartime statist impulse to centralize, rationalize, and harmonize all cultural activities toward total war.

The power of carnival kings was volatile due to the constant threat of state suppression. But even in the wake of periodic state crackdowns, these cultural icons always reasserted their cultural sway in different form.

46 Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, 131.
for they were only displaced, never defeated. The reason for this apparent immortality was that carnival kings performed on an official ideological stage built by the war itself, and against which they reacted, mimicked, mocked, and praised. Their oscillation between desire and sacrifice, humanity and inhumanity, and contained resistance and duplicitous obedience helped define the cultural experience of waging total war. These carnivalized cultural practices could not exist without war mobilization. In other words, carnival here is “carnival war” because it represented a multitude of cultural practices and attitudes that drew its sustenance from total war. Without total war, there could be no carnival war.

The penchant of the state to control collided with the instinct of society to resist and preserve freedom, with each entity triggering more intensive reactions, improvisations, and accommodation. The two forces met in the explosive third space of mass culture defined by “synergistic amplification” in which state controls and popular resistance simultaneously undermined and enriched each other. It is in mass culture, this third space, where carnival war thrived, buffeted by storms of mutual hatred and desire. Accordingly, when the ideological apparatus of the Japanese wartime state collapsed in 1945, so too did carnival war.

Carnival war exposes how other sites of home front life were infused with ideas about fluctuating gender identities and sexualities stimulated by total war mobilization. Just as total war created a context for extraordinary sexual violence by soldiers against civilians, total war created a simultaneous context on the home front for new joyous activities inspiring new ideas about gender and identity. This is where I depart from scholars such as Miriam Silverberg, who argued that prewar cultural fluidity and shifting gender identities persisted well into the late 1930s and even after the attack on Pearl Harbor despite war mobilization.

48 The idea of “synergistic amplification” (sōjōteki zōfuku) is from Tsuganesawa Toshihiro and Ariyama Teruo, eds., Senjiki Nihon no media ibento (Kyoto: Sekai Shisōsha, 1998), ix. I adapt the idea of the “third space” or “third realm” from Philip C. C. Huang, “‘Public Sphere’/‘Civil Society’ in China: The Third Realm between State and Society,” Modern China, vol. 19, no. 2 (April 1993): 216–240.

49 Writing about the “trickster,” Helena Bassil-Morozow similarly points out that the emergence of the modern nation-state with a vast functional-based bureaucracy penetrating society gives voice and resonance to the trickster. “Trickster energy can only be productive when it is shaped by culture,” she writes. “Without the framework, the trickster force is just pure energy, pure havoc, pure uncontrolled change. The framework is necessary for its successful utilization.” See Helena Bassil-Morozow, The Trickster and the System: Identity and Agency in Contemporary Society (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015): 5, 88.

Instead, I contend that such cultural fluidity was intimately stimulated by the experience of fantasizing, mobilizing, and then fighting total war. To be sure, the Japanese state expanded to an unprecedented extent socioeconomic controls over society during the war. No book about wartime Japan would be complete without the dutiful listing of repressive legislative decrees restricting speech, curbing political dissent, and even forbidding ostentatious clothing, permed hair, and jazz music. But this repression only fueled carnivalesque revelry. Carnival war could only be born in an incredibly repressive historical moment and its creative energies only intensified alongside state repression.

The rhetoric and experience of total war mobilization gave all actors and institutions across state and society a sense of unity and mission. Carnival war would then follow and periodically bring to the surface fractious divisions between the military and Welfare Ministry, or the Home and Education Ministries versus the Finance Ministry, or the reporter versus the censor. Or the home front versus the warfront. Everyone was united under the banner of total war, but carnival war would periodically rattle and test that unity.

Carnival war provided outlets for the masses to therapeutically vent pent-up grumblings; momentary celebrations of life which one might interpret as superficially transgressive for it only reinforced the stability and legitimacy of state authority. But such is the nature of carnival war – stimulated by war and repression, seething beneath state shackles, periodically bursting through such restraints with even greater joyful ferocity. State domination driven by imperatives of total war haphazardly tamed and then unwittingly provoked carnival war. Carnival was not only a “safety valve” to allow the masses to vent and dissipate popular discontent in order to consolidate war support. It was also a collection of cultural practices that forced the state to constantly contort itself in message and policy as total war rapidly spun out of control. In other words, carnival war was a force that fractured total war into a multitude of conflicting visions and experiences. Carnival war ultimately drew its energies from state violence and regimentation. It was precisely because carnival allowed people to project onto war what their heart most desired that popular consent was granted. But this popular support was ultimately volatile due to its multifarious foundations.

The Five Kings of Carnival War
This book is guided through the carnival war by five media-constructed carnival kings from 1937 to 1945. During the first stage of the China War in 1937, reporters undermined state-sponsored “spiritual mobilization”
by crystallizing an alternative vision of the war enriched by the adoption of new foreign loanwords and cultural concepts celebrating the excitement of modern life—“thrills” (suriru) and “speed” (supīdo). It was the reporter turned “thrill hunter,” and not the military censors, who determined the pace and tone of war coverage and, by extension, how Japanese consumer-subjects would be first introduced to total war. Thus, the reporter played a critical role in helping to usher in the chaotic birth of a carnivalized home front. In its violent wake, the first wave of carnival war left behind a series of new iconic tropes on the home front that allowed Japanese consumer-subjects to imagine a modern life full of desire and pleasure within an increasingly austere wartime system.

Chapter 2 introduces a clear manifestation of this kind of unabashed hedonism in a new world of national austerity with the munitions worker. The booming munitions industry during the late 1930s gave birth to the discursive construct of the munitions worker who masqueraded as a “fake gentleman” (nise shinshi) or “phony student” (nise gakusei) in his leisure time. Workers were glamorized and vilified in mass media as frivolous fops who inappropriately enjoyed the fruits of Japan’s war-induced economic boom by spending money on suits, accessories, and the red-light district. Official and nonofficial hostilities toward wartime dandyism such as periodic police raids in cafés peaked with the massive 1940 state antiluxury campaign that declared, “Luxury is the Enemy” (zeitaku wa teki da). But even still, conspicuous consumption among men connected to the munitions industry continued to inspire public alarm and jealousy for the munitions worker drew his sustenance from the very military–industrial complex that underwrote the entire war mobilization project. While chastised by some state agencies for frivolous behavior in wartime, the worker was also praised, honored, and even protected by other state agencies as a valiant “industrial warrior” laboring for the nation.

Chapter 3 illuminates the soldier as another ambivalent cultural figure on the Japanese home front. The soldier in the abstract was celebrated by the mass media as the traditional heroic model of patriotic bravery, noble sacrifice, and humility. However, the soldier inhabited three different guises in wartime: hyperaggressive military gods (gunshin) or war heroes; the pitiable, sympathetic “humanistic” soldier; and the angry, vengeful “returned soldiers” (kikanhei) wreaking havoc on the home front. Like the integrative and disintegrative role performed by the munitions worker, the soldier had a contradictory persona that invoked praise, pity, and paranoia from the home front. He was celebrated in the media through public displays of patriotic bravado and sentimentality that
solidified national unity, but he was also the vessel containing pent-up soldier rage against civilians that threatened to tear that unity apart.

Chapter 4 argues that the movie star in post-1937 mass culture also represented the broader oscillating patterns found on Japan’s carnivalized home front. Just as the affluent worker inverted the persona of the middle-class salaryman and the returned soldier emerged as the grotesque doppelganger to the heroic soldier, so too did the movie star serve as the vessel into which the competing wartime ideas of femininity of the Modern Girl and the Military Mother merged under state auspices. The movie star drew on prewar ideas of a liberated modern life for women within an illiberal, nationalist cultural environment. The wartime state tried to mobilize the mysterious charisma of movie stardom to boost war morale by creating an elaborate registration system for new actors, only to face bureaucratic hurdles and unexpected ideological challenges among prospective stars. Through official and media discourses, national attention of who or what makes a movie star captured public attention throughout most of the war years.

Chapter 5 brings us to the final and most powerful iteration of carnival war on the Japanese home front – the youth aviator. Unlike the tarred image of the soldier, the iconic youth aviator was celebrated in new aviation magazines and public rituals appearing after 1940 as an avatar for the alluring war technology of flight. Through the construct of the youth aviator, young Japanese consumer-subjects interfaced with aviation as consumers, imperial subjects, and fans. However, by late 1944, amidst growing public realization of the war’s hopelessness and the exhaustion of Japan’s weaponry and resources, the glamorous youth aviator devolved into the noble but doomed kamikaze pilot, sacrificing his life for a lost cause through the decidedly anti-technological method of crashing airplanes onto enemy vessels.

Each carnival king dragged into the spotlight the “shadows” of total war – the cracks, awkwardness, and rage seething through the home front; the circus freak cavorting next to the policeman. Their origins could be found with the dawn of Japan’s invasion of China in 1937, when carnival war began slowly at first, before turning into a chorus for killing, a whirlwind of savagery and manic delight. The ensuing media frenzy soon dissipated, but not before it had transformed Japan’s prewar mass society into a home front eager to consume further acts of carnival revelry. Serving as conductor of this concert of extraordinary violence and pleasure stood the reporter as “thrill hunter,” the first king of carnival war.
Carnival war was born during the brief but intense cultural moment of the Shanghai–Nanjing campaign when new literary, technological, military, and social forces swept into the Japanese home front. Out of this volatile maelstrom, mass media organs spawned the new wartime creatures of “thrills” and “speed” to reconfigure the violence of total war for mass consumption. Even with the fall of Nanjing and the fading of the war hysteria, these media-constructed phantasms continued to shape how intellectuals, reporters, and other agents of the culture industries promoted, debated, and gave meaning to total war until the twilight of the Japanese empire.

In a narrow sense, “carnival” refers to the chaotic media coverage of the Shanghai–Nanjing campaign from August to December 1937, which Japanese military and police officials criticized as a literal “raucous carnival” (omatsuri sawagi) for undermining state-managed spiritual mobilization. Irreverent celebrations of violence undermined government efforts to construct deep emotional connections to the war among the populace through economic frugality, public service, and participation in a variety of patriotic rituals.¹

In a broader sense, however, carnival describes the nature of Japanese state–society relations in wartime. At first glance, the media-driven war fever during the first stage of the China War in 1937 seemed to replicate patterns found in the 1931–2 Manchurian Incident. During the Manchurian Incident, the major dailies, driven by commercial ambitions to expand circulation into rural areas and dominate the national news market, mobilized the public into war frenzy to support the Kwantung Army’s invasion of Northeast China. This resulted in a more homogeneous narrative glorifying Japanese military expansion into Manchuria that dovetailed nicely with the government’s policy of “go-fast”

imperialism.² When the China War erupted in July 1937, newspapers once again sensationalized the Chinese and proclaimed the righteousness of Japanese military action in North China, not only to attract readers and boost circulation but also out of a sense of patriotic duty to nation.

One important difference in the media landscape after 1937 was that the state censorship system had become much more intrusive. When fighting between Japanese and Chinese forces broke out near Beijing in July 1937, the Army, Navy, Foreign, and Home Ministries all invoked Article 27 of the old Newspaper Law, requiring government clearance before the mass media could publish any reports about the war. The government decrees were designed to carefully manage both how the home front understood the significance of the fighting and to present a positive image of Japan overseas. In addition, the Army Ministry ordered censors to “safeguard military secrets in light of the danger of bringing out great harm to the military’s strategic plans.” After initially urging a “non-expansion policy” in China, the Konoe cabinet reversed course on July 11 to approve the army’s request for reinforcements in North China. At the same time, Prince Konoe summoned leading figures from the financial and publishing worlds to his official residence and secured their agreement to adopt a “national unity” position in supporting the government’s policies in China. Home Ministry censors issued a separate notice to all local officials on July 13 to ban the printing of “fallacies that are fundamentally mistaken on our China policy or reveal territorial ambition or bellicose use of force,” which would “contradict national goals” and “confuse the hearts of people and induce social unrest.” The Home Ministry further ordered newspapers not to print any “anti-war or anti-military articles,” “articles that give the impression that Japanese people are bellicose,” and “articles harboring suspicions that Japan’s external policy is aggressive.” These top-down commands were reinforced by informal consultations between media representatives and Home Ministry officials to prevent the publication of objectionable materials and clarify the boundaries of acceptable reporting. In other words, the wartime censorship rules were implemented by both official bureaucratic directives and appeals to the good graces and “courtesy” of media companies to practice “internal guidance” and self-policing.³

Elaborate state controls restricting press coverage were supplemented in September 1937 with positive messaging from the government-

² Louise Young, Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998): 114.
sponsored National Spiritual Mobilization Campaign Central League. Under the joint supervision of the Home and Education Ministries, this organization was charged with channeling popular support for the war around the ideas of “national unity,” “loyalty and patriotism,” and “untiring perseverance.” Just as soldiers were tirelessly fighting for the nation overseas, the Spiritual Mobilization Campaign called on civilians to devote themselves to “loyally serve the emperor and give back to the nation,” and prepare for long-term sacrifice.

In the face of such extensive state measures to tightly control and unify press coverage of the war, scholars have typically viewed the mass media in the China War as degenerating into mere parrots of government propaganda. Hata Ikuhiko argues that deviation by journalists from the official line was prevented by a powerful censorship system and the unconscious self-censorship of the media. Consequently, he contends, war coverage during the 1937 Shanghai–Nanjing campaign was based primarily on military press releases and traditional heroic war tales. Although acknowledging the general media excitement on the home front, Haruko Taya Cook also finds that “the newsmen were only covering the story exactly along the lines provided by army headquarters. Their perspective is completely that of Japanese military authorities and not that of either troops or independent observers.” Gregory Kasza similarly concludes that, after 1937, “given the penetration of mobilization policies, the resistance of the mass media was feeble on the whole, and the fundamental reason was patriotic support for the country at war.” Indeed, the media did not report on the great massacre at Nanjing or other related mass killings by Japanese soldiers in any way that might provoke the ire of military censors.

However, as the war in China quickly spiraled out of control beyond the overly optimistic predictions of the Japanese military, media coverage escalated to unprecedented sensational excess, provoking harsh criticism and private anxieties from military censors and civilian commentators.

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9 The one notable exception was Ishikawa Tatsuzō’s 1938 novel Ikiteiru heitai (Living Soldiers), which was quickly suppressed by military officials for its graphic depiction of violence in Nanjing.
The resulting media-promoted spirit of irreverence found during the first phase of the China War may have acted as a safety valve to soothe the popular disgruntlement over the rigors of spiritual mobilization, a fact which points to the limits of carnival’s subversive nature. But it also destabilized state propaganda by forcing consumer-subjects to constantly switch between an official and a “carnivalized” understanding of the war. In other words, Japanese society was mobilized for war through these conflicting visions of modern life: one that was regimented formally and informally by the state and another which eluded such controls to celebrate the grotesque and nonsensical.

The reasons for this bifurcated condition of mass mobilization can be traced to the relative powers and cultural cachet of censors and reporters. In practice, Japan’s military censorship system during the first six months of the China War was decentralized and starved of adequate resources and staff. War correspondents embedded with army units took advantage of the unevenly repressive censorship system to construct new spaces and content for aggressive and wild war coverage that would electrify the masses over a full-scale war against China. As a result, amid Shanghai street-fighting and particularly during the race to Nanjing, it was the war correspondents and not the military censors who shaped the tone of the news coverage.

This chapter explores three general but interconnected aspects of carnival war – the resilient sense of play within national mobilization, the ambiguous meaning of subversion, and the celebration of both the brutality and exhilaration of modern warfare. Exploring these issues requires historians to rethink the unquestioned dominance of wartime state ideologies within industrialized mass culture. A close reading of carnival war shows how state ideologies promoting rigid discipline, selfless sacrifice, and solemn patriotism clashed with contradictory media celebrations of the grotesque pleasures of modern life. And that clash in turn inspired further improvisation and revolts among state and non-state institutions. However multiple and contradictory, these visions, weaving together repression and joy, demarcated the broad parameters of carnival

12 For examples of works about the hegemonic power of Japanese wartime state propaganda, see Kasza, The State and the Mass Media in Japan; Barak Kushner, The Thought War: Japan’s Imperial Propaganda (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006); and David C. Earhart, Certain Victory: Images of World War II in the Japanese Media (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2008).
war. The figure who tried to control how the war was talked about was the unfortunate military censor. And the figure who outfoxed the censor to give a joyful voice to the world of carnival war was the reporter.

The Censor Becomes the “Effeminate Bookworm”

Although fearsome in appearance, the sprawling military censorship system that sprang up in the summer of 1937 was only unevenly applied by authorities. For example, in August 1937, the Army Ministry received 1,360 requests from newspapers to print military-related articles or photographs. Almost 80 percent (1,086) of the requests were approved, while only 20 percent (274) were rejected. Thereafter, to the alarm of Home Ministry police observing the Army Ministry’s censorship activities, “whatever the month, almost all submitted articles are approved.” The high approval rate was likely due to self-censorship among newspaper editors, who only submitted for review pieces they knew were likely to be approved. So long as articles mostly promoted valorous exploits of Japanese soldiers, and did not contain photographs or content that showed Japanese atrocities against Chinese or suggest the Japanese military was in a strategically disadvantageous position, newspapers were given relatively wide breadth of coverage. The one exception to this lax attitude was press photography on the frontlines. The military recognized the power of photography in swaying popular opinion back home and thus aggressively censored more images than text.13

The Navy Ministry introduced its own system of censorship in August 1937 after a naval clash with Chinese soldiers in Shanghai prompted direct naval participation in the war. On August 16, the Navy Ministry invoked Article 27 of the Newspaper Law to prohibit “the printing in newspapers of items concerning the operations of the fleet, vessels, airplanes, and units, and other classified military strategy.” Following the Army Ministry, the Navy Ministry also set up its own direct pre-censorship review system. And like the Army Ministry’s “ministerial decrees,” the Navy Ministry typically rubber-stamped the vast majority of articles while rigorously reviewing newspaper requests to print photographs.14

But the most hands-on censorship and coordination of the early war coverage was handled by the Army Ministry’s Military Press Department (gun hōdōbu). On August 20, 1937, a few days after the war expanded to Shanghai, a small group of army officers arrived in the city’s International

Concession to establish the Press Department’s onsite office. The Press Department’s primary purpose was to act as liaison between the Japanese newspaper correspondents and the field armies for arranging interviews and press briefings. The first few months of the Press Department were difficult, as the location of the office was exposed to daily mortar shelling by Chinese forces. The dangerous work conditions contributed to a chronic personnel shortage, and the office had trouble finding even a copyist and a driver. Inexperience was another problem. Major Mabuchi Itsuo, the department head, later admitted that he was a “complete novice” in media matters. Despite little training in dealing with the press, Mabuchi was picked by superiors to serve as official army spokesman for the Japanese press corps in Shanghai, which quickly ballooned to over one hundred reporters. He recalled how he “was at a total loss as to how to handle this. I wished that a bullet would just hit me or that I quickly be made into a battalion commander and leave for the frontlines.”

In addition to the lack of resources, dangerous conditions, and inexperienced staff, military censors sometimes struggled to gain even minimal recognition or understanding from other military personnel. Mabuchi recalled “all kinds of nonsense” happening in the early days with lost Japanese soldiers separated from their units stopping by the Press Department to ask for directions. Due to the similar-looking characters used for each term, soldiers confused the relatively new word “press” (hōdō 報道) with street guide office (michiannai 道案内). Other soldiers would stop by the office to seek counseling, having confused “press” (hōdō 報道) with “guidance” (michibiku 導く).

Within the military, there was institutional contempt for propaganda and censorship work. Despite years of research about the importance of propaganda following the defeat of Germany in the First World War, senior officers viewed military posts dealing with the media as tedious and decidedly unglamorous. Instead, most officers coveted higher-profile appointments overseeing military strategy, tactics, and field command. One lieutenant colonel transferred to do censorship work grumbled that “the press department is not a place for a real warrior.” Another former Press Department staffer, alluding to the fact that press officers essentially sit in an office all day reading books, magazines, and newspapers, recalled that he

16 Mabuchi, Hōdō sensen: 13–14.
and his colleagues were known within the military as “effeminate bookworms” (bunjaku). On the China front, some field commanders accommodated the Press Department’s requests to allow reporters to visit the frontlines, but others were annoyed at being followed around, while still others worried about reporters leaking classified information to the public. Not a few officers flatly refused to cooperate with the Press Department. Hearing reports of “troubles” (toraburu) between reporters and officers in early September 1937, Mabuchi decided to personally escort a group of correspondents to cover the fighting in Wusong, only to have to turn back to Shanghai upon receiving a terse message from one of the field commanders: “War correspondents are a nuisance and useless in carrying out operational duties. The embedding of reporters is for now denied.”

According to his 1941 memoirs, Mabuchi recalled a major incident breaking out in October 1937 between the military and the press when one newspaper (discreetly unnamed) broke the news that the army was preparing to launch a new offensive against the Chinese city of Dachang. Field commanders were enraged that reporters had publicized a classified campaign, thereby removing the element of surprise and allowing the Chinese time to fortify their defenses. The field commanders accused the Press Department of leaking the plan to reporters and demanded the court-martial of press officers. Mabuchi defended his staff and, after an investigation, concluded that the leak was the result of inadvertent misunderstandings. His explanation also revealed how understaffed the department was: “I was away traveling in the front and a temp who was filling in for my absence did the inspection [of the newspaper article]. Of course, he had no idea about the operational plans and gave the article a pass.” Although “all kinds of troubles arose from this issue,” Mabuchi noted that “somehow things calmed down.” Yet, reflecting on the uproar four years later, he lamented the weak coordination of military propaganda and censorship and reiterated his criticism of uncooperative field armies. Mabuchi also endured irate complaints from newspaper executives when his office blocked the reporting of certain war stories. “It was just impossible,” he remembered, “because someone like me with no tools was standing over and trying to regulate the person who had all the tools.”

Indeed, Mabuchi frequently blamed the troubled relationship with field armies for making the Press Department’s job all the more challenging. Field commanders withheld so much intelligence from military

18 Hirakushi Takashi, Dai hon’ei hōdōbu: Genron tōsei to sen’i kōyō no jissai (Tokyo: Kōjinsha, 2006): 32.
19 Mabuchi, Hōdō sensen: 31.
censors that he had to personally drive out to the front every morning to find out the latest war developments for press briefings. The Press Department was also in charge of censoring all articles before they were sent back to Japan. However, since the department was understaffed, Mabuchi finally asked the newspaper bureau chiefs to conduct their own internal censoring and only submit drafts to the Press Department to verify specific facts. To his relief, Mabuchi recalled, the newspapers were in “complete agreement.”

When the Imperial General Headquarters issued the order for the Nanjing assault in early December 1937, the Press Department immediately banned all newspapers from reporting the fall of Nanjing until an official military announcement was made. Reporters, vying with each other to scoop the news of Nanjing’s capture, hounded Mabuchi for clues as to which unit would reach the capital first. The competition among the correspondents during the Nanjing campaign, he observed, “grew more passionate than the besieging units.” During the chaotic march from Shanghai to Nanjing, some correspondents sent off reports of the capture of a Chinese city before it had really happened: “When a staff officer of one unit murmured, ‘looks like such-and-such town can be taken,’ the war correspondent standing next to him said, ‘All right, then it’s already occupied,’ and sent a telegram that such-and-such town was occupied. In the strict sense of the word, this was problematic communication, but I understood his impatience.”

Market competition placed intense pressure on news outlets to be the first to report the fall of Chinese cities, even if such reports turned out to be erroneous. For instance, both the Tokyo Asahi Shinbun and Dōmei Tsūshin news agency announced the fall of Wuxi on November 22, although Wuxi did not actually fall for another three days.

The powers of Mabuchi’s Press Department were further circumscribed by the permissive behavior of press officers. In early December, a “certain newspaper” ignored the department’s strict ban and scooped its rivals by printing a story about the Yoshizumi Unit seizing Nanjing’s Guanghua Gate. The blatant insubordination, according to Mabuchi, “created a huge uproar on the home front ... and threw local regulation and controls on reporters into disarray.” The press officer conceded that “our controls over local reporting fell into chaos right at the critical moment of Nanjing’s imminent fall.” Nonetheless, Mabuchi and his colleagues imposed only mild

22 Mabuchi, Hōdō sensen: 54–57.
punishment on the newspaper – one-week suspension from the Shanghai Reporters Club and no more complementary frontline inspections aboard military planes until the day before the army’s ceremonial entry into Nanjing. Harsher punishments were proposed by others, but Mabuchi was reluctant to crack down too hard: “I could not bear to impose a handicap (handekyappu) on the war correspondents working on the frontlines and risking their lives for articles and photographs.” He admitted that “outsiders” found the Press Department’s measures to be surprisingly “lukewarm” and “lenient.” However, he defended his decision, claiming that “in those tense moments when every second counted, the punishment was quite severe and, indeed, sufficient, for the newspaper.”

This is not to say that censorship was completely ineffective. The highly restrictive measures imposed on reporters by military and government agencies prohibited reports of battlefield operations except in the vaguest of terms, thereby driving newspapers to seek other kinds of war stories. As the casualties mounted, for instance, newspapers competed to be first to report the names and hometowns of the war dead, thereby drawing in civilian readers eager to find out the fate of loved ones.

But the intensive market pressures among newspapers helped undermine the elaborate wartime censorship system, so painstakingly created months earlier by Home Ministry bureaucrats and military officials. Thrill-seeking war correspondents stepped into this vacuum, as the first kings of carnival war, to capture the excitement of modern warfare for Japanese consumer-subjects.

The Reporter Becomes the “War Correspondent”

Despite his complaints about insubordinate reporters, Mabuchi praised war correspondents for keeping the home front informed about the fate of loved ones fighting on the front. He likened them to soldiers for “running around in the battlefield, with a pen instead of a gun, a camera instead of a cannon.” He believed that reporters played an especially important role in “modern warfare” for boosting the spirits among soldiers on the warfront and civilians on the home front with the latest war news. Thus, for Mabuchi, reporters were not to discover and report the “truth” of the war. Rather, their role was to provide critical psychological uplift for soldiers and civilians so that everyone would fully contribute to the war effort. “This is their most important mission,” Mabuchi intoned.

Indeed, the military demonstrated a conciliatory attitude toward the media in recognition of their important role in presenting a favorable picture of the war to the Japanese public. On August 4, 1937, the Army Ministry officially recognized all newspaper reporters, cameramen, and film operators working in China as “army war correspondents” (rikugun jūgun kisha).\(^{27}\) The number of war correspondents quickly ballooned as the war escalated. In October 1937, nearly 500 reporters were covering the war on the front.\(^{28}\) By the end of November 1937, this figure doubled to 1,000 reporters.\(^{29}\)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, newspapers feted reporters with praise typically given to soldiers, as on August 8, 1937, when the *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun* declared, “Let us pray for the War Correspondent.” The paper reported that the Tsuruoka Hachiman Shrine in Kamakura held a special prayer service not for soldiers but for “the newspaper reporters of all papers toiling alongside soldiers in the intense heat of the North China frontline, fulfilling their important mission of patriotic writing.”\(^{30}\) The Tsuruoka Hachiman Shrine also donated 53 “talismans” to the *Asahi* for their reporters in China.\(^{31}\) In November 1937, the powerful ad agency Dentsū put out four large notices urging civilians to give the same “comfort” honoring reporters killed in China as that given to fallen soldiers: “We believe that the glory of these victims has not one bit of difference with the honor of those killed in battle.”\(^{32}\) On December 6, 1937, the New Japan Sailors Union in Osaka passed a resolution to “express gratitude to the newspaper special correspondents undergoing hardships on the frontlines since the outbreak of the Incident, along with imperial soldiers.”\(^{33}\)

Basking in official endorsement and glory normally reserved for soldiers, reporters frequently became the topic of discussion among intellectuals as a new phenomenon peculiar to total war with the power to sway public opinion. In October 1937, the literary commentator Sugiyama Heisuke noted that the role of journalists is to “be the first to report on a situation where some dangerous phenomenon has arisen, then analyze,

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\(^{30}\) “Jūgun kisha e inoru,” *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun*, August 8, 1937.


\(^{32}\) (Advertisement) “Jūgun kisha imon go, so no ichi,” *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun*, November 2, 1937. Dentsū’s public praising of reporters reappeared in the *Tokyo Asahi* on November 12, November 20, and November 26, 1937.

interpret, and tell its significance to people.” However, he worried that this approach had led journalists toward superficiality and sensationalism, with “newspapers going wild with craze, devoting an entire page if there were stories about a serial killer or someone killing his son for insurance money.” For Sugiyama, the unfolding war in China only intensified this thirst for sensationalism among reporters on a massive scale: “If a serial killer story in peacetime would fill one page in the society section, then even a 300-page newspaper wouldn’t be enough to cover a single day of war.” Already in the early months of the war, Sugiyama noticed how reporters could easily shift the public’s attention to the latest battle at the expense of other stories which normally would have garnered significant coverage. “The murder of one or two people can be written off in a couple lines,” he lamented. “This is the age we are in now.”

The reporter was understood to be vitally important for the home front to stay abreast of the war, but also had the potential to dangerously disrupt and inflame public opinion.

However, in November 1937, journalist Ōya Kusuo was more sanguine about the reporter’s role on the home front. He believed that a new relationship had taken shape between the press and the military. In previous conflicts such as the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War, reporters were dismissed by the military as “outsiders” (tanin) and “nuisances” (yakkaimono). In the earlier wars, reporters would just stay behind the frontlines at the general staff headquarters and only visit the battlefield after fighting had finished to file a report. “But in this current Incident,” Ōya wrote, “such a leisurely, unhurried thing” (yūchō na koto) would not be tolerated by the frontline press corps. Starting with the Manchurian Incident, and especially in the current war in China, he felt that the relationship between the military and the press corps had remarkably improved, to the point that “already today the reporters are not treated as annoying burdensome bystanders.” Indeed, Ōya saw reporters as becoming assertive and even aggressive participants in war: “The reporters themselves will not take being treated like a nuisance lying down.” Reporters now worked right alongside soldiers on the frontlines, he said, and suffered casualties just like soldiers. “They are by no means writing ‘observations of military operations’ (kansen kiji),” he claimed. “While they may not be armed with guns, they fight alongside soldiers and dispatch ‘notes about real fighting’ (jissen shuki).”

But because the reporter was now imagined to be actively covering the war right alongside soldiers on the frontlines, observers of the newspaper industry all agreed that reporters must be young and enthusiastic. According to one anonymous columnist for *Nippon Hyōron (Japan Review)* in October 1937, “it is deeply felt that the war correspondent must be young. Reporting out on the frontlines is not suitable for one who is an old, seasoned veteran.” The columnist admitted that old reporters may still be suited for covering the occasional story outside of battle, but their headlines still required touching up by editors to fully capture the excitement of war. Seasoned reporters had become too accustomed to war and were no longer fazed by the scale of violence in battle. The columnist gave as an example a recent newspaper headline about Japanese forces destroying Tianjin’s East Station. The headline had to be revised by the editor into a more exciting style to draw reader attention: “East Station Blown to Smithereens, No Trace Left” (*koppa mijin*). While the headline was probably “a bit grandiose” and not close to the actual experience of the jaded old reporter, the columnist conceded, it was the kind of headline that war coverage needed. This made the youthfulness of reporters all the more important. “The writings of a young reporter will be personally different,” the columnist concluded. “You can liken it to baseball broadcasting, but he will certainly connect with the hearts of readers” (see figure 1.1).³⁶

Another industry insider concurred in October 1937, writing that “being young in age is an indispensable condition for newspaper reporters.” For this anonymous writer, youthfulness would mean reporters with “physical strength” (*tairyoku*) able to keep up with soldiers fighting on the frontlines. Thus, “at the very least, around thirty years old or so.” He was a little concerned with the average age of *Mainichi* reporters being between 36 and 37 years old: “Quite astonishingly old reporters,” he lamented. He cited the case of Special Correspondent Hirata from the *Mainichi* as a cautionary tale for allowing reporters above a certain age to cover the war. During a recent campaign in China, Hirata fell behind following a “much younger” reporter and ended up being killed by Chinese soldiers. Although acknowledging Hirata’s talents as a writer, the columnist felt he was past his prime: “if pushed I’d say that he was at the age when he should have been an advisor at headquarters.”³⁷

Writing two years later in 1939, the noted journalist and founder of Japan’s first journalism school Yamane Shinjirō rapturously described the

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national importance of the reporter as “a kind of public figure (kōjin) whose actions resemble that of a teacher, physician, priest, and attorney, with the professional duty to work with the masses to cover and criticize the various matters of state and society.” He noted the enormous power of the reporter, despite growing state censorship controls: “If with one stroke of the pen, the reporter can disrupt public peace and endanger people’s daily lives, then his character is definitely not something we can
ignore.” Reiterating earlier claims by others that the reporter in wartime must be relatively young and physically strong, Yamane argued that “the Reporter today is required to have vigorous health and strength. He must have excellent physical strength, working late into the night, performing superhuman feats covering a big story, or else he simply cannot do the job.” He noted approvingly that “during the China Incident, many war correspondents on the frontlines would dive through gunfire, or run through kilometers of mud carrying a wireless radio. They struggled with hardships unimaginable to a public who just thinks of the reporter with his fountain pen.” Yamane also believed that “common sense” (jōshiki) in knowing a little bit of everything was important to be a successful journalist, as well as being attentive and observant of everything. Thus, an individual with an educated background twinned with youthful vigor was the ideal journalist.38

The Thrills of Total War and the Crowning of the “Thrill Hunter”

Along with the new upstart status as “war correspondent,” the reporter also drew upon a new vocabulary which instantly conveyed battlefield violence to the masses as exhilarating, modern, and playful. In the early 1930s, intellectual observers of new social trends began using the word “thrills” (suriru) to refer specifically to the tension experienced watching an exciting film that induced fear or terror. One of the earliest descriptions of thrills is in the 1930 Modern Terminology Dictionary, which defined it as “emotionally moving, shuddering, shivering. The thrill of movies is the climax where the audience is drawn in and made to shudder.”39 The 1932 Latest Encyclopedic Social Language Dictionary similarly described thrills as “a film term referring to a climax or tension that sends a chill down one’s spine.”40

By the summer of 1936, the growing popularity of the word inspired literary critic Ōya Sōichi to write about a “theory on thrills” (suriru ron).41 Modern societies, according to Ōya, are full of “thrill hunters” (suriru hantā) seeking relief from the stresses of modern life because the “modern man” was “suffocating” in an increasingly atomized mass society. Ōya

found that thrills had a rather nihilistic quality. There is no purpose in thrills other than to seek them out. There is also no universal standard to judge the quality of thrills, since it all depended on individual tastes and circumstances. Instead, quantity is the only thing that matters, along with the amount of perceived danger. Incidents of sensationalized violence such as murder cases or even the recent February 1936 attempted army coup, Ōya continued, provide the “perfect opportunities” for throngs of “thrill hunters” (a word he used several times) to “satisfy their lust for ordinary thrills.” He stressed the modernity of thrills by arguing that they were particular to a mass capitalist society with a heavily commercialized mass media. “Modern men,” he explained, could no longer be satisfied by naturally occurring thrills and needed more intensive and “artificial” variants constructed by media, much “like morphine to a drug addict.” This metaphor underscored Ōya’s understanding of thrills as something modern, manufactured, and pleasurable, but also highly addicting and potentially deadly. To further illustrate the modern, commercialized, and addictive qualities of thrills, Ōya devised a “formula” to calculate the “thrill value” (suriru-ka) of anything:

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\text{Thrill Value} = \frac{\text{Quantity}}{\text{Unit Price}}
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The formula, he claimed, is used by people to decide which activity to engage in based on the quantity of thrills it contained. Likening “thrill value” to calories in food, Ōya argued that the most alluring thrills had to be mass produced and cheaply sold. An undercurrent of deviance or edge was also needed. It was for this reason, he said, that the popularity of traditional geisha among the urban masses was supplanted by more illicit and affordable street prostitutes who, in turn, lost their appeal upon gaining limited state recognition. “Thrill hunters” then turned to the new, sexually charged café waitresses knowledgeable of cutting-edge modern social mores.  

The idea of thrills as a phenomenon of capitalist modernity, extreme pleasure, and momentary celebration of transgression was echoed in a “New Word Dictionary” definition appearing in the January 1937 issue of Gendai (Modern) magazine. Thrills, the dictionary explained, were “the pleasant aftertaste of pure fright,” while adding, “To the extent one knows that modern life is dangerous like walking on the edge of a sword, thrills exist everywhere in the everyday.”  

in November 1936, the *Tokyo Asahi* described parachute jumping as “a modern, thrilling stunt in which with one false step you fall down head over heels.”

With the launching of full-scale war in China in 1937, the reporter picked up thrills and turned them into code that mixed together the visceral pleasures of killing, violence, and humor into an arresting cocktail within the otherwise oppressively solemn and severe edifice of wartime tension. Reporters dispatched to the front became, in a sense, professional “thrill hunters,” seeking stories of increasing extremity to capture readers’ interest and drive up circulation. As fighting between Japanese and Chinese forces broke out in the late summer and early autumn of 1937, “thrills” appeared with increasing ubiquity in news coverage.

Shortly after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in July 1937, correspondents from the *Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun* (commonly abbreviated as *Tōnichi*) reported experiencing “life and death thrills” when coming under enemy mortar fire. In the wake of the Konoe Cabinet’s escalation of the war from minor skirmish to a mission to “chastise atrocious China” in August 1937, a *Tokyo Asahi* reporter described to readers about the “thrills of a three-dimensional war” as Japanese residents in Shanghai watched “with stirring, unparalleled, thrilling, breathless excitement and cried out in wonder at the technological marvel of [the Japanese planes] dropping bombs.” During the height of Shanghai street-fighting in October 1937, perhaps in recognition of its growing ubiquity in war coverage, the *Tōnichi* introduced the term to the public in its “New Word Explanation” column:

**Thrills** – In English, it means “shivering” or “shuddering” . . . the tone to “thrills” you hear on the streets nowadays closely matches the sensations of the modern man . . . if air raids are thrilling then mountain climbing is also thrilling. There are thrills even in evading your parent’s watchful eye to break the law for love. If one carries out these adventurous acts, then anything can be thrilling.

That same day, the *Tōnichi* described an account of one correspondent’s “miraculous” escape from enemy fire as “the Thrills of the Front Lines.” In November 1937, a *Tōnichi* correspondent who went undercover as a Filipino reporter to infiltrate a Shanghai movie theater described watching an anti-Japanese film that “calmly showed atrocious,

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44 “Jikken shōnen wo koroshi, rakkasan wa mugon, ayamachi wa doko ni?” *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun*, November 22, 1936.
46 “Rittaisen no suriru: Kōgun muteki no funsen wo aoide, kaisai sakebu zairyū hōjin,” *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun*, August 18, 1937.
dead bodies one after the other; things got 120 percent thrilling as I shuddered in horror at the brutality of the Chinese.”

The capture of Nanjing in December 1937 similarly spawned a “thrilling tale” by Sublieutenant Shikata, whose unit was the first to enter the city. Shikata boasted of his unit finding and killing a group of fleeing Chinese soldiers near Chungshan Gate. “Look!” he excitedly told reporters, “All those corpses were killed by us.”

The idea of thrills was also used by reporters in conjunction with “humor” in battlefield violence. In November 1937, a group of journalists gathered in a roundtable sponsored by the weekly magazine Sunday Mainichi to discuss “thrills and humor (yūmoa) in bullet-ridden Shanghai.”

The discussion revolved around stories of narrow escapes from death while covering the Shanghai frontlines. In that same month, Tōnichi correspondents, in a long article filled with several references to thrills and humor, enthusiastically announced, “A World Rat-Trap Spectacle: The Last Chapter of Shanghai Street-fighting, Enjoying the Thrills of Modern Warfare, The Grand Finale to a ‘Hilarious Tale of Tragedy,’ Shocking an International Audience.” Hearing about a battle in the Zhabei district, the reporters rushed over “to witness the final three-dimensional war, one hundred percent thrilling Zhabei street-fighting.” Japanese troops had cornered a Chinese-held building and begun exchanging gunfire. By nighttime, the firing momentarily stopped until the reporters felt that “preparations for our offensive finally seem to be ready and before long, this sanctuary of thrills will be silenced by our evil-crushing sword.” Later that night, “the thrills thickened more and more” until the Japanese soldiers finally stormed the building.

The intersection of mass media and total war in 1937 transformed a foreign loanword to connote cinematic excitement into a code for carnival laughter in the face of violence. Thrills became the inverted doppelganger to the “tension” or “anxiety” (kinchō) of mobilization, distinct from the patriotism and seriousness of purpose promoted by the National Spiritual Mobilization Campaign, much to the chagrin of outside observers. A Bungei Shunju magazine columnist complained that wartime newspapers were concerned only with finding “color, ideology, and thrills”:

49 “Shanhai de mita ‘kōnichi eiga,’” Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun, November 24, 1937.
50 “Chūsanmon no ichiban nori, o, Tōnichi ka, hayai ne,” Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun, December 14, 1937.
51 “Dangan uhi no Shanhai de suriru to yūmoa o kataru zadankai,” Sunday Mainichi, November 21, 1937: 10–11.
52 “Sekai teki ‘nezumi tori’ kenbutsuki, Shanhai shigaisen no saishūhen, kindaisen no suriru mankitsu, kokkei na aiwa no ozume, kokusai kankyaku no shinzo kōru,” Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun, November 1, 1937.
War is not some drama at all, but newspapers treat it as a dramatic scene in which the reader becomes a character within his own drama. He forgets the purpose of war and its true nature. Although we keep saying there is still a long road ahead, he already gets drunk with the mood of victory. He desires a cheap peace and lacks any general tension.  

The idea of thrills became a linguistic metaphor bringing the violence of total war up-close for mass consumption, overthrowing the seriousness of mobilization. In this sense, it was not a form of escapist fantasy or merely an outlet for people seeking relief from the stresses of wartime life. In the discursive space of mass culture, it emerged in reaction to the rising “tension” of mobilization. Thrills conveyed an aspect of wartime culture distinct from the patriotism and seriousness of purpose promoted by the National Spiritual Mobilization Campaign. Writer Kimura Ki observed that more intellectuals like him were heading over to the China front to write reportage accounts than during previous wars. Improvements in transportation and reduced travel costs, he speculated, made these journalistic opportunities more appealing to writers. “But as for me,” he insisted, “the first attraction was the thrills of war.”

“Thrills” also contained its own mode of disciplining consumers to a new world of modern dangers – forcing them to sharpen their senses, to viscerally feel the plunge of a sword into flesh, the cold sweat on their bodies after escaping gunfire or hearing the explosions and screams during an air raid. As Enda Duffy has argued about “thrillers” in modern “speed societies,” thrills essentially represented “incitement on the one hand, education through terror on the other.” The adoption of “thrills” by reporters to capture the excitement of battlefield violence laid the foundations for increasingly irreverent stories from the front and a template through which war and mass culture could intersect. Through thrills, the mass media brought Japanese consumer-subjects into intimate contact with total war by transforming battlefield violence into a visceral and vicarious experience that brought together humor, exhilaration, and fear all into one alluring package.

The Speed of Total War

The reporter used thrills alongside the foreign loanword and cultural concept of “speed” (supiido) to help reconfigure total war into media spectacle. Speed

as cultural construct was already an important part of prewar modernism and modern life in Japanese mass culture from at least the early 1920s. There was a self-conscious awareness among Japanese writers and intelligentsia that modern life was accelerating due to new technological innovations and rapidly changing social norms. In 1930, magazine articles appeared discussing the “Speed Age” and the “Speed Problem.” In 1931, a writer on “The Art and Science of the Airplane” declared that the 1930s would be a “high-speed culture.” The January 1932 edition of “Latest Encyclopedic Social Language Dictionary” had no fewer than five speed-related entries: “Speed,” “Speed-Up,” “The Speed Age,” “Speed Meter,” and “Speed Mania.”

By the mid-1930s, the popular understanding of speed accelerating the pace of modern life was confirmed by new media technological innovations. In September 1936, the Asahi pioneered the phototelegram, which came equipped with an electric battery and 100 feet of aerial wire to transmit photographs electronically. Shortly thereafter, newspapers began using the radio telephone, which could be carried safely into the frontlines and had a range of up to 60 kilometers. The development of shortwave radio telegraphy allowed reporters to wire news from branch offices in China and Manchuria to the home offices in Japan. In addition, military expansion into North China was followed by reporters who established more offices in Tianjin and Beijing. Thus, by the summer of 1937, reporters enjoyed greater physical and technological proximity to China than ever before.

This technological proximity accelerated the pace of news reporting, thereby creating a paradox in social acceleration. As communication and media technologies accelerated, the amount of time reporters and

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consumer-subjects had to process the news decreased. There was more news than ever before, but it was increasingly difficult for people to make sense of it all. When the China War began, reporters realized that it would be unlike any previous conflict, full of hundreds if not thousands of individual experiences scattered all over the front and encompassing an array of strikingly different scenes from dramatic and rapid urban street-fighting and soldiers slowly marching through the vast Chinese countryside, to terrifying air raids, and grotesque nonsensical anecdotes. To be sure, reporters continued to practice tried-and-true traditional war reporting such as tales of battlefield heroism (bidan) and reprints of military press releases. However, the overwhelming enormity and rapidity of the conflict both challenged and inspired reporters to experiment with new methods to explain the war faster and more comprehensively through the news film (which was put into far wider practice than during the Manchurian Incident), tales of the nonsensical and grotesque, contrived media stunts celebrating speed, and the captivating new genre of “reportage” (ruporutāju) written in a hybrid mix of diary entry, novelistic style, and travelogue. In early 1938, one intellectual critic lavished praise on “reportage” while heaping scorn on conventional literature for failing to capture “a world which changes its appearance one after another in a filmic, speedy (furumuteki supiidi) way. This speediness (supiidiinesu) has very great significance in the mental every day of the present, which has seen the development of communication and media networks.”

Speed could also signify new state restrictions on the individual’s freedom of movement, reflecting the penchant of modernity to discipline and regiment everyday life through Taylorist modes of production and scheduling. But speed, like thrills, could also unlock liberated, intense visceral pleasure, thus illuminating the other side of modernity. The self-consciousness sensation of speed immediately gave the viewer, consumer, and producer a sense of being at once overwhelmingly powerful and highly vulnerable. Furthermore, both the term and concept of speed and thrills fed off each other. For the all-consuming, insatiable impulse

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65 Takaoki Yōzō, “Ruporutāju no honshitsu,” Chūō Kōron (February 1938): 477. For more details on reportage-style China War coverage, see chapter 2: “‘Senso’ no katari – Nichū sensō wo kōkoku suru buntai,” in Narita, “Rekishi wa ika ni katarareru ka?”
of speed and thrills in a wartime setting demanded a deterritorialized space—a place stripped of all previous local historical distinctiveness and identity; a blank slate onto which thrill hunters and speed seekers could construct new fantasies of empire.\(^{66}\)

In this respect, reporters who internalized the urgency of speed turned China into a non-place in media coverage. Reporters referred to Chinese soldiers as nondescript “enemies” (teki) who existed only to be summarily wiped out by Japanese soldiers in spectacular fashion. Reporters would, in rather aggressively casual and inconsistent fashion, sometimes write out place names phonetically with furigana to approximate the actual Chinese pronunciation, but other times would instruct readers to pronounce Chinese place names with Japanese pronunciations of the characters. Even radio broadcasters would pronounce already well-known place names approximating the actual Chinese pronunciation but then during the same program switch to a Japanese reading of less-familiar names.\(^{67}\)

The authenticity of reporting from faraway China was tempered by a dismissiveness towards a need for any serious representation of China as place. While ethnographic, almost prurient details about Chinese women appeared repeatedly in the wartime press, parallel to this conversation was a discourse that deemphasized the particularities of China as place and instead celebrated the speedy, thrilling movements of Japanese soldiers and reporters into, through, and out of China as space. Much of the actual battle coverage consisted of a seemingly endless listing of Chinese towns and villages with no description to distinguish one from another. The Japanese military conquered the new non-place of China through various levels of speed such as the rapid deployment of soldiers, tanks, artillery, and airpower. Japanese reporters echoed this speediness of war through near-instantaneous reporting with radio, photography, and telegrams.

Back on the home front, references to speed shaped how some media industry observers viewed the growing news frenzy of the military campaigns. In the newspaper industry periodical *Gendai Shinbun Hihan (Modern Newspaper Critique)*, critics, usually anonymous, grumbled that the *To-nichi* always “jumps the gun” in projecting the fall of Chinese cities. By contrast, the *Asahi* was criticized as “too slow and cautious” or even just a “slow-mo” (suro mō).\(^{68}\) In October 1937, one industry critic of

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\(^{66}\) This is drawn from Duffy, *The Speed Handbook*: 18–19, 45–46, 267.

\(^{67}\) To the point that one writer complained that the inconsistent ways journalists pronounced or wrote out Chinese names were confusing readers. See Abe Shinnosuke, “Shakai jihyō” *Gendai* (January 1938): 98–99.

journalism complained, “The editors aimlessly focus only on speed—anything will do, doesn’t matter, just hurry, hurry. Newspaper editors focus more on speed and quantity over quality.” The columnist “KRK” called the acceleration of war reporting “news speedyism” (nyūsu supii-diizumu) in depressing terms: “Newspapers have deviated from their true nature and write nothing more than fictional works. Fictional works are turned into telegrams, then print, and then into news... From their willful news speedy-ism to leaking military secrets, newspapers themselves misguide national policy.”

Home Ministry officials overseeing domestic media censorship worried about magazines and newspapers becoming more sensationalized by adopting the worst features of each other, thereby accelerating the pace and coarsening of the news. The bureaucrats quoted approvingly at length an article from the October 1937 issue of the right-wing journal Tōdairiku (Great Eastern Continent) on “The Crisis and Vulgar Popular Journalism.” According to the article, since the war began, “magazines have become newspaper-ized (zasshi ga shinbunka),” meaning that formerly thoughtful magazine pieces have deteriorated into flimsy ill-researched articles rushed to publication in imitation of daily newspapers. Newspapers were also criticized by Tōdairiku for turning into magazines (shinbun no zasshika) by devoting more pages to the arts and entertainment sections and hiring popular writers. The piece blamed the pernicious influence of commercialism pushing newspapers and magazines to “pander to readers” through articles that focus on entertainment as opposed to serious topics.

By November 1937, as the Battle of Shanghai started to wind down, Japanese army units shifted their attention to the Chinese capital city of Nanjing. The war transitioned from grueling urban street-fighting to a high-speed blitzkrieg across the numerous cities and towns stretched between Shanghai and Nanjing. As individual army units began racing toward Nanjing, reporters created the “first to arrive” (ichiban nori) contest, in which the first unit to enter a Chinese city would be praised in newspaper articles as “first to arrive.” For example, the Tōnichi reported in early November that in the occupation of Yuci, “first to arrive was the Okazaki Unit, followed by the Kobayashi Unit.” The Sunday Mainichi

72 “Yujiku, Kan jōchin aitsugi senkyō, Taigen no teki, imaya nezumi no fukuro,” Tokyo Nichinchō Shinbun, November 5, 1937.
breathlessly recalled for its readers the fierce race among rival Japanese units to be “first to arrive” at Dachang. 73 An embedded Mainichi reporter similarly declared, “Our unit lets out the war cry of first to arrive! The soldiers of all the units equally burned with the desire to be ‘first to arrive in Dachang!’”74 Reporters also claimed for themselves the title of “first to arrive” in freshly conquered Chinese cities. In the early morning of November 9, Tōnichi correspondents followed the Ōba Unit in climbing up the walls of Taiyuan, noting, “among newspaper reporters, we were truly first to arrive.”75 The most-prized goal among reporters was to be crowned “first to arrive in Nanjing” (Nankin-jō ichiban nori). At Nanjing’s Chungshan Gate, Tōnichi reporters ran into a surprised Sublieutenant Shirakata (the man with the “thrilling tale”) who exclaimed: “Hey, are you Tōnichi? You’re terrifically fast. I’ll vouch that you guys were the first from the press corps to arrive here.”76 One Yomiuri reporter secured permission to board an army attack plane during a bombing mission over Nanjing. The Yomiuri then proudly announced, “As a reporter he succeeded in being first to arrive from the skies in Nanjing.”77

**Thrills and Kills**

In addition to “first to arrive” contests, reporters from both the national dailies and regional papers actively covered kill-counts by Japanese soldiers. These stories combined the whimsical attitude of thrills with the rushed velocity of speed. The Tokyo Asahi trumpeted on August 22, “Shanghai Camp’s ‘Miyamoto Musashi’ slays twenty Chinese soldiers like watermelon” (Shinahei nijūmei suika giri Shanhaijin no “Miyamoto Musashi”), only to be countered by Tōnichi’s September 2 story of a unit that “counted up to forty but later could not recall 1000 kills” (yonjūnin made kazoeta ga ato wa oboenu senningiri) and a September 3 “interview with the ‘1000-man killing unit’” (“senningiri” butai wo tō). Several kill-count stories used the phrase “clean sweep” or “killing with one sword stroke” (nadegiri). The Tokyo Asahi printed on September 9 a story of “Unit Commander Kakioka who, using his blade like a saw, jumped into a trench and killed 34 men in one clean sweep” (sanjūnin nadegiri).

74 “Ichiban nori o mezashite tosshin su!” Sunday Mainichi, November 21, 1937: 4.
75 “Teki no shikabane, gō ni jūman, gammei, Taiyuan zanhei no saigo, honsha tokuhain ichiban nori,” Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun, November 10, 1937.
76 “Chūsanmon ichiban nori, oh, Tōnichi ka, hayai ne,” Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun, December 14, 1937.
77 “Kesshi, Nankin daikōchūsen sanka, honsha kisha rikugunki ni dōjō,” Yomiuri Shinbun, December 5, 1937.
On November 17, the *Fukushima min’yū* similarly described a soldier who “could still fight even without bullets, sixty killed in one clean sweep” (*tama wa nakute mo tatakai wa dekiru rokyūnin no nadegiri*).78

The extraordinary violence of the Japanese invasion of China has been well-documented. However, what is less remarked upon is that the very words used by newspapers to describe the killing of Chinese soldiers, such as *senningiri* and *nadegiri*, carried irreverent double-entendres. According to the 2001 edition of the *Nihongo dai jiten* (Great Dictionary of Japanese), the word *senningiri* (literally “thousand-man killing”) could mean either, “slaying one thousand people for practice or for prayer,” or “having sexual relations with one thousand women.”79 A “new word dictionary” (*shingo jiten*) from 1938 defined *senningiri* as “1) cutting down many people and 2) having [sexual] relations with many women.”80 The same new word dictionary defined *nadegiri* as: “Having [sexual] relations with women one after another like cutting down vegetation.”81

Recognizing this wartime media context helps us historicize the most infamous kill-count story, the *Tōnichi*’s coverage of the “Hundred Man Killing Contest” (*hyakunin giri kyōsō*). This was a contest between two young Japanese officers competing to see who could be the first to kill one hundred Chinese soldiers with a sword. Unlike the one-off kill-count stories, the *Tōnichi* devoted four installments of this killing contest during the Nanjing campaign from late November to mid-December 1937.82 Today, the killing contest is remembered primarily through arguments between the left and right wing in Japan over whether the contest even happened, or as a shocking symbol of the cruelty of Japanese militarism and grotesque prelude to the Nanjing Massacre.83 But at the moment of

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78 These articles and more examples are reprinted in Ono Kenji’s compilation of copycat kill-count stories, which he collectively refers to as “countless hundred man killings.” See Ono Kenji, ed., “Hodō soreta musū no ‘hyakunin kiri,,’” *Kikan Sensō Sekinen Kenkyū* 50 tōkigō (2004): 74–83.


81 Watanabe, *Gogen kaisetsu*: 129.

82 The story appeared in the *Tōnichi* on November 30, December 4, December 6, and December 13, 1937.

its production and consumption on the Japanese home front, the Hundred Man Killing Contest and the other kill-count stories may be understood as the culmination of reporters’ efforts to tantalize readers with thrills and speed in total war.

After the Second World War, several Japanese right-wing writers dismissed the Hundred Man Killing Contest as a pure fabrication by reporters, citing the nonsensical tone in news coverage and the ludicrous idea of a private contest conducted within the imperial army. Indeed, the other kill-count stories compared the killing of Chinese soldiers with slicing watermelons, made references to the legendary samurai hero Miyamoto Musashi, and described soldiers “mowing down” their targets or reaching the implausible figure of “1000 kills.”

From a different perspective, the kill-count stories suggest a new genre of war journalism being created by reporters for home front consumption. The irreverence of kill-count stories is a jarring contrast with the traditional wartime tales of heroism and bravery (gunkoku bidan) mass-produced by publishers during the Manchurian Incident and the China War. Bidan usually told the story of a soldier performing a self-sacrificial act in battle for the sake of the nation with particular focus on his glorious death. The tone was invariably sentimental and serious, without a trace of humor. In the kill-count reports, by contrast, the focus was not on the glorious death of the Japanese soldier, but his spectacular killing of Chinese soldiers in whimsical fashion. The media’s fixation on kill-counts both dehumanized the enemy into an abstract numerical figure and transformed battlefield violence into a modern game with outcomes easy for readers to compare, classify, and track. According to Tōnichi reporters, the two officers participating in the Hundred Man Killing Contest eventually lost count of who first reached 100 kills. Using baseball terms, reporters noted that the contest became a “Hundred Man Killing Drawn Game” (hyakunin giri dōron geiimu) and that the officers decided to go into “extra innings” (enchōsen).

Given the playful tone of these stories, the sexual wordplay was certainly chosen by the reporters and likely to have been recognized by readers. It was through this wordplay that Chinese soldiers were dehumanized, emasculated, and broken down into interchangeable parts signaling violence, sex, and humor. The preoccupation with the body and


84 See summary of their arguments in Wakabayashi: 323–324 and 328–329.
bodily functions recalls Bakhtin’s concept of grotesque realism – the highly exaggerated and graphic embrace of the material body and its activities during the time of carnival. Grotesque realism stresses this “degradation” of the body as a positive force reaffirming the vitality and energy of social life. In a similar vein, the kill-count stories used tongue-in-cheek wordplay that breezily linked celebrations of life (sex) and death (killing).

The relationship between the soldier and the reporter was at the heart of the kill-count stories. The killings must be performed or said to be performed by the former and witnessed and recorded by the latter to have any cultural valence. In one instance, the Tōnichi actively assisted a soldier in finding a new sword when his weapon broke down under the strain of killing nearly thirty Chinese soldiers. In the Hundred Man Killing Contest, one of the contestants invited the Tōnichi and its sister paper, the Osaka Mainichi, to judge the contest and offered to donate his prized sword to the newspapers after the game was over. Therefore, unlike bidan, which were created unilaterally by either military propagandists or newspaper editors on the home front, kill-count stories were coproduced by the correspondent and the soldier on the warfront. The soldier provided sensationalized material for the reporter otherwise limited by censorship rules. The reporter, in turn, granted the soldier public acclaim at home for spectacular battlefield exploits. Nearly 40 years after the event, one of the Tōnichi reporters covering the Hundred Man Killing Contest recalled the following:

I remember we were getting ready for a tent encampment that night there. M. and N. officers saw the newspaper flag we hoisted up and came over. I remember they asked, “Hey, are you guys Mainichi Shinbun?” and a conversation began. They said that because their unit is the smallest unit, they expressed dissatisfaction somewhat that their brave battle exploits have not been reported in newspapers back home. They talked about how the soldiers on the frontlines fought so bravely in high spirits. Now I don’t recall the various tales they told, but among them was the story of a contest plan of martial exploits (bukō) that was young officer-like (seinen shōkō rashii), and that they were planning, the “Hundred Man Killing Contest.” Among all the war tales we heard, we selected this contest idea. We then

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88 This understanding of the grotesque differs from Miriam Silverberg’s use in her analysis of Japanese interwar mass culture. Silverberg uses the grotesque to refer to the raw tensions experienced by the “down-and-out” living in a modern urban culture, experiencing gross inequality between mass leisure and pleasure, economic hardship and social marginalization. See Silverberg, Erotic Grotesque Nonsence: 30 and 203–204.
89 “Yuushi no nayami,” Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun, November 6, 1937.
added and telegrammed this idea toward the end of that day’s many war progress articles. This was the first report of the “Hundred Man Killing Contest” series.91

In return for publicizing their exploits, soldiers would also help reporters gain a better sense of the shifting warfront. Field commanders normally tried to keep the press “two or three kilometers behind the frontlines,” thereby making it difficult to cover the latest troop movements. However, frontline soldiers came to the rescue by burning local Chinese homes to signal to reporters back at headquarters where the frontline had moved that day. The reporters would see the smoke from a distance, then correlate the rising smoke in the horizon with a map to determine the new location of Japanese units.92 The reporter was thus not simply a neutral observer of the news, but fulfilling his new wartime role of covering and creating the news for the home front.

While carnivalized grotesquerie rendered the male Chinese body as an eroticized numerical abstraction, in a slightly different way, the female Chinese body also became the object of intense scrutiny in Japanese wartime media. (See figure 1.2) During the Battle of Shanghai in October 1937, in the otherwise serious intellectual journal Chūō Kōron (Central Review), the writer Inoue Kōbai wrote an article called “Erotic Grotesque Notes on Chinese Lewdness.” Below a drawing of an exotically dressed Chinese woman with slanted eyes and a face half-obscured by mysterious shadows, Inoue declared that the biggest hobbies in China are opium- and alcohol-induced stammering, gambling, hedonism, and games. For “hedonism” (kyō), he claimed that since Chiang Kaishek’s New Life Movement was launched in 1934, Chinese cities were now overrun by the proliferation of movie stars and dancers moonlighting as “street girls” (sutoriito gāru) who would extort money from male customers in restaurants and cafes. “Ill-mannered women of all sorts are allowed in China,” he observed, “which has many feminists (feminisuto).” Inoue disapproved of the recent popularity of the qipao dress in China for suggestively accentuating the female figure. He noted that they were mostly worn by “girl students and floozies (baita)” and that all women were now sporting short hair. “Spiritually and materially, they have thrown away the strong points of their country,” Inoue lamented.93

92 Asami, “Shingata no shingun rappa wa amari naranai”: 344.
A few months after the fall of Nanjing, in the March 1938 issue of Gendai magazine, the novelist Muramatsu Shōfu opined that although Nanjing women dressed plainly with little makeup, “underneath, in their underwear and lingerie, they wear more flamboyant, risqué things... with an even more suggestive effect.” He explained to readers that most Shanghai women were prostitutes while Guangzhou, “the city of the
bizarre" (ryōki no tokai), was famous for blind prostitutes who could “satisfy bizarre local tastes.”94 In November and December 1937, the Tōnichi reinforced this gendered depiction of China as a vulnerable, erotic, feminine creature with such sensational headlines as “China Finally Screams” (Shina, tsui ni hime wo agu) and “the Moans of Nanjing’s Annihilation” (Nankin shimetsu no umekī).95

There was a particular Japanese media obsession about the Chinese army being filled with women masquerading as soldiers, thereby suggesting that Chinese soldiers represented a kind of perverted gender. According to Sayama Eitarō, writing in Fuji magazine in October 1937, there were Chinese female soldiers (onna no heitai) who “quite bravely serve as platoon or company commanders.” He described these women’s primary mission to teach Chinese soldiers “anti-Japanese thought.” But at other times, he claimed, “in the camps, they perform erotic services (ero sābisu) for the senior officers.” In their “handbags” (hando baggu), Sayama continued, the female soldiers kept “medicine, needle and thread, egg cream (depilatory), and strange sexual tools (myō na seigu),” in addition to “three to four love letters (rabu retā).”96 In October 1937, Tokyo Asahi reporters found that retreating Chinese soldiers redoubled their efforts after encouragement from “two hundred young, short-haired female soldiers.” The Chinese male soldiers leapt over trenches to throw grenades at the Japanese camp, before going back to the female soldiers.97

In November 1937, the Tōnichi reported that there were “frequent appearances of female troops (jōshigun) near Shanghai who would gain the following of Chinese soldiers in camp with amorous tactics (momoiro senjutsu).” After a brief battle, soldiers from the Ōno Unit were shocked to learn that their now-slain opponents were actually female soldiers, “with the same clothes as that of male soldiers except for a blue woolen knit hat. Scattered next to the corpses were invariably gramophones and records of Chinese pop songs.”98

97 “Iiki na Shina hei,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, October 20, 1937.
98 “Dai issen o makidasu, momoiro tokusen no jōshigun, seikyō made kanzume ni sarete, aware o yamu Mushaku sensen,” Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun, November 29, 1937, C2. “Jōshigun” 娘子軍 or “female army” was possibly a reference to an all-female soldier unit led by a Chinese princess during the Tang Dynasty. The term “jōshigun” was also being used by the Japanese military as a euphemism for military comfort women. See Yuki Tanaka, Japan’s Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution During World War II and the US Occupation (London: Routledge, 2003): 12.
The idea of eroticized Chinese female soldiers was even taken up in a January 1938 routine by the male–female comedy duo Azabu Shin and Azabu Rabu, which was printed in Yûben (Eloquence) magazine:

AZABU SHIN: Do you know about the female army (jôshigun) in the Chinese military called the Thank You Unit (irôtai)?
AZABU RABU: What’s the Thank You Unit?
AZABU SHIN: As the name implies, it’s a “thank you” unit (irôtai). In popular parlance, we would say it’s an erotic unit (erotai).
AZABU RABU: What do you mean by “erotic unit?”
AZABU SHIN: That is, they go to where the Chinese soldiers are on the frontlines and fully give their all (shikkari yatte chôdai yo). With that being said, they do various kinds of services (iroiro to sâbisu).
AZABU RABU: Then what?
AZABU SHIN: Chinese soldiers love women. So their spirits are lifted when they hear the women’s seductive voices, and they rush out of the trenches. Then our military’s machine guns go bang, bang, and shoot them down.
AZABU RABU: That’s a really weird battle tactic.
AZABU SHIN: In this war, there’s a lot of weird tactics.

The comedians are making a word pun of irô (recognition of services) which sounds similar to iro (sensuality or lust), ero (erotic), and iroiro (various). Accompanying the printed comedic routine was an illustration of a young woman with bobbed hair and high heels, stylishly posing in a tight fur-lined black dress that exposed her breasts, while holding a cigarette. Around the woman are uniformed Chinese soldiers excitedly sniffing her dress or admiring her figure, while in the background other soldiers are shown rushing off to battle, armed with rifles.99 These stories were most likely fabricated pieces designed to ridicule the Chinese military but also reflected the desire of reporters looking for the next bizarre or sensational story. Like the highly charged interplay woven into kill-count stories, these reportage accounts of Chinese women tied together ideas about the body, violence, and humor as part of a greater media transformation of war into a product for mass consumption.

Playful humor, killing, and wordplay were also found next to the Hundred Man Killing Contest story from early December 1937, in a long article entitled: “Such Interesting Colors at the Front! A Unit Full of Variety (baraietii). Policeman in Entertainment Trio. Unit Commander is Priest. An Instant Prayer for a Slain Enemy Soldier. A Whole Year’s Worth of Combat Standup Material.”100

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100 “Sensen ni kono isai!” Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun, December 4, 1937.
profiled a Japanese unit made up of three unlikely comrades – a policeman, a priest, and a *manzai* comedian. Matsudaira Misao, the comedian, tells the reporter the following “un-*manzai*-like *mandan*” story.¹⁰¹

The story begins with the Jiading to Taicang offensive . . . outside Taicang [i.e., during the march from Shanghai to Nanjing], a regular soldier holding a hand grenade was captured alive. At that moment, Sergeant Gotō showed off his police training by cleanly finishing off [the soldier] with one stroke of the sword. Watching this was Sublieutenant Harada who, under his military uniform, fiercely aspired towards Buddhahood. He took out rosary beads from his pocket and, right then and there, said a sutra with all due ceremony. That night at Taicang, the three of them set up a bathtub and happily got inside. Later they discovered that the tub was not a water jug . . . but a vat for toilet use. At that moment, Private Matsudaira roared with a *dodoitsu* poem, “Gazing at the moon from the bathroom window, our luck sure ran out (benjo no mado kara, otsuki sama wo nagame, kore ga honto ni un no tsuki).”

Matsudaira’s joke here makes two puns. In Japanese, the word *un* means both “fortune” and human feces (written with different characters but the reporter wrote the words in ambiguous phonetic script). Furthermore, the expression “bad luck” or “bad break” in Japanese is *un no tsuki*. *Tsuki* can mean “moon” as the first part of the joke implies and also a verb meaning something coming to an end, again with different characters used. The intricacies of the punning aside, this rapid-paced narrative casually intermixed violence (slaying a captured Chinese soldier for show) with ersatz religious piety (giving an “instant prayer” for the soul of the slain Chinese) and lowbrow bathroom humor (mistaking an oversized chamber pot for a bathtub).

The confluence of uneven censorship and the powerful market pressures on reporters to hunt for speed and thrills created a loosely structured environment in which carnival war flourished. Stories of grotesque violence, couched in playful humor and silliness, had little to no strategic significance or meaningful commentary on the politics of the war, so they avoided the watchful eyes of military censors. The killing contest stories, for example, usually appeared in the arts and entertainment section, behind the sports page. They frequently shared space with other stories

featuring local units placed in dangerous, comical, or bizarre situations on the front, such as the “unit full of variety.”

The celebration of the grotesque through all these stories signaled the growing carnival energies surging through wartime mass culture. But it is also connected to the specific moment of late November to early December 1937, when the military campaign escalated from urban street-fighting in Shanghai to the siege of Nanjing. During those fateful weeks, kill-count stories and other bizarre reports began appearing with greater frequency in the pages of Japan’s largest newspapers as the “speed” of modern life swept into the media frenzy and accelerated the hunt for “thrills.”

“’Tis the Season for the Fall of Nanjing!”

From August to early November, the Battle of Shanghai became a stalemate with the Japanese side sustaining casualties of 9,115 deaths and 31,125 wounded. The stalemate was broken on November 5, 1937 when the Tenth Army made a surprise landing at Hangzhou Bay behind Chinese lines and forced Chinese soldiers to retreat to Nanjing. On November 7, General Matsui Iwane amalgamated all field armies into the Central China Area Army (CCAA) under his command to pursue fleeing Chinese troops. The Japanese Army and Navy in Tokyo belatedly established the Imperial General Headquarters (IGHQ) on November 20 to centralize and coordinate wartime strategy. The IGHQ ordered the CCAA to stop the advance and regroup near Lake Tai to await further instructions. However, CCAA frontline units ignored the demarcation line and pushed forward to Nanjing, followed by war correspondents.102

Among the reporters embedded in the units racing to Nanjing was 28-year-old Asami Kazuo from the Tōnichi. Asami represented the ideal reporter for wartime; a young man in his late twenties who had attended elite Waseda University before joining the Mainichi newspaper company (parent company of the Tōnichi) in 1932.103 Asami typified the youthful vigor and learned professional background of the reporter particularly sought after by intellectuals and journalists on the home front. During the march to Nanjing, on November 30, Asami and several colleagues wrote the first story about a “Hundred Man Killing Contest” (hyakunin giri kyōsō), recording that Sublieutenants Mukai and Noda already reached

103 This is based on a brief biographical summary at the back of his 1971 book on China. See Asami Kazuo, Shin Chūgoku nyūmon (Tokyo: Chūō Tosho, 1971).
56 and 25 kills respectively. The Tōnichi reporters interviewed Mukai and Noda during a break from campaigning at Changzhou Station:

**Sublieutenant Mukai:** I’ll probably kill about 100 by the time we get to Danyang, let alone Nanjing. My sword cut down 56 and was only nicked a little, so Noda will lose.

**Sublieutenant Noda:** We’ve decided that we won’t kill those that run away. I’m working at the [censored]-office so my results won’t go up, but I’ll show a big record by the time we reach Danyang.\(^{104}\)

The next day, on December 1, the IGHQ authorized a full-scale assault on Nanjing but instructed the units to march in orderly stages. The plan was for all units to regroup at a closer location, and then launch a united general assault on the city, thereby avoiding a chaotic, haphazard campaign. But the CCAA’s Shanghai Expeditionary Force and the Tenth Army ignored the plan and moved straight toward Nanjing city walls ahead of schedule.\(^{105}\) Japanese newspapers excitedly covered their race to Nanjing and the imminent capture of China’s capital city. On December 3, the Tōnichi announced, “Nanjing, now at hailing distance.” The next day, the Tōnichi printed a second story from Asami and his colleague Mitsumoto which reported that Mukai was up to 86 kills, while Noda had 65 kills. The correspondents caught up with Mukai at the now-conquered city of Danyang:

My man Noda is no blockhead because he’s really catching up. Don’t worry about Noda’s cut. It’s not serious. Because of the bones of the guy I killed at Lingkou, there’s a nick in one place on my Magoroku. But I can still kill 100 or 200 men. You guys from Tōnichi and Daimai [i.e., Tokyo Nichinichi and Osaka Mainichi] can be the referees.\(^{106}\)

By December 6, as thousands of Nanjing residents fled into the “Nanjing Safety Zone” set up by Westerners in the city, Asami’s third report on the killing contest appeared in the Tōnichi. He noted that the competition had become a “close contest,” full of “bravery” with

\(^{104}\) “Hyakunin giri kyōsō! Ryō shoī, hayaku mo hachijūnin,” *Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun*, November 30, 1937. Asami co-wrote the first killing contest article with two other reporters, Mitsumoto and Yasuda. However, Asami appears to have been the principal author as he is the only reporter credited with all four installments.


Mukai at 89 and Noda at 78.\textsuperscript{107} The following day on December 7, Chiang Kaishek and his government officially evacuated Nanjing for Hankou.\textsuperscript{108}

As media excitement intensified over Nanjing’s imminent capture, army officials began to complain about the media coverage. On the evening of December 6, at the Army Ministry’s annual press club gathering, army press officers rebuked journalists for oversensationalizing the fall of Nanjing: “All this raucous carnival is troubling” (omatsuri sawagi) said one unmused officer. The army urged people to exercise more “self-control” in the festivities and go pray for the war dead at Yasukuni Shrine. Whether the \textit{Tōnichi} reported this story with a straight face is unclear, especially since its account gratuitously mentioned that the press club dinner menu had been, ironically, “Chinese food” (chūka ryōri).\textsuperscript{109}

On December 9, General Matsui issued an ultimatum to remaining Chinese forces in Nanjing to surrender. When the deadline passed on the following day with no response, Matsui ordered all CCAA forces to begin the general assault on the city walls.\textsuperscript{110} By the evening of December 10, a military telegram had arrived in Tokyo announcing that Japanese soldiers were now mopping up the enemy within Nanjing city walls. The telegram created an excited uproar in Tokyo, as explained by the \textit{Tōnichi} with a hint of sarcasm at the end:

The attention of all citizens is focused on this one point in newspaper extras and radio. Excited hearts from all over the country are beating faster and faster . . . today especially, in the imperial capital, an explosion of cheers and Japanese flags buried underneath the waves of fire from the lantern processions. But we must not forget the officials’ attitude to “avoid raucous carnival” and try to go to shrines to commemorate the spirits of the war dead.\textsuperscript{111}

After repeating the military’s buzzword of “raucous carnival,” the \textit{Tōnichi} reporter went on to describe the night’s commotion from the telegram. Tokyo residents flooded the Army Ministry Newspaper Group office with phone calls asking, “Did Nanjing really fall?” Meanwhile, journalists at the Army Ministry headquarters pressed officials on when a formal telegram announcing Nanjing’s conquest would be released. A beleaguered

\textsuperscript{109} “Nankin kanraku no kōden o machi, Mazu Yasukuni jinja ni sanpai,” \textit{Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun}, December 7, 1937.
\textsuperscript{110} Masahiro, \textit{Nanking: Anatomy of an Atrocity}, 64.
\textsuperscript{111} “Sono yoru teito no kōfun,” \textit{Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun}, December 11, 1937.
Lieutenant Colonel Hayashi promised that “as soon as the official telegram arrives, I will make an announcement.” The unsatisfied reporters remained at the ministry late into the night to await more answers. The atmosphere was so chaotic that the reporter overheard an excited office boy happily declaring, “Tonight, I’m staying,” before pulling out a chair and blanket to settle in for a long night.112

The formal issuance of surrender terms by General Matsui on December 9 and the official authorization for a full-scale assault on December 10 were somewhat lost in the growing media excitement over Nanjing’s capture and the presumption by reporters that the campaign had already begun. Although the national dailies all covered the Nanjing campaign with fervor, the Tōnichi was the most aggressive in its coverage. After years of falling behind the Asahi and Yomiuri in circulation, the Tōnichi suddenly soared to the top of the newspaper world during the China War by boldly injecting “loud and flashy” elements in its war coverage. The newspaper slyly invented its own scoops by simply attaching the qualifiers “virtually fallen” (jijitsujo kanraku) and “completely fallen” (kanzen kanraku) to maximize the number of breaking stories it could report. On December 8, the Tōnichi released the headline, “Nanjing – Virtually Fallen: Enemy Forces Routed, Offensive Suspended, Outside of City, Leisurely Awaiting Entry.”113 The Tōnichi never seemed to lack vigor during the Nanjing frenzy. According to one anonymous critic, “the Tōnichi put out an extra on the evening of December 7, saying, ‘Nanjing – virtually fallen.’ The Tōnichi is very adept at making gullible people... they make people think that ‘Hey, Nanjing has fallen!’”114

The Yomiuri Shinbun was also quite enthusiastic in its war coverage, and also openly complained about the authorities’ reservations about excessive celebrations. On December 8, Yomiuri reporters speculated in one article, “Before long, Nanjing will fall! Nanjing will fall! ... the hearts of all citizens were beating fast, waiting for the ‘It’s broken into!’ news. Aah, entering Nanjing city! ... Still the stern and unmoving leadership of the Army and Navy ... [have] told us to, ‘Stop your raucous carnivals and go to Yasukuni Shrine’... But why can’t we be happy? The irrepressible joy of the people has already lit the fuse, preparing for flag processions and lantern parades.”115 As Nanjing’s downfall became a foregone conclusion

112 “Sono yoru teito no kōfun: gaimushō ka, kaigai e no yorokobi no hiden, shimin no me to mimi, Miyakezaka e,” Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun, December 11, 1937.
113 “Nankin: jijitsujo kanraku su, tekigun kaisō,” Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun, December 8, 1937.
115 “Nankinjō wa me no shita da,” Yomiuri Shinbun, December 8, 1937.
in many media outlets, Asakusa, Shinjuku, and Ginza transformed into “crucibles” (rutsubo) for grand festivities, complete with blazing neon signs and lantern parades. Cafes bustled with patrons gorging on celebratory toasts and feasts. Department stores announced special sales and put out outlandish war decorations. “All of Ginza,” gushed the Tōnichi five days before Nanjing’s fall, “is drunk in gratitude to the imperial forces and the great victory.”

On December 7, the Tōnichi announced that Nanjing had become a “city of death,” while the Tokyo Asahi tantalizingly told readers that Nanjing was “hanging by a thread.” On December 8, the Tokyo Asahi still reported that Nanjing was “on the brink of death.” Meanwhile, the Tōnichi cried, “Hurry Ring! The Bells of Newspaper Extras,” and invoked Christmas-like festivities by proclaiming: “‘Tis the Season for the Fall of Nanjing’ (Nankan kanraku hiyori).” The evening edition described for readers the sounds of planes dropping bombs onto the city, exploding buildings, huge roaring fires, and the screams of panicked Chinese residents as “the moans of Nanjing’s annihilation.” The military campaigns on December 8 also prompted the Tōnichi to proclaim, “Nanjing’s Elegy: Nanjing Surrounded by Self-Destructive Inferno.” That same day, the Yomiuri boldly declared, “Imperial Forces Rush into Nanjing Fortress at Once, Its Downfall is Any Moment Now.”

On December 9, the Tōnichi announced with a playful mixture of irony and triumph, “The World’s Greatest Joy and Tragedy: Nanjing Now Surrounded and Cornered.”

On December 11, the Army Ministry issued a second warning to the public, “Do not get drunk with war victories” and urged greater “self-restraint” and “self-control” on the press. The National Spiritual Mobilization Executive Department issued a directive to all local branches, sternly warning residents to exercise “self-discipline,” have a “new recognition” of the war itself, and be more “serious.” The same day of the second

118 “Nankan imaya fuzione no tomoshibi,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, December 7, 1937.
119 “Shuto Nankan no meimyaku tanseki,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, December 8, 1937.
121 “Nankan shimetsu no umeki,” Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun, December 8, 1937.
122 “Nankan no banka’ Nankan jimetsu no gōka ni tsutsumaru,” Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun, December 8, 1937.
124 “Sekai saidai no kankei to higeki: ima Nanjinjō o kakonde tairitsu,” Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun, December 9, 1937.
125 “Kinchō o yurumeruna, fi mo shimin no jikei o unagasu,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, December 11, 1937.
evening edition, the Yomiuri suddenly declared, “It’s Broken Into, it’s Fallen!... This long awaited day has appeared as a great joyous present like Christmas and New Year’s shoved all at once right before the very eyes of one hundred million citizens.” The Yomiuri also announced that, “the Wakizaka Unit smashed through Guanghua Gate... surged into the city and became the amazing first to arrive in Nanjing.”

By December 12, Tokyo shops began selling “Fall of Nanjing Noodles” (Nankin kanraku soba). Advertisements for Morinaga milk caramel and Isetan Department Store’s end-of-the-year lottery sale urged readers to buy their products in celebration of Nanjing’s imminent capture. The general excitement even drove the Kabutochō stock market into “explosive” growth. Stock speculation over when Nanjing would fall led the press to coin a new buzzword, “Nanjing Nouveau Riche” (Nankin narikin). The Tokyo Asahi, trying to capitalize on the national frenzy over all things Nanjing, printed a list of Japanese words which happened to include the word “Nanjing” such as “peanut” (Nankin mame), “bedbug” (Nankin mushi), and “Chinese rice” (Nankin mai) (see figure 1.3).

Nanjing’s long-awaited downfall finally occurred on December 13, 1937. The date coincided with the Tōnichi’s final report on the Hundred Man Killing Contest and a hint that more killings were ahead:

> NODA: “Hey, I got 105. You?”
> MUKAI: “I got 106!”
> BOTH SECOND LIEUTENANTS: “Hahahahaha!”

Eventually, they ignored who was the first to cut down one hundred and agreed at once, “Well, let’s call it a drawn game. But what about doing it again, up to 150?” And then, at last, the 150 man killings began.

The reporters then interviewed Sublieutenant Mukai for comment during a break in mop-up operations to find remaining Chinese soldiers at Purple Mountain, near Nanjing: “Well, it was great that both of us passed 100.

127 “Nankin jōtō sansan tari nisshōki,” Yomiuri Shinbun, December 11, 1937.
129 “‘Senshō keiki’ no bakuhatu,” Yomiuri Shinbun, December 10, 1937.
130 “Nankin kanraku sóba de dare ga mōketa ka,” Hanashi (February 1938): 104.
131 “Nankin zukushi,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, December 12, 1937.
My *Seki no Magoroku* was nicked because I cut through the steel helmet of one guy. When I’m done fighting, I promise I’ll donate this Japanese sword to your company.” After describing a near-miss incident involving a flamethrower, Mukai dodged flying enemy bullets as he “showed the reporters his Magoroku, which soaked up the fresh blood of 106 people.”

On December 15, apparently indifferent to the army’s earlier admonition against “getting drunk with war victory,” the *Tokyo Asahi* announced, “Imperial capital drunk with the toasts of fire” as Tokyo residents spent a second late night partying in the streets. On January 25, 1938, the *Osaka Mainichi Shinbun* (Kagoshima–Okinawa edition), reported that the Hundred Man Killing Contest was at 253 kills, with the two officers now vying to first reach the new goal of 1,000 kills (*sennin giri*). The same

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133 *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun*, December 15, 1937.
newspaper also printed the lyrics to “The Blade of the Hundred Man Killing Sword Song” (*hyakunin giri kireaji uta*), which described how the sword in question “gave a hungry, mournful cry” as it “showed me the killings, the hundred-man killings.”

**Wild Dancing in Ginza**

In the 1938 New Year’s edition of the gossip magazine *Hanashi* (*Talk*), the satirical cartoonist Ono Saseo gave readers his impressions of “Ginza in military triumph” during this season of carnival war. Strolling down the grand boulevards of downtown Tokyo, Ono described being “bewitched amidst such strong colors – the comings and goings of the newly fashionable waves of red, yellow, and green ... Glossary: Ginza-dōri dazzled like the explosion of a howitzer gun.” Upon hearing the familiar tune of the military marching song, the cartoonist felt “the thrills (suriru) of the battlefield.”

At a Ginza dance hall where, “in this time of crisis, the elevator is packed like a can of asparagus,” Ono observed crowds of people “wildly dancing,” which prompted this reflection: “War and dance. In every corner of the globe, when the sound of gunfire booms and roars, dance mania rises up like a spring.” On the dance floor, he overhead a young couple’s conversation, which seemed to internalize an increasingly carnivalesque home front:

**WOMAN:** “Hey, I have a favor to ask.”
**MAN:** “What is it? If it’s something I can do ...”
**WOMAN:** “It’s something for the nation.”
**MAN:** “Hmm, say again?”
**WOMAN:** “Pleease buy me a patriotic war bond!” (*aikoku saiken katte kudasaru naï*) The girl clung to him, her breasts underneath thin lingerie pressing closely to the very corners of his dress shirt.
**MAN:** “Alright, alright. This will be my present (*purezento*) for you.”
**WOMAN:** “Ohhh, I’m so happy.”

For Ono, this was the perfect solution, “With one stroke, he appears to have settled this in a spirit of patriotism and passion.”

A “dance maniac” friend then staggered over to Ono after flirting with a “beautiful madam.” “Gosh, it’s so weird,” blurted out the dance maniac, “Even though they say there is a war going on, when you think about it, there sure are lots of sleazy guys. Parties and stuff are going on non-stop.” Ono muttered to himself, “Ha ha, isn’t it sad.” Ono realized that

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pleasure-seeking was not an escape from war but, rather, its intimate partner, its life-force.

The reporter helped knit together such a potent combination of war and pleasure for a home front audience. And in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Nanjing, he continued to ascend greater heights of social grandeur. At the January 1938 Imperial Poetry Ceremony, the Empress Dowager, imperial princesses, and members of the peerage read aloud poems all praising the “war correspondent.” As one lady-in-waiting explained, these public readings by such esteemed personages “express the personal intentions and sympathies of Her Majesty, their Imperial Highnesses, and imperial attendants toward the war correspondent and how hard he works on the frontlines.” The Empress Dowager herself was reported to have been “deeply awed and moved” (kyōku kangeki) reading in the papers about “the war correspondent who, through intense heat and cold, and under bullets, connects the warfront and home front.”

A more sardonic assessment was made in January 1938 by a commentator in Gendai magazine. Acknowledging their prowess in speed, their bravery, and their fearless depravity, he compared war correspondents to “flies gathering around horse dung on the battlefield”:

Like flies chasing after and swarming around a new horse dung, the Reporter search for and gather around the latest gunfire and then scatters. With the outbreak of the China Incident, requests for pen and camera correspondents flooded in. Immediately, in North China and Shanghai, the bold press war had begun. Then, like flies, the quick and light (keikai de kibin na) special correspondent began his remarkable activities.

The Decrowning of the “Thrill Hunter”

As the mass killings began in Nanjing on December 13, 1937, the crackling energies of carnival abruptly dissipated on the home front. The war ground on, of course, but only as a slow, unending stalemate, with no more dramatic victories filled with thrills and speed. The stock market bubble burst shortly after Nanjing fell, prompting media commentators to sneer that the “Nanjing Nouveau Riche” (Nankan narikon) were now “Nanjing No Moneys” (Nankan nai kin). By the end of 1937,

136 Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, January 23, 1938.  
137 Yamazaki, “Jikyoku no wadai”; 445.  
138 There have been considerable disputes over the exact death toll in the Nanjing Massacre, but more reputable sources range from 150,000 to 300,000 casualties. See Fujiwara, “The Nanking Atrocity”; 51.  
the Home Ministry imposed new restrictions on dance halls and other leisure activities.  

In March 1938, the Diet passed the National Mobilization Law, empowering the government to ban the sale and distribution of any publication, and also to intervene, reorganize, merge, or abolish existing media companies in the name of war mobilization. In September 1938, the Army Ministry, to better control media coverage, mobilized selected writers into a new “Pen Unit” for military-sponsored trips to China. Pen Unit writers would then write more controlled and on-message stories about the military’s triumphs on the warfront. The reporter was now tamed, it seems, and at least partially decrowned. Mabuchi himself, writing in 1941, criticized the correspondents during the first months of the war for “degenerating into a sports-like competition.” However, he expressed relief that “as the Incident entered into a constructive war (kensetsusen) and as newspapers have awakened even more to the crisis, this evil practice (heigai) has gradually declined.”

As for the reporter himself, his aura dimmed somewhat as new media controls constricted his movements. By 1939, newspaper industry accounts sadly observed that the major newspapers were hemorrhaging reporters approaching 40 and tired of dangerous work conditions and low pay. These journalists “hightailed it” to more lucrative opportunities in the booming wartime munitions industry. An old veteran reporter lamented in 1940 that reporters had become completely docile, having “lost their newspaper reporter soul” to become nothing more than a “salaryman” or “bank clerk,” working for a paycheck. The days when reporters bravely organized popular protests demanding constitutional government or universal suffrage during the 1910s and 1920s were now over, he felt. On the other hand, the old reporter conceded that the new generation of reporters was more professional and respected than before with the knowledge and skill to interview government ministers about politics or the economy. “This has led to the disappearance of ‘eccentric’ reporters of old,” he observed.

Yet memories of the failure to manage media hysteria lingered on in official minds long after the fall of Nanjing, aggravated by periodic eruptions of the grotesque and nonsensical in wartime mass culture. Following its initial appearance in the Tōnichi, the legend of the Hundred Man

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142 Mabuchi, Hōdō sensen: 171.
143 “Shinbun no maki,” Hanashi (August 1939): 116–118.
Killing Contest migrated to other cultural artifacts. In February 1938, the popular women’s magazine Fujin Kurabu (Ladies’ Club) published a poem entitled “Warfront Romance: The Hundred Man Killing Sublieutenants,” adorned with a color illustration of a Japanese soldier striking down an unseen enemy with a sword (see figure 1.4).145 In March 1938, the Kagoshima Shinbun recorded Sublieutenant Mukai’s 374th kill on the China front while in May 1939, the Tônichi reported that the killing contest had escalated to the new goal of 500 kills (gohyakunin giri).146 The Yomiuri Shinbun’s collection of China War anecdotes in May 1938 contained an episode called the “Blood-drenched Hundred Man Killings.”147 In the fall of 1938, the publishing giant Kôdansha released a children’s book, The All-Out Attack on Nanjing, that included a highly dramatized recounting of “The Patriotic Hundred Man Killings.”148 Meanwhile, the vocabulary of carnival war continued to circulate in wartime mass culture. “Thrills” still appeared as a cutting-edge buzzword in a 1940 “new word” pocket dictionary that captured the danger and excitement of modern life:

Thrills – Translated as a feeling of shivering, shuddering, trembling; a modern sensation. The modern man has radicalized emotions to the utmost degree. He constantly seeks out stimulation of intense senses. For instance, the staggering spectacles of car racing or aviation adventures or a close call in wild animal films, watching these scenes that give him goose bumps, one can recall the satisfaction of these senses. This is called “thrill.”149

Official apprehensions of another “raucous carnival” reappeared during later moments of intensive military campaigns. In anticipation of the military’s capture of Hankou in October 1938, officials from the Tokyo municipal government, the Home Ministry, and the Education Ministry issued new “celebration rules” to guide people toward “simple and frugal” festivities and avoid “costume parades and raucous carnivals.”150 Following Japan’s entry into the Pacific War against the United States and Great Britain in December 1941, the Cabinet Information Bureau

150 “Kankō kanraku’ wa sairen de,” Yomiuri Shinbun, October 25, 1938: 2; “Katte kabuto no . . . omatsuri sawagi ni ochisu na,” Yomiuri Shinbun, October 26, 1938: 2; “Kankō kanraku’ wakitatsu zenso,” Yomiuri Shinbun, October 26, 1938: 2.
Figure 1.4 “Warfront Romance: The Hundred Man Killing Sublieutenants.” *Fujin Kurabu* (February 1938): 33.
issued guidance for citizens to maintain a serious and proper attitude and “not descend into raucous carnival.”

And in January 1942, following the Japanese navy’s stunning attack on Pearl Harbor, the film magazine Eiga no Tomo (Friend of the Movies) explained to its readers the importance of the news film in war coverage with these rather ambivalent words: “in an uneventful world, one seeks out speed, thrills, and spectacles... Speed, thrills, and spectacles are sought after by the cameraman. He is called the glorious warrior of the three Ss. Or, to put it another way, he is their slave.”

The media frenzy which gave birth to carnival war was brief and ephemeral. But its violent progeny remained on the Japanese home front to transform the prewar culture of “Shōwa modernism” into a new mass culture inextricably bound with national mobilization. As the war dragged on in China, new cultural icons emerged in Japanese fantasies to further shape the language, aesthetics, and rhythm of total war: the munitions worker, the soldier, the movie star, and the youth aviator. The genesis of these media constructs can be traced back to late 1937, when the culture industries reconfigured the cruelties of modern warfare into the thrills of modern life.

152 Kainan Mototada, “Wadai wa midare tobu nyūsu eiga!” Eiga no Tomo (January 1942): 55. In Japanese, the word “thrills” is transliterated as suriru, hence the “three Ss.”
The munitions worker emerged out of the smoldering ashes of carnival war to become an object of desire, envy, and rage for seeming so out of place in an era of austerity and sacrifice. He reflected perfectly, however, the peculiar intersection between war mobilization and mass culture. As metaphor, cultural construct, and the personification of society’s deepest hopes and fears, the munitions worker intermittently disrupted the official order but not fatally so, for he never completely overthrew the system. Instead, he exposed the hollow arbitrariness of official ideologies, thereby cracking open new imaginings of a more revitalized world. In wartime Japan, the munitions worker became a trickster-like figure within the discursive anxieties of Japanese police, intellectuals, and bureaucrats in reaction to the unexpected tumult of labor mobilization. The onset of war led to the mass conscription of adult men into the armed services and a severe labor shortage on the home front. Labor scarcity provided young workers in real life and the munitions worker in the popular imagination opportunities to loyally serve the state in munitions factories but also to revolt against state imposition of socioeconomic controls. This ambiguity led the munitions worker to be simultaneously honored and despised in official and popular discourse.

An examination of the munitions worker has profound implications for thinking about modern Japanese history. Wartime Japan is usually characterized as a moment when national mobilization, labor controls, and rationing curbed consumer spending to the point of extinction. This

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perspective meshes well with the often-told story of the triumph of a hegemonic “culture of thrift” that prioritized economic frugality and the subordination of personal desire for national goals. According to this narrative, a series of state-directed compulsory wartime savings campaigns and the intensive drilling of factory youths appealed to many Japanese aspiring toward a modern, rational, and disciplined middle-class way of life, which went on to define postwar Japanese society.  

The sanctity of thrift was also reinforced by the transnational consensus in the 1930s and 1940s that victory in total war required severe reduction in popular consumption and significant bolstering of national savings to free up resources for the military.

Drawing on these important insights, the munitions worker serves as a heuristic device for thinking about an alternative side to wartime modernity that celebrated not austerity but avarice, not obedience but disobedience, not discipline but disorder. War mobilization did empower the state to reconfigure Japan’s prewar class society into a rational and function-based “total war system.” But mobilization also created new social divisions by granting workers the resources to engage in the modern-day practice of “binge consumption.” The misbehavior of munitions workers enraged conservative guardians of an austere and disciplined vision of the Japanese home front. And yet, the critical role the munitions worker played in sustaining Japan’s war machine, along with the abetting of factory owners and the military services, shielded him from the most onerous state controls. While


6 According to the theory of binge consumption, marginalized groups cut off from traditional social institutions and subsisting on irregular income tend to binge their earnings on hedonistic pleasure-seeking. This is not a throwback to undisciplined premodern practices but a phenomenon rooted in modern industrial capitalism. That is, as Richard Wilk writes, “the binge is always present in capitalist consumerism, for even if it is suppressed or concealed, it is always the logical complement, the ‘evil twin’ lurking in the background behind the ideology of thrift.” See Richard Wilk, “Consumer Culture and Extractive Industry on the Margins of the World System,” in John Brewer and Frank Trentmann, eds., Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives: Historical Trajectories, Transnational Exchanges (Oxford and New York, NY: Berg, 2006): 125 and passim.
many Japanese munitions workers were certainly exploited by the state and endured harsh working conditions following the 1939 enactment of labor conscription, mobilization also opened new interstices for some worker agency and creativity. Andrew Gordon demonstrates how workers during the war evaded labor and wage controls through job-switching, slowdowns, and sabotage. The ineffectiveness of labor controls forced factory owners and bureaucrats to implement innovative workplace reforms beneficial to workers, which laid the foundations for Japan’s famous postwar employment system. In a slightly similar vein, Sasaki Kei argues that the wartime state used not only coercion but also “positive” campaigns promoting worker welfare benefits and “labor culture” to enhance worker productivity.

This chapter seeks to further explore the innovative, even improvisational, dimension of carnival war within total war mobilization – as a constantly shifting “experience” as opposed to rigid “system” – by looking at the mass media fantasies of the munitions worker in wartime Japan. The unanticipated social turmoil of mobilizing for total war and the subsequent inability of the state to permanently discipline real-life munitions workers contributed to a multifaceted construction of the munitions worker in the popular imagination. While Japanese civilians were harangued by official calls to sacrifice for the war just like the noble “industrial warrior,” they learned from the media about the worker’s glittering life on the home front. In the 1939 Japanese comedy film, Enoken’s Tough Tactics (Enoken no ganbari senjutsu), middle-class passengers aboard a first-class train car watch in stunned silence as rowdy factory youths break into boisterous song over a newly won 30 percent pay raise: “It’s our world now – and what a fantastic time it is! Bankers and office workers don’t even come close . . . Let’s drink sake and sing! Money is no object! Let’s be outrageous and go crazy!”

The munitions worker claimed the mantle of the patriotic “industrial warrior” while scorning state-promoted values of thrift and self-discipline.

7 For studies highlighting the repressive side to labor mobilization, see Katō Yūji, Nihon teikokushugika no rōdō seisaku (Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobō, 1970); Havens, Valley of Darkness; and Rice, “Japanese Labor in World War II.”


As a phantasm of carnival war intimately tied to industrialized warfare abroad and mobilization at home, regulated and rewarded by the state, feted and feared in mass media, the worker exhibited all the hallmarks of a classic carnival king. “Wartime” was his world now – and what a strange, fantastical time it was.

**Early Wartime Mobilization and Its Consequences**

The munitions worker emerged out of a society mobilizing for total war. When the China War erupted in the summer and fall of 1937, the government called up hundreds of thousands of adult men for military service. By December 1937, nearly 600,000 men were conscripted into the army. By the end of 1938, the military conscripted another 530,000 adult men.11 The large numbers of adult men going into the military in 1937 and 1938 created a labor shortage in the munitions industry. To safeguard the labor pool, the government unleashed a torrent of labor control legislation. In October 1937, the Home Ministry created a system of employment agencies that would allocate workers based upon labor requests from munitions plants.12 In January 1938, the Welfare Ministry was founded at the army’s behest to be the primary agency spearheading labor mobilization.13 Subsequent legislation later that year, such as the National Mobilization Law and the Revised Employment Exchange Law, empowered the Welfare Ministry to, among other things, impose extensive controls on labor, wages, and private enterprises in order to maximize the nation’s economic productivity in time of war, as well as coordinate all employment agencies toward the new state mission of “industrial labor placement.” While the Cabinet Planning Board identified several potential labor supply pools such as single unemployed women, people laid off from jobs made redundant by war, and Korean immigrants, “in the end, after all is said and done, the one group that could provide the most in numbers are recent elementary school graduates.” That is, young men and boys who finished compulsory education but below the military conscription age of 20 were seen by government officials as the ideal targets for labor recruitment (see figure 2.1).14

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Figure 2.1 The Factory Youth. Cover of *Shōnen Kurabu* (March 1940).
State efforts to draw young men into the munitions industry saw an immediate impact. From 1937 to 1941, the number of male factory workers grew from 2.1 million to 3.6 million.\textsuperscript{15} The accelerating growth in munitions workers was particularly noticeable in army-run arsenals. In 1937, there were 88,124 workers in all army arsenals. This figure jumped to 137,981 in 1938, 152,318 in 1939, 174,464 in 1940, and 215,790 in 1941. Even this expansion was not enough for munitions factories to keep pace with the growing military demand for weapons and supplies. In 1940, army arsenals nationwide were still operating at only 60 percent capacity.\textsuperscript{16} To cope with the manpower shortage, in July 1939 the government issued the National Labor Conscription Ordinance to begin conscripting workers. However, labor conscripts constituted a relatively small proportion of the industrial workforce over the next couple of years. Only 850 conscripts in 1939 and 53,000 conscripts in 1940 were called up. It was not until 1941, when the possibility of war with the United States and Great Britain loomed, that the government invoked the full force of labor conscription to mobilize workers en masse.\textsuperscript{17}

The gendered labor mobilization policy of the Japanese government also exacerbated the worker shortage on the home front. Unlike other home fronts in Great Britain, Germany, and the United States, the Japanese government was reluctant to fully mobilize women into the labor force out of fears of undermining the pro-natalist “family–state” ideology and disrupting domestic food production now reliant on female farm labor. Although women constituted a significant part of the national labor force, the proportion of overall female labor only grew slightly, from 39.3 percent in 1940 to 41.8 percent by 1944. The gender disparity was especially evident in the munitions sector. The proportion of female workers in the metals and machinery industries modestly increased from around 8 percent in 1936 to a bit under 12 percent in 1941. For the manufacturing and construction sector in 1940, women made up only 24 percent of workers. In 1944, this figure dropped slightly to 23.7 percent. Even in August 1944, when dire war conditions convinced the government to finally impose labor conscription on women, labor mobilization targeted only unmarried women and widows while exempting married women.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} Yamazaki, \textit{Senji keizai sōdōin taisei no kenkyū}: 359–360.
\textsuperscript{18} Yoshiko Miyake, “Doubling Expectations: Motherhood and Women’s Factory Work under State Management in Japan in the 1930s and 1940s,” in Gail Lee Bernstein, ed., \textit{Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press,
With relatively muted labor conscription in place until the last year of the war, factories resorted to high compensation to recruit and retain young men. Throughout the late 1930s, press coverage of the booming munitions industry helped publicize the opportunities awaiting young workers. These stories laid the first building blocks for constructing the ambivalent image of the munitions worker byzeroing in on not only the economic benefits workers received but how unrighteous, unnatural, and excessive their wages were. In the fall of 1937, one investigative reporter discovered that a leather factory which normally employed 200 workers was hiring an additional 500 temps to keep up with the military demand for boots and belts. At this particular site, workers were earning over 100 yen per month, larger than the then-average monthly factory worker salary of 35 yen.19 In the summer of 1938, newspapers were reporting that Mitsubishi Heavy Industries gave out 250 percent bonuses while Hitachi Factory, Nakajima Aircraft, and Tokyo Gas announced bonuses of up to 150 percent to attract and keep workers.20 More reliable figures suggest a less sensational but still significant growth in factory pay. According to official military statistics, by 1941 the average monthly wage of an army arsenal worker grew from 70.25 yen in 1935 to 90.52 yen.21

Journalist Sugiyama Heisuke, writing for Gendai (Modern) magazine in August 1938, called on the government to “balance out this unevenness.” Businesses in the so-called “peace industries (heiwa sangyō),” such as silk and textiles, he wrote, were suffering under strict wartime controls that blocked access to overseas markets and critical raw materials. By contrast, the “wartime industries (senji sangyō)” were flourishing. Sugiyama concluded, “there are some who are extremely lucky and others who are extremely unlucky because of the war. This is not a good thing.”22

In August 1938, bureaucrats from no fewer than seven ministries (Home Affairs, Finance, Commerce and Industry, Army, Navy, Justice, and Welfare) held a conference to discuss the growing problems of the “imbalanced economy” (hakō keizai). The conference attendees claimed that munitions workers were “chuckling over their bonuses and raises”


21 Yamazaki, Senji keizai sōdōn taisei no kenkyū: 367.

while those in the “peace industry” suffered layoffs and unemployment. Echoing Sugiyama’s remarks, they reserved the bulk of their public statement admonishing the munitions industry: “It is only in the military munitions sector where many are wastefully and extravagantly spending due to their pay raises. This is a most serious matter.” The bureaucrats urged workers to “refrain from wasteful spending” and “follow the national policy line in wartime” by putting their excess wages into savings accounts.  

Shortly thereafter, the Welfare Ministry announced a plan to establish “home front daily life reform groups” (jūgo sekatsu sas Shin han) in all factories to encourage workers to save their earnings instead of “ignoring the Finance Ministry’s savings campaign” by engaging in “wasteful spending.”

A juvenile delinquency expert similarly decried the growing economic dislocations brought on by mobilization, which, he said, created a “lopsided economic boom” (henzai keiki). With fathers away fighting in the frontlines and mothers forced to make ends meet by working outside the home, the writer argued, Japanese factory youths were irresponsibly earning high wages without adult supervision: “Many of them earn about three yen a day or fifty to sixty yen per month. This rapid rise in income allows for easy spending binges. Not a few of these youths wear extremely gaudy clothes and shoes. Many frequent cafés and coffee houses.” And when the money is gone, “many descend into crime.”

A university professor, writing for the intellectual journal Kaizō (Reconstruction), likewise observed that juvenile delinquency seemed to be most pronounced around munitions factories. He claimed that because workers were earning inappropriately large sums of money, they were “recklessly indulging themselves in pleasure.” In Gunma prefecture, the Purity League (junketsu dōmei), a nationwide group of Japanese Protestant social activists, became alarmed at growing licentious activities around local munitions factories. Starting in 1938, league members made repeated visits to the factories to teach workers to follow a more austere and morally disciplined life.

In May 1939, the writer Koiwai Kiyoshi bitterly complained that munitions workers in downtown Tokyo were flaunting their newfound wealth in a time of national austerity. Recalling that, before the war, social divisions were between the city and countryside, he argued that “now the

23 Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, August 27, 1938.  
24 Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, October 5, 1938.  
divide is between the munitions industry and small businesses.” In his view, the munitions boom brought about two undesirable social trends among factory workers – spending sprees and juvenile delinquency. “Frequently,” he observed, “it is a factory worker ordering an expensive item on the second floor of the department store . . . these are nouveaux-riche workers who defy national policy by engaging in reckless spending and foolish carousing . . . When one thinks about our young men today risking their lives fighting on the continent, one becomes quite disturbed at this lack of personal propriety and spiritual mobilization.”

Koiwai’s complaints reflected the growing axiomatic belief on the home front that the war had created an unfair division between those in the munitions industry and those who were not. And that young munitions workers were inappropriately earning excessive wages to splurge on frivolous activities during a time of national crisis.

Beginning in 1939, the government took stronger actions to rein in worker spending and job-switching for higher-paying positions. An April 1939 Welfare Ministry decree ordered workers to seek government approval before switching to a higher-paying factory job. However, this decree proved ineffective when factory owners simply provided newly hired workers with forged consent forms. A special Welfare Ministry task force created to investigate and punish workers lacking proper paperwork was similarly stymied by uncooperative factory owners refusing to provide information to the inspectors. The government more forcefully addressed the economic unevenness of the wartime boom with the September 1939 Stop Ordinance (stoppu rei). The ordinance froze wage levels for all workers to curb escalating wartime inflation and resolve the growing pay imbalance between the munitions industries and non-munitions sectors.

Economic bureaucrats who drafted the decree blamed “undeserved salary raises” as the root cause of wartime inflation. To demonstrate the need for the Stop Ordinance, one newspaper claimed that the highest-paid worker at a munitions plant in Kamata earned 1,000 yen per month, which was more than even the monthly income of the Japanese prime minister: “The Welfare Minister was reportedly stunned by this fact.”

The Stop Ordinance was followed by the September 1940 Revised Wage Control Ordinance, which established maximum wages according to gender, age, industry, and location along with a total aggregate wage quota that employers were barred from exceeding. However, these state

31 “Itai shōkkōsan, inshin sangyōgai kumori,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, September 20, 1939.
efforts to control the real wages of munitions workers had mixed results. With the military demand for munitions continuing unabated, workers found ways to illegally job-switch for higher pay, and factory owners resorted to extra-legal means to lure in and keep workers. In 1942, the Home Ministry Economic Police belatedly discovered that factories had for years been routinely handing out secret “black market wages” (yami chingin) to workers in order to get around wage controls. According to a police report from that year, “in the Tokyo region, one hears that ‘up to 99 percent is black market wages.’” The police blamed the rampant use of off-the-books compensation on “shortage of workers, lack of controls over sub-contracting fees, and unequal treatment in official wages.” The Economic Police also complained that their efforts to stamp out this practice were hampered by collusion between factory owners and military officials who prioritized production over wage controls.

Some munitions workers themselves protested at what they said was an unfair portrayal in the mass media of their supposed affluence. In September 1939, a worker from Mitsubishi Heavy Industry, Yamanami Yoshitarō, wrote an article for Gendai magazine to categorically reject the public perception that workers had “money bulging out of their pockets.” Yes, some workers earned over 300 yen a month, but, he claimed, they “made up only two or three people out of 100 skilled workmen.” To media claims that workers were getting bonuses tripling or quadrupling their monthly wages, Yamanami retorted, “No way! Wages have gone up at most around 20 percent.” He did not deny workers were carousing around at the red-light districts but insisted these people were actually factory owners or “young guys from the countryside recruited by the company who mistakenly convey a munitions boom to the public.” By contrast, workers like him have “only” received the 20 percent pay raise, which is tempered by rising inflation and automatic deductions for war bonds purchase. “We have not been riding the wave of the munitions boom, indulging ourselves in luxuries,” he insisted. Yamanami again blamed new younger rural migrants for giving all munitions workers a bad name. Being naïve and tempted by the consumerist pleasures of urban life, “they are prone to indulge themselves in the atmosphere of cities.” Finally, Yamanami addressed another rumor that workers had so much money that they routinely commuted by taxi. He admitted that this was true but only when a worker was running late.

A similar defensiveness appeared in a January 1940 anonymous letter presumably by a worker to the *Yomiuri Shinbun*. Complaining that “the word ‘worker’ (*shokkō*) has an offensive connotation,” the letter-writer was exasperated at this negative stereotype against workers, “most of whom,” he insisted, “recognize the importance of the crisis and lead a simple life.” He resented the fact that the bad reputation of workers was perpetuated by a small minority “who have lots of money, drink alcohol, get into brawls, and frequent places of ill repute.”

Despite these occasional protests to the contrary, the image of the high-living “offensive” worker remained entrenched in the public imagination. By February 1940, a cartoon appeared in *Kingu* (*King*) magazine lampooning the breathtaking status reversal between factory worker and middle-class salaryman in the new wartime economy. Titled “Corporate Employee and Factory Worker” (*shain to shokkō*), the cartoon consisted of two panels. In the first panel, labeled “Before,” a company man is dressed in top hat, suit, dress shoes, and carrying a briefcase. The gentleman nonchalantly tosses aside a cigarette to the ground. A worker dressed in a worker’s cap, overalls, and sandals bends over to pick up the cigarette, while muttering, “My goodness! What a waste!”

The next panel, labeled “Now,” shows a quite different scene. This time it is the worker wearing shiny black shoes who casually tosses aside a cigarette as the poor company man, now in sandals, stoops down to pick it up. The once-proud company man grumbles, “Huh, the boom must be great!”

**The Profile of the Munitions Worker**

As public debates about binge-spending munitions workers unfolded alongside announcements of one ineffective wage control ordinance after another, a rough image of the worker gradually took shape on the home front. Defenders of munitions workers blamed a small category of young, teenaged males for giving all workers a bad name. And indeed, technically, workers in munitions factories came in many categories, including juveniles, students, unmarried women, and unemployed male adults. However, the munitions worker lurking in public anxieties crystallized into a generally agreed-upon image. He was usually between 17 and 20, right around the cusp of conscription age when many workers were drafted into military service. Young factory workers under the conscription age of 20 tended to be overrepresented among juvenile delinquents.

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35 (Dokusha no me) “Shokkō wa shokkō ga ii,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, January 5, 1940.
The munitions worker was often presumed to be armed with swords, machine tools, or other makeshift weapons stolen from his worksite. According to a labor specialist writing in 1940, police arrested a “gang” (furyōdan) of 17- to 18-year-old workers at a Tokyo munitions factory. “Of late,” the labor expert complained in an interview, “almost all delinquents now work in the factories, bringing home income to help their parents, while making extra money by selling tools taken from factories.” The dismissal of every thieving worker was not a viable option for factory owners due to labor scarcity. At another large factory, according to a police report, the supervisor opted not to fire one worker for theft. “In today’s spirit of the age,” the report lamented, “one cannot easily do such a thing. The reason is that this man was quite useful and skillful.” This “useful and skillful” worker, together with six accomplices, had smuggled out 8,000 yen-worth of machine tools from the factory to sell on the black market.

Hair greasy from pomade was another characteristic linked in the popular imagination to the munitions worker. Pomade sales increased during the early years of the war despite the government rationing of castor oil for military usage. According to a 1941 Japanese cosmetics industry report, “among all cosmetic products, none has brought about a tremendous jump in demand like pomade. Currently, one sees pomade everywhere, from the urban areas to the corners of remote mountain regions.” This commercial success in spite of wartime scarcities was partly due to the cosmetics industry’s adoption of synthetic ingredients to substitute for rationed oil. Yanagiya cosmetics company, for example, developed a crude castor oil substitute for pomade use.

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37 According to the “Delinquent Youth Arrest Statistics” (furyō shōnen kenkyō tōkei) compiled by the semiofficial labor-management cooperation organization Kyōchōkai, out of the 22,534 juvenile delinquents arrested from August to September 1942, over 50 percent were classified as factory workers. Also within this group of 22,534 juveniles, 9 percent (2,136) were 17 years old, 14 percent (3,228) were 18 years old, 17 percent (3,930) were 19 years old, and 20 percent (4,534) were 20 years old. The numbers decline for older age groups: 17 percent (3,817) for 21-year-olds, 6 percent (1,138) for 22-year-olds, 4 percent (983) for 23-year-olds, 3 percent (663) for 24-year-olds, and 4 percent (1,056) for 25-year-olds. Clearly, military conscription decimated the ranks of factory youths once they reached the draft age of 20. See Kyōchōkai, ed., Senjī rodō jijō (Tokyo: Kyōchōkai, 1944): 98–99.


The pomade boom was also due to male cosmetics companies expanding their customer base from the relatively small circle of middle-class office workers to the more numerous factory youths with the money and desire to purchase such a product. One example of this trend was Yanagiya pomade. At first, newspaper advertisements for Yanagiya pomade marketed primarily to the middle-class white-collar salaryman. Photographs of American actors Clark Gable and Robert Taylor were used by the company to market pomade in 1937, followed by illustrations of male office workers with slick, neatly combed hair, suits and ties, and, at other times, a Panama hat and eyeglasses. The advertisements suggested that middle-class men could still be stylish in wartime as seen in Yanagiya’s July 13, 1940 pomade advertisement featuring an urban professional in Western suit beneath the slogan, “the essential item for the home front gentleman!” Beginning in December 1941, when the war expanded to the Pacific theater and the government fully enforced labor conscription, images of salarymen in the advertisements were replaced by text assuming a tone targeting a younger and more working-class audience: “All Citizens Work (kokumin kairō da)! Youths of Japan defend the home front with both body and mind neat and tidy (kiriri toshite).”

The next batch of Yanagiya advertisements strengthened the link between workers and pomade. From May to September 1942, advertisements featured the image of a smiling young man with neatly combed hair wearing a collared factory uniform. The text above the picture invoked the common wartime slogan directed at workers: “For warriors on the frontlines of increased production (zōsan) – stand tall and firm with a neat and tightened mind and body.” From October 1942 to March 1943, pomade advertisements identified even more explicitly the worker as their ideal consumer. The image on display was of a young man with slickly combed hair in worker’s uniform next to the shadow profile of a man wearing a worker’s cap. The caption below read, “Make the heart and head bright and cheerful! Let’s enthusiastically fight to the bitter end” (see figure 2.2).

By 1940, greasy, pomade-drenched hair became part of a distinctly wartime style of delinquency supposedly out of step in the new era of wartime austerity. One juvenile court judge in 1940 warned parents that greasy hair along with outlandish clothing was a sure sign of juvenile delinquency.

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42 See, for example, advertisements in *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun*, January 4, 1937; August 7, 1937; January 24, 1938; May 23, 1938; November 27, 1938; September 8, 1939; December 5, 1939; July 13, 1940; and February 5, 1941.

43 (Advertisement), *Asahi Shinbun*, December 5, 1941.

44 (Advertisement), *Asahi Shinbun*, May 31, 1942; September 6, 1942.

45 (Advertisement), *Asahi Shinbun*, October 9, 1942; January 6, 1943; March 14, 1943.
Figure 2.2 Yanagiya pomade advertisement, *Asahi Shinbun*, January 6, 1943.
In 1941, an indignant magazine writer denounced as unpatriotic the sight of “monstrous” young men loitering on the streets of the Ginza with “flashy suits” styled with “ridiculous use of pomade,” which left “a lingering oily smell on their head.”

The Munitions Worker in Disguise

Though frequently depicted by the mass media in a worker’s cap and collared factory uniform, the munitions worker was sometimes imagined to be in disguise. Beginning in 1940, several media accounts claimed that workers were masquerading as students. According to the writer Hayashi Tatsuo, groups of workers would pose as “fake students” (nise gakusei), riding the commuter trains between Tokyo and Yokohama. They appeared to be elite college or higher school students wearing the traditional Prussian-style navy blue uniforms with brass buttons and lapel badges. However, while regular students talked about sports or music, Hayashi observed that the fake students would exchange vulgar stories about women. What’s more, in spite of the recent state crackdown on luxuries, the workers sported big shiny rings that no ordinary student could afford or should wear.

Periodic press accounts of police raids in cafés reinforced the image of the worker as a “fake student.” “A wickedness created by the thriving industries,” screamed the sensational headlines of the Tokyo Asahi Shinbun on April 9, 1940. Police announced the mass arrest of over two thousand youths loitering late at night in Tokyo streets, some armed with razors and swords stolen from the worksite. Within the group, according to the report, “factory workers as fake students were the most conspicuous.” Most of the youths were released from custody after writing an official apology and receiving a stern warning from police. In highly distilled form, both these texts highlighted the most offensive elements of the munitions worker – conspicuous consumer, larcenous delinquent, and master of disguise and deception.

46 “Senjika no chimata ni ‘furyō:’ ika ni michibikeba yoi ka,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, June 8, 1940.
48 Kitagawa Kenzō was the first to note in passing the curious phenomenon of “fake students,” which he attributed to the growing affluence of munitions workers. See Kitagawa, “Senjika no sesō fūzoku to bunka”: 239–240.
50 “2,500 mei kenkyō, totsujo sakariba no dai furyō kari, inshin sangyō no umu aku,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, April 9, 1940.
The anxiety about the growing affluence and attire of munitions workers was amplified in April 1940, when the *Yomiuri Shinbun* ran a series of articles about juvenile misbehavior, the second installment of which was called “The Desire for Student Uniforms: When Taking Off the Blue Work Overalls Slackens the Heart.” The article told the story of 17-year-old factory worker, Tsuruda Nobukichi, who was led astray down the dark path of masquerade by his 18-year-old co-worker Sakamoto Ichirō, who recently started wearing a “dark navy-blue student uniform.” One day, after work, Sakamoto meets up with Nobukichi at a café, where they encounter three more factory youths, also dressed in student uniforms like Sakamoto. The fake students glare at Nobukichi, still in his factory work clothes, and sneer, “well look who’s arrived! It’s the master mechanic.” At the café, Sakamoto tells Nobukichi that he has been moonlighting as a subcontractor at a higher-paying factory, which pays 150 yen a month. With the extra cash, he bought a student uniform to wear at the movie theater. “Hey, what about you?” Sakamoto suddenly inquires of Nobukichi. “If you come to my apartment, I’ve got a student uniform. I’ll lend it to you – just this one night. Let’s go.”

The detail about the subcontracting system hearkens back to the Economic Police complaints about “black market wages” being especially prevalent among factory subcontractors. The story also exacerbated popular fears about older workers leading naïve factory youths astray and invoked longtime public apprehensions of the café as a denizen of moral vice. Nobukichi ends up spending 35 yen for his own student uniform so that he could live “a double life – factory work clothes in the day, student uniform at night.” He eventually repents and discards the uniform while Sakamoto and his fellow “delinquent factory youths” are later arrested by police for their “hooligan” behavior. Despite the abrupt, didactic conclusion, the fictionalized newspaper anecdote illustrated the ambiguous place of the munitions worker in the popular imagination. He could be both a good-hearted, if susceptible and naïve, young man and a dangerous delinquent pleasure-seeker lurking in the shadows. His ambiguity was further heightened by being just young enough to avoid military conscription but just old enough to create havoc on the home front.

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51 “Furyō e no michi: Gakuseifuku e no akogare – kokoro no yurumi wa nappa wo nuida toki,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, April 23, 1940.


53 “Furyō e no michi,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, April 23, 1940.
About a week before publishing this story, the *Yomiuri Shinbun* invited readers to provide their own opinions about “fake students.” One anonymous reader complained in a letter, “it is said that there are many fake students in delinquent raids; mostly factory youths. They wear school caps with school uniforms. But what else should they wear? It’s not as if they can secretly wear a suit.”

A few days later, another reader wrote in to comment about workers masquerading as students. “Currently, there is nothing else that is adequate [for workers to wear] aside from the student uniform and student cap. We really have to work hard to avoid the so-called American style (*meriken-gata*) of replacing the uniform button with a specially made button showing the company’s insignia and, similarly, the company’s insignia on an extremely short-brimmed hat.” Another concerned citizen opined, “I have no particular objection over the student uniform, but it would be best if they wore clothing with absolutely no gold buttons.” Still another reader helpfully suggested that workers adopt a recent army fashion of a turned-down collar (*suten karâ*) decorated “not with a gold button but a plain black button. And what about wearing a hunting cap instead of overdoing it with a student cap?”

The reader responses in the *Yomiuri Shinbun* suggest that some members of the public recognized that current workers’ uniforms were legitimately unsatisfying to workers, but a proper replacement was yet to be found. In this small way, the *Yomiuri* provided a platform for readers to anonymously participate in the public debate about reconfiguring the identity and look of the factory worker that rendered him ambiguously deviant and sympathetic.

The phenomenon of “fake students” invoked public memories of an earlier association between masquerade and juvenile delinquency. During the 1920s, some Tokyo street gangs would kidnap and force students to join their group, and appropriate school caps and school pins as part of their gang identity. In this way, as David Ambaras has found, “lower-class gangs could thus simultaneously mock and embrace the symbols of the dominant culture.” By the 1930s, delinquents masqueraded as students to cavort with café waitresses in Tokyo. This led to police crackdowns on students in general spending time in dance halls, movie theaters, or cafés based on the theory that such sites of pleasure would lead to wasteful spending and eventually a life of crime.

In the era of total war, such masquerade by munitions workers blurring class boundaries and celebrating mass consumption acquired a politicized

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54 “Dokusha me,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, April 13, 1940.
55 “Dokusha me,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, April 17, 1940.
and subversive edge in the eyes of middle-class social reformers trying to regulate leisure activities. In a 1941 commentary on “public morals,” the writer Hagiwara Sakutarō described his firsthand encounter this time not with “fake students” but with “sham gentlemen” (gisō shinshi) – workers dressed in suits like urban professionals. When one goes to Tokyo bars, Hagiwara noted, there are usually “shady-looking” salarymen with neatly pressed suits. But all is not what it seems upon closer inspection: “The look of a salaryman is that of an intellectual who finished school, mixed with the style of an obsequious snob . . . But the men sitting next to me were not of this type at all. Their look was not a bit like that of the intellectual.”

The clothing of these impostors troubled Hagiwara for they were “purposefully mimicking gentlemen and students.” He explained that since the war started, workers pursued masquerade with quite a different goal than during the masquerade seen in the 1920s: “they do not think simply about ‘flirting with women.’ Rather, they want to buy respect as full-fledged members of society (shakaijin).” In order to fit in with the expensive leisure sites they could now patronize, the writer noted, munitions workers began wearing Western suits or uniforms from elite colleges and middle schools. “In this way,” Hagiwara sniffed, “an ‘instant gentleman’ and ‘instant student’ is born.” He expressed irritation that workers were using their newfound wealth to buy their way into the middle class without proper middle-class upbringing or education.

What perhaps perturbed Hagiwara even more was that munitions workers were not really aspiring to be middle-class salarymen at all. By knowingly assuming the persona of a salaryman in the presence of real salarymen who saw through the façade, the worker demonstrated how fluid, fragile, and inauthentic such class identities ultimately were. By not aspiring toward but mimicking salaryman identity, knowing very well he is not fooling anyone, the worker exposed the hollowness of middle-class visions of modern life centered on rationality, frugality, and discipline. If a figure as outrageous, hedonistic, and violent as a munitions worker could so casually mimic an elite student or “gentleman,” the authenticity of middle-class identities of actual salarymen would seem to rest on a shallow foundation. What also made masquerade so offensive to the intelligentsia was the worker introducing new modes of behavior that reconfigured hegemonic assumptions about modern society. His disingenuous mimicry of a pseudo-intellectual suggested that workers, not intellectuals, were beginning to define new social mores for the home front.

58 Hagiwara, “Fūzoku jihyō”: 84–85.
A warning to parents from a Tokyo middle school official from 1940 expanded on this middle-class anxiety toward workers. The educator blamed young workers for leading middle school students into a life of delinquency. “Before,” he wrote, “middle school gang leaders were so-called fallen former students (gakusei kuzure). But recently among delinquent gangs I have studied, a great many workers have become the leaders.” Middle school students, according to the educator, traditionally enjoyed a sense of social superiority from children of workers. “But lately,” he wrote, “the munitions boom has given factory youths lots of money while, at the same time, the children of salarymen are deprived even of spending money.” The social status reversal led to troubling trends such as factory youths now treating middle school students to meals, and then “luring middle school students to form gangs.” And while prewar student-led gangs engaged in relatively mild “student-like” delinquency such as fighting and extortion, now wartime worker-led gangs “carry out malicious acts in brothels and fake cafés.” Thus, the educator urged middle-class parents to monitor who their children associated with.59 In other words, what made wartime juvenile delinquency so disturbing in the popular press was not simply because they grew in scale but because they were being committed by the wrong kind of people — young workers, not middle-class students.

Hagiwara’s complaint about workers appropriating identities of “instant gentlemen” and “instant student” spoke to a greater public concern not only about disruption of class boundaries but also ideas about shifting masculinities through clothing. From one perspective, the consumption patterns of the imagined worker echoed not the salaryman but a working-class form of male dandyism. The public fixation with the greasy pomade hairstyle and outlandish dress associated with the munitions worker took place within the context of growing visibility of male fashion in early wartime Japan.

Foppish attention to suits and uniforms tapped into a long, fraught relationship in modern Japanese history between male fashion and state orthodoxy. During the Meiji period, young disaffected men such as the sōshi and bankara demonstrated oppositional forms of nationalism by wearing ripped-up kimono and tucked-in sleeves in a deliberate rejection of the Western effete style adopted by the “high-collar” oligarchic “gentlemen” in government.60 By the 1920s, middle-class urban men began

59 “Chūgakusei no furyō kōi: Shokkō to musubi akka shita,” Yomiuri Shinbun, May 10, 1940. David Ambaras also found reports from the 1920s of gangs of factory youths led by students or sons of middle-class salarymen. See Ambaras, Bad Youth: 144.
wearing English-style suits in a variety of colors but also sportswear, hunting gear, golf attire, the fedora hat, and other outfits during leisure time. Technological advances in the clothing industry in the 1920s and 1930s such as the introduction of artificial silk and synthetic fibers lowered the cost of Western clothes, thereby making them more accessible to a wider group of consumers.61

The expansion of the Western clothing industry and increasing visibility of Western attire on a mass level was further accelerated by Japan’s economic recovery from the Great Depression in the 1930s under new government policies boosting rural relief spending and domestic investment.62 As the economy recovered, urban middle-class white-collar men gradually acquired the money and leisure time to become interested and knowledgeable about fashion, specifically the English-style suit. In addition, the expansion of white-collar work in company offices, government bureaucracies, and other workplaces requiring the suit pushed many otherwise uninterested men to acquire at least some rudimentary knowledge of male fashion.63

Slowly but steadily, pockets of media outlets emerged in the early 1930s to cultivate appreciation and consumption of male style. *Shin Seinen* (New Youth), known as a “magazine by modern boys for modern boys,” began running a regular column in 1929 on the latest Western male fashions.64 While primarily covering movie fan culture, *Sūtā* (Star) magazine, founded in 1933, carried articles and advertisements about male grooming and clothing, particularly modeled after English-style suits and Hollywood actors.65 Even after the outbreak of the China War in 1937 and growing public criticism over conspicuous Western-style fashion in an era when sacrifice not hedonism was promoted by the state, public interest in male fashion continued. In May 1938, *Sūtā*


65. For example, see “*Kaori no seihō,*” *Sūtā* (June 1935, jōjungō): 12; “*Oshare to wa?*” *Sūtā* (October 1936, gejungō): 32; “*So You Want to Dress in the London Manner?*” [English in original], *Sūtā* (July 1937, jōjungō): 47–49.
magazine began offering a “Star Boys” catalogue available through a special membership system. The editors announced, “even those from the countryside can cheaply buy popular new Western accessories such as autumn hats, dress shirts, neckties, and socks at thirty to forty percent below the market price.”66 By October 1940, the catalogue, renamed “Front Club” (furonto kurabu, likely a reference to the war “front”), boasted a membership of 140,000 customers. The mail order system also targeted customers who either lived far from big city department stores or could not afford to buy clothes at full price.67

*Sutā* magazine also ran a series of elaborate advertisements for Ginza Yutaka barbershop from 1937 to 1940, offering fashion-conscious male consumers elaborate haircuts to choose from that reflected a confluence of militaristic and Hollywood aesthetics, and called for copious use of pomade. For example, in August 1939, Ginza Yutaka advertised eight haircuts for men, including the Konoe Look (named after the popular once and future prime minister), the Robert Taylor look (Hollywood matinee idol), the Business Cut (for the white-collar professional), the Anti-Communist Look, the Military Victory Style, and the Regent Style (a British-inspired pompadour) (see figure 2.3).68

Attempts by young munitions workers using their already “unde- served” earnings to purchase elite status through new clothing inflamed growing public criticism about male fashion becoming out of control. In June 1940, police accused at least one well-known gangster of masquerading as a “lady-chasing bad boy” (nanpa no furyō seinen) in order to avoid recognition. The gang boss would “pose as a young gentleman with the air of a marvelous Ginza man, wearing the latest style in suit, shoes, and hat.” There were also fears that workers disguised as “gentlemen” would seduce ladies “of good families” at the movie theaters and create further mischief.69

The public discussion on worker attire thus reflected a broader debate about clothing reform in total war. Toward the end of 1940 and into 1941, rationing and austerity to conserve materials for the war effort assumed a renewed importance on the home front. On July 7, 1940, the government announced the “Regulations Restricting the Production and

68 *Sutā* (August 1939). Advertisements for Ginza Yutaka also appeared in April 1937 (*gejungō*), 1; July 1937 (*jōjungō*) 49; December 1937 (*jōjungō*), 42; April 1938 (*gejungō*), 31; December 1938 (*jōjungō*) 38; April 1939 (*gejungō*), 36; August 1939 (*gejungō*), 42; and March 1940 (*gejungō*), 48.
69 “Waka shinshi toshite musume san ni chikazuku Ginza ōkō no furyō wo fusegu,” *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun*, June 20, 1940.
Sale of Luxury Items” (shashihin tō seizō hanbai seigen kisoku) to lower inflation and redirect scarce materials away from consumer spending and toward war production and savings bonds. Growing public intolerance of flagrant consumption by anyone, male or female, was further cemented in November 1940 when the government introduced the austere “national uniform” (kokumin fuku) for all men to wear in place of the Western suit. The national uniform and the luxuries ban were state attempts to push all Japanese subjects to subordinate private desire for the war, conserve scarce material resources, and smooth over social tensions arising from economic differences under the munitions boom. In March 1941, a writer for *Sutairu* (Style) magazine recounted seeing a handwritten notice in a Tokyo barbershop declaring,

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“The Regent Style is a treasonous style. If you’re a Japanese Man, stop it.” The writer approved of the barber’s newfound adherence to “national policy” and expressed his own hatred for the Regent Style and the pomade it consumed: “There still are some guys (anchan) on a Ginza corner wearing suits, just standing there with a wistful look on their faces and a lingering oily smell on their heads . . . I wish that this snobby, flashy suit, along with this haircut be thrown away into the history of the old order.”72 Public alarm over workers “performing” as elite students or “gentlemen” became caught up in a national campaign by a variety of state and non-state guardians of the home front to wipe out male frivolity and impose a standardized life of discipline for total war.

The Munitions Worker Becomes the Industrial Warrior

Public anxieties about the munitions worker diminished somewhat after December 1941 as the government shifted toward almost exclusive reliance on labor conscription following the expansion of the war into the Pacific theater. Thereafter, the demographics of munitions workers drastically diverged from the image of the Japanese teenaged male delinquent. To keep factories at capacity, the government pulled the remaining non-munitions adult male labor force into factory work in 1941, then students and women in 1943, and finally forcibly conscripted 1.5 million Korean and 38,000 Chinese colonial subjects in 1944 and 1945.73 By the end of the war in 1945, over 6 million people across gender, age, and ethnic lines were mobilized to work in factories and mines.74

In the popular imagination, the munitions worker by the end of 1940 was almost instinctually linked to his noble doppelganger, the industrial warrior (sangyō senshi). Even direct criticism of misbehaving workers was now followed by wistful hopes they could still be rehabilitated into productive, disciplined subjects. Already in January 1939, the Welfare Ministry’s “home front daily life reform groups” had this goal in mind of “cultivating wholesome industrial warriors” who will “strengthen spiritual discipline and plan for a complete understanding of the crisis.”75 But it was really following the failure of the September 1939 Stop Ordinance that one can see a decisive shift in government rhetoric and policy on workers. The ineffectiveness of the ordinance convinced labor specialists

73 Awaya, “Kokumin dōin to teikō”: 182–184.
75 “Jūgo seikatsu no sashin hō’ wo denju, Kōseishō de mazu ‘kōjō no oyaji kyōiku,’” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, January 21, 1939.
in the Welfare Ministry to supplement punitive wage control measures with welfare benefits in order to incentivize harder work and discourage wasteful consumption and carousing among workers. This policy shift not only further blurred the ambiguous place of the munitions worker on the home front, but also paved the way for his official consecration as an industrial warrior worthy of the same public acclaim given to soldiers. In November 1940, the Cabinet Planning Board announced the outline for a New Labor Order (kinrō shintaisei), which declared that labor was now a sacred and honorable duty performed by all subjects of the empire. Under the clarion call of the New Labor Order, state officials and labor scientists pushed factories to improve treatment of workers for the public interest and move away from practices motivated only by private profit (see figure 2.4). 

The new policy attention toward improving the workplace conditions of workers was given specific direction by the influential social critic Gonda Yasunosuke. In the December 1940 issue of Yūben (Eloquence) magazine, Gonda argued that “national leisure” (kokumin goraku) should be promoted by the government to “encourage national spirit, vigorous national thought, and improved national physique,” which would then “expand labor efficiency in everyone.” His ideas resonated with a growing number of wartime policymakers who believed that the state should accommodate rather than repress worker desires for leisure to maximize military production. The trick was to offer more wholesome alternative forms of leisure for workers and draw them away from the red-light districts and spending binges. Gonda lamented that workers currently patronized commercialized forms of entertainment which offered only “crude and poor content.” He suggested that the state sponsor recreational activities for workers such as factory-based theater troupes, music bands, and sports teams. This would, he contended, enhance the quality of entertainment consumed by workers and “nourish their spiritual, material, and wholesome development.”

To that end, in 1940 and 1941, many labor experts joined the staff of the Greater Japan Patriotic Labor Association (Dai Nippon Sangyō Hōkokukai, commonly referred to as Sanpō) to promote a New Labor Order by creating “labor culture” (kinrō bunka) at the worksite, characterized by popular musical programs and comedy shows for workers’ entertainment. Through such cultural activities, Sanpō leaders aimed to boost worker morale and productivity but also to elevate the sanctity of

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76 Sasaki, “‘Sangyō senshi’ no sekai”: 57; Takaoka, “Dai Nippon sangyō hōkokukai to ‘kinrō bunka’”: 39–42.
77 Gonda Yasunosuke, “Jikyokuka no kokumin goraku,” Yūben (December 1940): 140–143.
Figure 2.4 A labor recruitment poster created by the Welfare Ministry and the Employment Association from the early 1940s. The slogan, alluding to the idealized industrial warrior, reads, “Labor Mobilization: Go! To the warfront of the home front. To heavy industry.”
labor itself. As one Sanpō official put it, labor should no longer be understood as “pain” (kutsu) divorced from culture but rather as “joyful, hopeful, and honorable.”

After some moderate success, in December 1941, the Sanpō’s cultural activities were absorbed into the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (IRAA taisei yokusankai) Culture Department. The IRAA was a massive national organization founded in October 1940 by “reformists” in the government and private sector. They hoped to shake up the political status quo and tap into the energies of the masses for national goals by unifying all cultural and political activities under the aegis of the IRAA. The IRAA vision of “labor culture” demanded workers follow “wholesome” cultural practices derived from an organic “worker’s culture” and not on crass mainstream mass culture. In this respect, IRAA leaders felt they were being more faithful to Gonda’s initial call for noncommercial, morally uplifting entertainment. Accordingly, in 1942 and 1943 under IRAA influence, Sanpō culture units stopped performing popular songs and comedy routines for workers and instead shifted toward performances of pedantic patriotic plays and “national people’s songs” (kokumin uta).

Through such “wholesome” leisure practices, the IRAA activists believed, workers would not only become more productive at the worksite but also adopt a more rational and disciplined daily life. The burst of bureaucratic activity among IRAA and Sanpō officials to promote “correct” music among workers during leisure time revealed new anxieties among the bureaucratic intelligentsia about mass culture and the very meaning and purpose of “culture” itself. Former orchestra conductor turned labor reformer Kiyomizu Osamu argued throughout 1942 about how important it was for Sanpō units to create new “workplace songs” which could inspire workers to work harder, thereby bolstering productivity. He pointed out that such “workplace songs” used to exist in the premodern era among farmers who would chant ballads during rice-planting season. But no appropriate new songs have appeared in the modern age to motivate workers engaged in industrial labor. He criticized workers who would only sing preexisting “pop songs” (kayōkyoku) memorized from records. Another Sanpō campaign to promote “workplace theater” also urged workers to reject commercialized pop culture and create and perform their own authentic plays. The mimicking of commercial songs was insufficient. As one official put it, “even if workers become good at naniwabushi [traditional Japanese storytelling music],

78 “Kokuminteki kinrō bunka no kensetsu,” Nippon Hyōron (June 1941): 94.
manzai [comedy routines], or even copying the [vaudevillian musical group] Akireta Boys, the culture of workers will not improve.”

While bureaucrats and social reformers wrestled with the question of what exactly “labor culture” should look like in order to inspire and discipline workers, the glorification of the industrial warrior on the home front kept ascending to greater heights. In March 1941, the *Yomiuri Shinbun* observed that differences between the warfront where soldiers fought for the nation and the home front where workers labored for the nation were meaningless and “merely spatial questions.” Echoing the New Labor Order’s elevation of labor as a sacred duty, the newspaper boldly declared that if soldiers fighting on the frontlines are celebrated as national heroes, “then so too must industrial warriors endeavoring to increase production be called heroes of our times.”

In January 1942, the government announced the creation of a “Labor Merit Award” (kinrō kenkō sho) to “publicly honor the labor of industrial warriors who, under the crisis, protect the vital worksites of production.” The government insisted that the award should be seen as the civilian equivalent to the Order of the Golden Kite (kinshi kunshō), which was awarded only to soldiers. Indeed, “the toil of industrial warriors who devote their bodies in mines and factories day and night to increase and expand production of all war materiel including weapons and ammunition, is no less than that of frontline soldiers.”

Rhetorical praise was sometimes matched with official tangible perks that assumed outsized importance in the early 1940s as the rest of the home front scrambled to avoid starvation with meager rations and black market bartering. Throughout 1943, workers in Tokyo would receive subsidized or free distributions of beer and candy from factories. Starting in April 1943, workers could purchase movie tickets at 50 percent off, courtesy of the Tokyo Sanpō office and the film industry. In September 1943, the Sanpō arranged for subsidized “special rations” to workers of “wartime soap” for personal hygiene, and laundry detergent to wash their factory uniforms. In 1943, factories were still publicizing in employment guidebooks various workplace benefits in order to attract workers. That year, the Aichi Machine Tools Arsenal paid for a two-page
photo montage advertisement touting reasonable hours of operation (7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), major holidays off (including every Tuesday), and opportunities for work-sponsored leisure activities. The notice featured a group photo of a “boys factory worker wind orchestra” standing before a company-owned dormitory. The Asia Leatherworks Factory listed impressive workplace amenities in its advertisement: a baseball club, sumō club, table tennis club, a fishing club, and hiking club. Starting salary was to be 75 sen (presumably a daily wage) with two raises per year. This was on top of a monthly “perfect attendance” allowance, bonuses, family allowance, “incentive pay” (shōreikin), and tuition and supplies subsidies for night schooling at a youth school. The factory even offered a free dormitory to employees equipped with an “entertainment room,” “reading room,” and an on-site health clinic.87

Worker masquerade was cited and even embraced by at least one observer in 1942. Economic journalist Nishitani Yahei welcomed the mixing of sartorial styles between students and workers, believing that this would enable each group to adopt the unique traits of the other and thereby strengthen the nation. “It has become common to not know whether one is a middle school student or a so-called industrial warrior,” he wrote. “[I]n many ways, this is a good thing.”88 When coupled with the mixed reactions to worker masquerade two years earlier by Yomiuri readers, Nishitani’s remarks suggest an insight into the cultural force of the munitions worker/industrial warrior. His disruption shakes the old order, only to revivify and renew the cultural imagination and possibilities in wartime. For some Japanese, such discursive fantasies provoked jealousy and fury; for others, such behavior could provoke discussions that made the home front seem more human, more real, and simply more alive.

Despite the glorification of the industrial warrior, anxieties about the misbehavior of the munitions worker and his potential to disrupt home front morale continued to appear in the popular press in the Pacific War era. In September 1942, a magazine writer still noted that factory youths, not college students, were the most frequent patrons of urban amusement centers: “the cafés are thriving with young industrial warriors seeking out relaxation as they uneasily hold up their cigarettes.” The journalist recounted that Tokyo police launched yet another crackdown on factory workers loitering in cafés and movie theaters, arresting 9,900 people and confiscating over 800 weapons. He observed that these youths were

“making too much money” and “growing increasingly wild living in dull dormitories.” Throughout 1943, newspapers once again warned the public about maliciously masquerading munitions workers, this time disguised not as “fake students” but “fake detectives” (nise keiji) robbing civilians in dark alleyways. In October 1944, the Tokyo Police Agency announced the mass arrest of over 10,000 factory youths engaging in theft and carousing.

We can find some signs of workers engaging in gluttonous outings in Tokyo in the Pacific War era, at least according to the diary of 20-year-old Yamada Fūtarō, who worked at Oki Electric Factory from 1942 to 1944. In one outing on December 12, 1942, Yamada and two other workers dined on “tuna, surf clam, and dried seaweed sushi at a train station sushi shop.” Next, the workers stopped at a nearby “fruit parlor” (furitsu pārā) for some sweet red bean soup (shiruko) before going to a restaurant to eat fish tempura, sardine dumplings (iwashi dango), daikon, rice, and konnyaku. The evening ended with milk and cake at a “pancake bakery” (pan keiki beikarii). Ten days later, Yamada joined his friends for a special “eating party” (kuo kai) that night. At the Tama Restaurant in Tokyo’s Gotanda district, he recorded the night’s first main course: “croquettes (korokke), taro potatoes boiled in broth (satoimo no ni korogashi), konnyaku, and daikon boiled in soy sauce (daikon no netsuke), and two big bowls of rice. With this we already felt full.” But since this was an “eating party,” Yamada noted, “this was only the beginning” (jo no kuchi da). The three workers moved on to a bakery for some milk, coffee, and cake, and then ended the evening by trying different varieties of sweet red bean soup with mochi at three red bean soup shops (oshirukoya). By the end of the night, their stomachs were “gravely hurting” and “stretched like a chicken’s gizzard.” After factory payday on January 31, 1943, Yamada and his friend Kikuchi decided to go out

91 “Furyō kōin gakusei nado ni tettsui,” Asahi Shinbun, October 6, 1944.
93 December 12, 1942 entry, Senchūha mushikera nikki: 43.
94 December 22, 1942 entry, Senchūha mushikera nikki: 54–55.
that night to “show off our usual heavy eating (rei ni yotte bashoku buri).” They started with a curry rice bowl at Shinagawa before having their main meal at a Gotanda restaurant with “two helpings of rice bowls, one meat plate, one sashimi dish, boiled potatoes, carrots and tofu dish.”

In early February 1943, Yamada and a navy friend on shore leave discovered a secret restaurant that illicitly served gourmet Western food in Tokyo’s upscale Ginza district. Entering an establishment called “Suehiro’s Sukiyaki,” they discovered a dark, abandoned dry goods shop. After going upstairs to the second floor, the two young men turned around to see a heavy door shut behind them. Yamada felt like “we were becoming prisoners inside some eerie cave,” until another door opened to a “magnificent great room with palm trees and tables with pure white tablecloths,” illuminated by “dazzling electric lights.” Yamada and his navy friend quietly took a seat at the corner table in a daze and “ordered a real, full-scale Western meal of soup, yakiniku, bread, and fruit.”

In both real and imagined form, the munitions worker continued to plague attempts by various state actors to tame his wild behavior and fully mobilize his productive powers toward munitions production in the final years of the war. In June 1943, under the leadership of Kaya Okinori, the Finance Ministry launched a new campaign to boost national savings and provide more financial resources for the war effort. Despite Kaya’s efforts to extract more savings from civilians, the one group who eluded his grasp was munitions workers. The finance minister castigated workers in the “thriving industries” (inshin sangyō) who ignored his grand savings campaign by engaging in “wasteful spending.” He accused them of harboring “old individualism” for thinking that wages were “their own money and theirs to spend.”

Part of the failure of his campaign came from a government divided over the perennial problem of how to properly motivate and discipline munitions workers. Right when Kaya’s savings campaign got underway, the government abolished wage caps, thereby restoring the ability of factories to openly offer pay raises to workers. Government leaders decided that such wage controls were impeding the ultimate goal of maximizing weapons production. Meanwhile worker salaries continued to jump. Starting with the index level of 100 in 1937, wages grew to 136.4 in 1942, 145.3 in 1943, and 159.2 in 1944. Wartime inflation reduced the

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95 January 31, 1943 entry, Senchūha mushikera nikki: 117–118.
96 February 3, 1943 entry, Senchūha mushikera nikki: 127–128.
98 Garon, “Luxury is the Enemy”: 58.
true value of these wage hikes, with inflation soaring by over 200 percent or seven times prewar levels from 1939 to 1944. But factories compensated for inflation with illegal overtime pay, incentive pay, allowances, and other unofficial extra remuneration to retain skilled workers.\footnote{Ohara Shakai Mondai Kenkyūjo, ed., Taiheiyo sensō no rōdōsha jūtai, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Tōyō Keizai Shinpōsha, 1964): 64–65.}

The dire war situation and the insatiable military demand for munitions continued to override austerity campaigns when it came to worker wages. In October 1943, the Diet passed the sweeping Munitions Company Law to break through the bottlenecks found in inefficient weapons production. The law authorized the military services to bypass middlemen like the Welfare Ministry and industry cartel-like Control Associations and issue contracts directly to munitions firms. Preexisting controls over prices, wages, and labor were also relaxed and guarantees of a minimum level of profit were provided for firms. A Munitions Ministry, staffed by reform bureaucrats, was also created to centralize all munitions production under one agency.\footnote{Janis Mimura, Planning for Empire: Reform Bureaucrats and the Japanese Wartime State (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011): 174–181.}

This legislation helped destroy whatever lingering wage controls remained in the munitions sector. The Munitions Company Law empowered a new group of elites to sweep in and defend workers from wage controls and moral opprobrium. Munitions Ministry bureaucrats criticized the Welfare Ministry’s practice of imposing a single undifferentiated punitive wage control policy across all companies. Kitano Shigeo, in a 1944 explanatory guide to the law, argued that a uniform wage policy not accommodating toward local conditions or worker needs created “hindrances” in hiring and production. What Japan needed, he wrote, was “a wage system that is compatible for all firms.” Reversing years of official disapproval of spiraling worker wages, the bureaucrat stated flatly, “We have to think about raising compensation appropriately as efficiency advances and production grows.” Kitano brushed aside public complaints about the unfair economic benefits enjoyed only by the munitions sector: “the sacrifice and adverse effects in other sectors simply cannot be helped.”\footnote{Kitano Shigeo, Gunjushō oyobi gunjū kaisha hō (Tokyo: Takayama Shoin, 1944): 127, 130.}

The very coherence of labor administration fractured throughout 1943 and into 1944 as Control Associations, the Munitions Ministry, and the National Labor Conscription Protection Association each started to organize their own separate “leisure and comfort” projects and traveling theater shows for workers. At the same time, government funding for the
Sanpō and the IRAA was sharply curtailed in the face of dwindling resources. Government centralization over film distribution and production stripped the Sanpō of its ability to even make their own films for workers. It was just as well for by late 1943, Sanpō agents began scaling back their promotion of an organic “labor culture” in the face of growing worker backlash. One Sanpō official warned his colleagues to be careful of playing “high-quality music” like classical music during factory lunch breaks. One worker, upset that the usual pop songs were not playing, threw a rock at the office window. “Afterwards,” the official noted calmly, “rōkyoku and manzai were played.”

The final year of the war witnessed the death blow to rational wage and labor controls when the military and munitions factories began to brazenly hoard materials and foodstuffs to poach workers from other worksites. At the same time, the Economic Police’s ability to enforce labor controls withered away as the number of officers in Osaka alone fell from 388 in 1941 to 296 in 1944.

Proponents of the industrial warrior continued to insist he was the savior of the Japanese home front mired in a war now gone terribly wrong. In a 1944 book entitled *The Way of the Industrial Warrior* (sangyō senshidō), Welfare Ministry official Kubota Hideo argued that the industrial superiority of the Anglo-American Powers made “the duties of our industrial warriors large and heavy.” He reminded his readers that Japan’s early victories against America at Pearl Harbor and the Solomon Islands were thanks to “those airplanes manufactured by our industrial warriors” which “had the spirit of industrial warriors.” Therefore, Kubota believed that workers deserved the exact same public support and acclaim as that given to soldiers. “The industrial warrior is a soldier on the frontlines right here,” he wrote. “The worksite itself is a battlefield.”

However, even this 1944 paean to workers admitted that “out of all citizens today, industrial warriors make the most money” and, as such, must take care to avoid antagonizing the rest of society struggling to get by in “today’s age of daily life shortages.” In other words, Kubota sternly wrote, “we must greatly admonish those who take advantage of their large income and use unfair methods to obtain daily life materials through special privileges inherent in their job duties critical to the state.” The Welfare Ministry official warned that workers who are too “arrogant”

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about their earnings, engage in spending binges, or unfairly exploit their positions to access daily items denied to ordinary civilians “will disturb the environment and break the harmony of the people.” Such misbehavior would only “bring about deterioration in war potential.” It would seem that the industrial warrior could never be completely detached from longstanding fears of the munitions worker.

As state economic controls collapsed, industrial production sputtered to a standstill and all consumer pleasures seemed to vanish into thin air, the munitions worker continued to make whimsical cameos in the mass cultural artifacts of late wartime Japan. In May 1943, Chiyoda Camellia Pomade, signaling the triumph of the munitions worker over the salaryman as the preferred consumer for male cosmetics, placed but a single image in its newspaper advertisement: a factory chimney bellowing smoke. The final wartime newspaper advertisement for pomade appeared in February 1944. The advertisement for Yanagiya pomade shows a smiling young man with neatly combed hair. The image is a headshot of his face and factory uniform collar with a disembodied hand holding a comb. Below, the text reads: “Always bright, like the sun. Let’s go out to the worksite (shokuba). Simple, economical, superior quality.”

The wording highlighted the ambiguity of the munitions worker as cultural construct – the embodiment of a productive and economical laborer but also a privileged consumer who shamelessly used rationed oil to make his hair shine “like the sun” (see figure 2.5).

The visceral association of the munitions worker with binge spending, questionable sartorial style, and delinquency was visualized in a 1944 collection of cartoons by, appropriately enough, workers aspiring to be cartoonists. One worker contributed an illustration of the “blind, old-fashioned worker . . . [and] delinquent factory youth who cast aside the honor of industrial warriors.” The cartoon was of an unshaven worker chomping on a cigarette while wearing a worker’s cap backwards. With one hand, the worker grasps the arm of a frightened coworker, coercing the latter to hand over a wad of cash. With the other hand, the worker grips a large sake or wine bottle. An oversized pen is removing the label of the noble “industrial warrior” from his lapel while a large hand waits to

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107 (Advertisement) Yomiuri Shinbun, May 28, 1943.
108 (Advertisement) Yomiuri Shinbun, February 8, 1944.
109 Production and sale of pomade, however, continued well into 1945. Yanagiya’s pomade production in Tokyo did not stop until Allied air raids in March and April 1945 destroyed the company’s store in Nihonbashi and factory in Koishikawa. See Yanagiya Honten: 41.
paste a new label of the despised “worker” (shokkō). Jutting from the worker’s coat pocket is a jumbled collection of items symbolizing his decadent lifestyle – pocket watch, wristwatch, cash, and a receipt from the “café” (kafe). It is true, as Sasaki Kei argues, that the cartoon

Figure 2.5 Yanagiya pomade advertisement, Asahi Shinbun, February 8, 1944.
visualized a concerted effort by labor bureaucrats to castigate the model of the rough and “old-fashioned” prewar worker in favor of the moral and dedicated industrial warrior befitting wartime. However, the image also reflected new popular imaginings of the worker specific to wartime itself. Here, the worker was the powerful beneficiary of the wartime economy, unjustly enriching himself from the peculiar economic configurations of total war to engage in disruptive behavior: a patron of the modern eroticized space of the café, a consumer of a leisure culture seemingly disconnected from war, a violent extortionist, and an irreverent prankster who sloppily wears his worker’s cap backwards (see figure 2.6).

Another drawing from the same 1944 cartoon collection reinforced the perception among advocates of the industrial warrior that they were fighting against a new and unpleasant phantasm who refused to relinquish desire in total war and who teetered dangerously on the edge between order and disorder. In this piece, a determined-looking worker gripping a hammer is decked out in overalls and cap properly worn forward. The caption below explained that the plucky industrial warrior is bravely resisting the tantalizing pleasures of greed, lust, gluttony, and violence, represented here by the following images: money bag next to piles of cash, a beautiful woman with hair perm holding a martini glass, a sake bottle, and fish delicacy, a clawed hand labeled with the word “grumbling” (fuhei), cigarette resting on an ashtray emitting a puff of smoke, and a handgun. The cartoon neatly captured the hopes and fears ascribed to the munitions worker in the twilight of wartime Japan (see figure 2.7).

Conclusion

Total war unleashed sweeping socioeconomic transformations in Japanese society – twisting official ideologies into new cultural forms that complicated the state’s ability to reshape the home front into a single unified image. As the war expanded in the late 1930s and early 1940s, state agencies issued and reissued a bewildering web of contradictory labor regulations more honored in the breach than in the observance. Circulating alongside was an official rhetoric that schizophrenically valorized and vilified workers. Within this cacophonous vortex stood the munitions worker as an elusive specter who defied easy categorization and control, a culturally imagined spawn of total war who shouldered Japan’s entire industrial machinery and yet personified official anxieties that the industrial warrior would one day invert into a dangerous juvenile delinquent.

111 Sasaki, “‘Sangyō senshi’ no sekai”: 60–61. 112 Katō, Zōsan manga shū: 32.
Figure 2.6 The Munitions Worker. Kato Etsuro, ed., Zōsan manga shū: Zen Nippon seinen mangaka kyōkai daiichi sakuhin shū (Tokyo: ShinKigensha, 1944), 23.
Figure 2.7 The Industrial Warrior. Katō Etsurō, ed., Zōsan manga shū: Zen Nippon seinen mangaka kyōkai daichi sakuhin shū (Tokyo: Shinkigensha, 1944), 32.
The munitions worker only imperfectly championed “resistance” against the total war system. Like other carnival kings on the Japanese home front and like all tricksters around the world, he operated not in direct opposition to the status quo but along the boundary between the realms of official and unofficial ideologies, ready to “move swiftly and impulsively back and forth across all orders with virtual impunity.”113 This ambiguity made it difficult for state agencies to control his autonomy without jeopardizing the foundations of critical military production. The wartime state and the munitions worker were, in a way, “stuck” with each other. The state could crack down on the munitions worker to make him behave, but only to a limited extent for the line between disciplining and sabotaging the worker was a fine one. Conversely, the worker’s cultural aura resonated only within the fantasies and nightmares inspired by the state’s ruthless attempts to mobilize the home front in support of industrialized warfare. Once the war ended and the total war system collapsed, the munitions worker as mischief-maker, carnival king, and trickster par excellence vanished from public consciousness. As Lewis Hyde explains, “if the ritual setting is missing, trickster is missing. If his companions – all the other spiritual forces within whose fixed domains he carries on his mischief – are no longer with us, then he is no longer with us.”114 The trickster needs the rituals of an authoritarian system both as a stage to perform on and as a foil against which to mock, destroy, and renew. Otherwise, he will dissipate into the ether as a directionless force of nature.115 In this sense, the munitions worker did not simply reflect social reality but rattled and rejuvenated it. The state laid out the rules for total war as system; the munitions worker promptly shattered those rules to reimagine total war as lived experience.

113 Hynes and Doty, Mythical Trickster Figures: 34.
114 Hyde, Trickster Makes This World: 13.
The soldier as liminal cultural construct was simultaneously exalted and disparaged by Japanese consumer-subjects in wartime mass culture. For many Japanese, the soldier offered values to cherish and a patriotic symbol to rally around in wartime. He represented masculine courage and fortitude, stoically struggling through immense hardships on the frontlines for family and nation. This popular image of the soldier was strongly promoted by the government and mass media to the Japanese home front. Indeed, scholars have since claimed that the deep, emotional bond civilians felt with the fighting men overseas became the foundation for nearly seamless national unity during the Asia-Pacific War. It is the strength of this bond between home front and warfront, frequently invoked by wartime ideologues and noted by many present-day scholars as well, that serves as one of the fundamental assumptions in our understanding of Japanese wartime society and culture.


2 For example, Barak Kushner argues that Japanese war propaganda successfully forged unity on the home front and “helped create a symbiotic relationship between soldiers at the front and civilians throughout the empire in support of imperial expansion.” See Barak Kushner, *The Thought War: Japanese Imperial Propaganda* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006): 6 and 9–10. David Earhart similarly writes that “the figure of the noble warrior became a powerful tool in domestic policies and programs mobilizing the entire nation, as the men, women, and children on the home front became ‘the people behind the man behind the gun.’” See Earhart, *Certain Victory*: 103. For an excellent overview of the social and cultural support on the home front for returning disabled veterans during the Asia-Pacific War, see Lee K. Pennington, *Casualties of War: Wounded Japanese Servicemen and the Second World War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

3 In contrast with English-language scholarship, current Japanese scholarship is not so quick to presume a stable social harmony uniting soldiers and civilians alike. Ichinose
This chapter will follow the soldier icon’s transition from celebrated godlike hero during the heady early years of the China War to a humbler everyman who appealed to people’s sympathies as the government tried to sustain popular support for a protracted conflict with no end in sight. This resulted in a shift in wartime mass culture away from celebrations of awe-inspiring hero worship to sympathetic portrayals of sensitive, courageous but vulnerable entities needing “comforts” from the home front to continue fighting for the nation. The imagined soldier was reconfigured again as the war degenerated into a quagmire in 1939 and 1940 and hundreds of thousands of disabled and traumatized soldiers returned to Japan. With growing material shortages at home and the increasingly unavoidable sight of wounded veterans requiring public assistance, the home front could no longer easily draw consumerist and patriotic gratification from supporting troops in the field. The number of comfort packages sent by civilians sharply fell – prompting anxiety from military officials and bitterness from soldiers. The chapter concludes by analyzing the awkward place of the returned soldier in wartime mass culture, his criticisms of the home front’s ignorance of war, and how his cultural inversion of the iconic soldier underscored the volatile cultural politics of wartime Japan, which operated through the constant crowning and decrowning of old and new kings of carnival war.

The Soldier Speeds Up

The practice of posthumous media celebrations of Japanese soldiers heroically dying in battle for nation as “military gods” (gunshin) can be dated back to the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). Media fixation on soldiers dying spectacular battlefield deaths through reckless close combat, sometimes armed only with a sword or bayonet, grew out of a strategic shift within the military after Japan’s 1905 victory in the Russo-Japanese War. Military planners concluded that the strategy of intensive firepower on enemy positions was not a feasible one for future wars. Despite fighting the Russians to a draw, Japanese units faced chronic shortages in ammunition and other critical materiel and were sometimes forced to rely solely on close combat with rifles and bayonets.

Toshiya has investigated the great inequalities and unevenness in state welfare policies toward soldiers, veterans, and bereaved families. See Ichinose Toshiya, 為兵人，為國家：戰爭時期的士兵及其家屬 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2005) and 廣範內戰時期的士兵及家屬生活 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2009). Inoue Toshikazu was one of the first scholars to identify the antagonism and diverging interests between the home front and returned soldiers during the China War. See Inoue Toshikazu, 日支內戰時期的日本 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2007).
The realization that Japan lacked the necessary ordnance to sustain extensive mechanized warfare led to a shift in emphasis in Japanese infantry drill manuals after 1909 away from the German tactic prioritizing firepower in favor of hand-to-hand combat (hakuheishugi). After the First World War, when trench warfare in Europe convinced the Great Powers to develop defensive firepower over close combat in future conflicts, the Japanese army followed a different track and expanded the hand-to-hand combat doctrine to include night attacks and surprise attacks with rifles and bayonets. In the 1923 drill manual, the preferred tactic taught to soldiers was close combat combined with an ill-defined “attack spirit” (kōgeki seishin), while further downgrading material-based firepower to secondary importance. The reliance on night attacks and surprise attacks with rifles and bayonets over long-range artillery fire remained the cornerstone of battlefield tactics until the end of the Asia-Pacific War in 1945. This shift in strategic thinking within military circles helped create a broader cultural expectation that the ideal soldier was to be daring, fast, and decisive, engaging the enemy in close proximity without the dehumanizing distancing of mechanized warfare.

Thereafter, soldiers who perished in battle while fighting the enemy in spirited hand-to-hand combat were often deified by media as “military gods.” During the Manchurian Incident (1931–1933), the number of “military gods” celebrated in the media proliferated. In February 1932, three army privates died in a brazen attempt to ram an explosive tube through enemy Chinese barbed wire. The army and newspapers praised the sacrifice and bravery of the three men, crowning them the “Three Human Bombs” (bakudan san yūshi) or simply the “Three Heroes” (san yūshi). A series of songs, plays, and movies based on their story quickly appeared, thereby reproducing and amplifying throughout Japan the ethos of martial self-sacrifice and a spirit of sensationalized war excitement. Many of the songs and stories called the Three Heroes “military gods,” exemplifying true “Yamato Spirit” and “loyalty and bravery” (chūya giretsu). In March 1932, Lieutenant Commander Kuga Noboru also became the subject of media celebration for committing suicide after his release from Chinese captivity. The army praised Kuga’s act as a “manly death” and “the highest military spirit” in accordance with the way of the warrior (bushidō). He properly atoned for the shame of enemy capture by taking his own life.

5 Louise Young, Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998): 77–78; Obinata, “Sōron.”
The start of the China War in the summer of 1937 inspired a similar bravado in media celebrations of the soldier. But whereas between 300,000 to 400,000 soldiers were mobilized during the Manchurian Incident of the early 1930s, the China War called for a more massive callup of adult men into the services. From 1937 to 1941, the total number of mobilized soldiers jumped from 634,000 to 2.4 million. By 1945, over 7 million men were in the military. Accordingly, the figure of the soldier loomed even larger in the public imagination after 1937.

During the chaotic Nanjing campaign in late 1937, when city after city fell to victorious Japanese troops in quick succession, the soldier was portrayed in the media as an agile force in constant motion, driven by an intangible martial spirit, and representing the ideal performance of hand-to-hand combat. We have already seen in Chapter 1 how reporters developed new ways to celebrate soldiers fighting in close combat “First to Arrive” and kill-count contests. Public fascination with “speed” intersected with the now-sacrosanct tactical principle of close hand-to-hand combat in battle. In October 1937, the boys’ magazine Shōnen Kurabu (Boys’ Club) published a series of dramatic illustrations of soldiers moving rapidly in battle, performing dramatic feats of valor made possible by a unique Japanese spirit. One illustration was labeled, “Ahh, the two bomb bullets! Such spirit pervades the imperial forces!” The image showed two soldiers climbing up the stone walls of a Chinese city as cannon fire smoke and airplanes surrounded them. Another illustration depicted Japanese marines armed with bayonets charging into a tank amid city rubble. The caption read, “How exciting! Taking an enemy tank alive. Even the latest weapons are no match for the Japanese spirit!”

The celebration of speedy, close combat skills of the soldier during this early phase of carnival war was also characterized by unconventional, even nonsensical behavior appearing in mass media portrayals. In the same 1937 issue of Shōnen Kurabu, another image invoked the legendary Three Human Bombs (bakudan san yūshi) from the Manchurian Incident by introducing the “Two Bomb Officers” (bakudan ni shōkō). To break the defenses of a besieged Chinese city, the two officers climbed up the city walls carrying bombs and explosives, only to be shot and killed. The two men fell, igniting the explosives, and creating a breach in the

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wall for Japanese troops to enter. The story represented a further iteration of the traditional media celebration of “military gods” dying spectacular battle deaths for nation. But it also suggested a new China War-sensibility of nonsensical, even irreverent behavior. The Two Bomb Officers only succeeded in their mission by accident through their own incompetence and ironic deaths.8

In November 1937, Shōnen Kurabu featured the “Heroic Incident Picture Collection: This is the Imperial Military,” which further emphasized the speed and death-defying martial daring of soldiers in battle. Soldiers appeared in several illustrations engaging in battle while traversing through flooded, chest-high rivers, racing along a river on a makeshift ladder held up by other men in the water, driving a commandeered armed train, and firing on fleeing Chinese soldiers. Two other pictures showed soldiers in calmer settings, as if to offer a sentimental intermission in between nonstop visual action. One was a group of marines resting behind a sandbag wall, smoking cigarettes, reading letters from home, and decorating the sandbag with flowers placed inside a cannon casing. Even a tranquil scene, however, was used by the magazine editors to further denigrate the inferiority of the Chinese. The caption explains that “only the Japanese soldier has the heart to love the beauty of nature even in the bloody warfront. How noble and refreshing when compared to the trenches where Chinese soldiers roll around playing things like mahjong.” Another illustration showed a more solemn picture of Japanese soldiers bowing before the grave of a Chinese officer who died in battle.9 Similar imagery of death-defying soldiers circulated in the mass magazine Kingu (King), which regularly featured photographs such as marines running through the burning streets of Shanghai’s International Concession looking for Chinese “plain-clothed soldiers”; cheering soldiers with bayonets raised on top of a captured Chinese plane; and two soldiers calmly napping right under a massive tank.10 What unites these soldierly images was the celebration of the spiritual and physical strengths of Japanese fighting men and the absence of much discussion of technological prowess.

The Military God Becomes a Sentimental Soldier

Following the tumultuous conclusion of the Shanghai–Nanjing campaign at the end of 1937, the soldier slowed down, both on the battlefield and in popular culture (see figure 3.1). The number of accounts and images of him rushing, racing, speeding toward yet another Chinese encampment or city, his every move recorded by embedded war correspondents, diminished.

Figure 3.1 Okada Sojū, “Hōdanka no Shanhau: Senjo Shanhau tsu dai isshin,” Kaizo, (October 1937): 372.
Following the fall of Nanjing in December 1937, Chiang Kaishek withdrew his forces deep into the Chinese hinterlands, thereby forcing the Japanese military to switch to an exhausting policy of long-term occupation and sporadic anti-insurgency campaigns. By late 1938, Japanese casualties reached 100,000, surpassing the number killed in the entire Russo-Japanese War. At the same time, the Japanese government continued to pour billions of yen into the war effort with no clear plan for victory. In November 1938, Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro announced vaguely that the war’s aim was to build a “New Order in East Asia” while explicitly rejecting direct territorial annexation or reparations, to the confusion of the public expecting a quick victory and war booty.  

As the war shifted from blitzkrieg to stalemate by the fall of 1938, media depictions of soldiers began emphasizing a bleaker picture defined by methodical marching through harsh terrain. The soldier after 1938 diverged from earlier depictions of a brave, valorous superman who seemed beyond common experience. Although fallen soldiers were still celebrated in popular culture as “military gods,” the more common depiction became that of a quieter, humbler stereotype – the humanistic mortal man who was courageous and patriotic, but also vulnerable, quick to tears, and intimately recognizable to civilians as someone deeply rooted to his hometown. For example, in January 1939, Shōnen Kurabu ran a series of illustrations from the warfront entitled “Imperial Army Charge Pictorial.” One illustration showed a long line of soldiers marching slowly through muddy waters, shivering beneath cloaks and hoods. The caption explained that these were rear transport units trying to connect with the main force besieging Wuhan: “They are working to fulfill their heavy responsibility in case the war comrades of the frontlines run out of bullets and rations. Such hardship! Such effort! Just looking at this picture, we can’t help but bow our heads [in respect].” The fast-changing frontlines with dramatic battles were now less visible.

To further promote a sympathetic view of the war and soldiers, in 1938 the Cabinet Information Department started a photographic journal for

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a general audience called *Shashin Shūhō* (*Photographic Weekly*). In the glossy photo spreads and articles of *Shashin Shūhō*, Japanese soldiers appeared in ordinary settings resting in camp, recuperating at a hospital, or performing mundane tasks on the front. As the war became a protracted affair, *Shashin Shūhō* moved from trumpeting glorified battle deaths to presenting human interest stories of fellow countrymen struggling on the frontlines for the nation.\(^\text{13}\)

The move away from depictions of soldierly bravado immortalized in the media in favor of a stoic, kind, even gentle everyman soldier was echoed in war films made after 1937. A sense of quiet fatalism pervaded these films, which typically had long scenes of soldiers marching obediently through China in mud, rain, and sun. This genre, called “humanistic” by film scholars, featured unit commanders as fatherly figures unsparingly solicitous of their men’s health and well-being. Soldiers in the films demonstrated an intense, familial comradeship in their unit. In this way, military life, which involved the separation of young men from their families into a rigid, single-sex, and often brutal regimen, was reconfigured by the movies into the more familiar framework of the family. The frail and emotionally sensitive soldier fighting within a family-like unit in humanistic war films was an attempt by directors and film censors to garner the sympathy of Japanese civilians. There was a tacit understanding that such portrayals would be more effective to mobilize popular support than images of awe-inspiring but ultimately remote and distant warriors.\(^\text{14}\)

The changing nature of the war thus demanded a new understanding of the soldier. Unlike the victorious Shanghai–Nanjing campaign of 1937, subsequent military campaigns lacked the same level of drama and speed and inspired few fictional and semi-fictional accounts. As a result, there was a less receptive public climate for glorified “military gods.” After 1937, the number of certified “military gods” celebrated by the press fell sharply. A 1942 book listed the twenty “military gods” from Japan’s wars: three from the Russo-Japanese War, four from the Manchurian Incident, three from the China War (until 1942), and ten from the Pacific War (as of early 1942). The scarcity of officially recognized “military gods” from 1937 to 1942 is underscored by the fact that earlier wars yielded the same number of “military gods” or more in just a year’s time. Even within less than a year, the Pacific War already generated ten soldiers judged by the military and press worthy of the title. Furthermore, the three

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14 High, *The Imperial Screen*: 217–222. For example, see films such as *The Five Scouts* (*Gonin no sekkōhei*, 1938), *Chocolate and Soldiers* (*Chokoreto to heitai*, 1938), and *Earth and Soldier* (*Tsuchi to heitai*, 1939).
China War “military gods” all died in less than heroic circumstances. In 1938, Lieutenant Commander Nangō Mochifumi crashed into an enemy plane, but his acclamation as a “military god” was only done retroactively four years later. Lieutenant Sugimoto Gorō died while charging into an enemy base in September 1937, but his death did not attract much attention until the posthumous publication of his book, Taigi (The Great Cause), in 1938, which argued for a mystical, religious significance in the China War. His philosophical writings, and not his actions in battle, sparked public attention and uplifted him to “military god” status in the mass media.\(^\text{15}\)

However, the third China War military god did manage to achieve a more lasting cultural significance. Tank Commander Nishizumi Kojirō had a somewhat ignominious death in May 1938 – struck down by a stray enemy bullet while climbing out of a tank. However, the Army Ministry, eager to uphold more fallen soldiers as heroic paragons to rally the home front, organized an elaborate publicity campaign to deify Nishizumi as a “military god” through public lectures and exhibits.\(^\text{16}\)

By December 1938, the Tokyo Asahi Shinbun dubbed Tank Commander Nishizumi a “Shōwa military god” (“Shōwa” being the reign name of Emperor Hirohito). Over the next two years, Army officials went on speaking tours praising Nishizumi’s heroic death, while the noted writer Kikuchi Kan penned a biography of Nishizumi which was serialized in the Tokyo Nichinichi and the Osaka Mainichi Shinbun. In November 1940, Shōchiku studios released an army-endorsed movie about Nishizumi’s life called The Legend of Tank Commander Nishizumi (Nishizumi senshachō den).\(^\text{17}\) Captain Kubota Tatsuo praised the film in the movie magazine Sutā (Star) for showing how the tank as a weapon of modern warfare was just as essential as the more popular airplane. The actor playing the title role, Uehara Ken, brought a verisimilitude born from actual military drilling. Uehara, noted Kubota, even used his father-in-law’s real military sword, grew a stubble, and shaved his hair to closed-cropped style, so that “he was the spitting image of Tank Commander Nishizumi.” All the actors underwent training to learn how to operate a tank properly, which impressed Kubota greatly: “It was truly amazing how they did not make even one mistake.” The result of their training was battle scenes “the likes of which have not been seen even in news film.”\(^\text{18}\) A full-page advertisement for the film appearing in the same issue of Sutā praised Nishizumi the man as

\(^{15}\) Yamamuro, Gunshin: 261–268. The book Yamamuro refers to is Hata Kensuke, Gunshin den, jō ge (Tokyo: Chōbunkaku, 1942).

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Yamamuro, Gunshin: 266–268.

“The flower of modern warfare with such overwhelming heroism. The brilliant deeds of superhuman work of the tank unit.”

The film did very well in the box office, running for three weeks in the theater, thanks in part to organized viewings among student and youth groups (see figure 3.2).

Despite the advertisement’s claims, however, Nishizumi in the film seemed quite different from the strong and brawny soldiers seen in earlier war films and stories. As Peter High writes, “there is something intellectual and dandyish about the tank commander’s manner of speaking and dressing, even in his pensively held cigarette.”

The question over what makes a “true” or successful war film was openly debated among critics, actors, and even veterans. The film critic for the Tokyo Asahi felt that the film “failed” at capturing Nishizumi’s personality. “The tank seemed to be more like the film’s ‘main character,’” he sarcastically wrote. The problem for the critic was the actor playing Nishizumi: “From the beginning, Uehara Ken as ‘Nishizumi’ is impossible (muri). It is absolutely pathetic that this is the ‘military god’ of our army.” Uehara, who was more famous as a romantic lead, played Nishizumi as a “mild and gentle” (nyūwa) officer lacking the “emotional force” (seishin ryoku) to comfort his subordinates one moment and then boldly lead them into battle the next moment.

The film reviewer suggested that the true realities of war, that is the very real and personal experience of combat, were not captured here.

The reviewer was not alone in expressing disillusionment with the kinds of major blockbuster war films produced by Japanese movie studios. There was another similar critique against the acclaimed soldier film, Earth and Soldier (Tsuchi to heitai). The 1939 film was based on a reportage novel of the frontlines by the famous soldier-writer Hino Ashihei while stationed in China. Despite the seemingly authentic source of the film, in February 1940, several veterans openly criticized Earth and Soldier in a Sutā magazine interview as “unsatisfactory” (monotaranu). The actors portraying soldiers were not convincing, wrote one veteran soldier from Osaka, and there were too many mistakes that betrayed insufficient understanding of real warfare: “For example, striding in front of the enemy with a Rising Sun flag attached to the gun is something that is absolutely forbidden . . . and yet, the Tamai Unit [the fictional unit in the film] does this all the time.” In addition, real soldiers, according to

21 High, The Imperial Screen: 212–213.
22 “Shin eiga hyō: Nishizumi senshachō den,” Asahi Shinbun, December 4, 1940.
Figure 3.2 “The Legend of Tank Commander Nishizumi,” starring Uehara Ken. *Kinema Junpō* 732 (November 1, 1940).
this real soldier, always made sure to take off their heavy knapsacks before going on break. “It annoys me to no end when [in the movie] soldiers just stand there chatting or smoking cigarettes with their knapsacks still on,” the veteran fumed. “I kept wanting to shout, ‘hurry up and take off your knapsack!’” Furthermore, the veteran continued, the orders given to soldiers in the film, “Charge ahead! (totsugeki mae e),” should instead be “Charge and advance! (totsugeki susume).” He found problematic how the film portrayed unit formations against the enemy, predicting that in real life, “the Tamai Unit would have been annihilated.” As for the common argument that war films should be granted some dramatic license, the veteran was unimpressed. “Some say that these are theater actors, movie actors and we have to watch it with this handicap (handikyappu) in mind,” he concluded. “Well, if that’s the case, then this is not a masterpiece.”

The sense that something was off for some with both Earth and Soldier and Tank Commander Nishizumi was further hinted at in a February 1941 interview in the magazine Eiga no Tomo (Friend of the Movies) with Uehara and Kosugi Isamu, the star of Earth and Soldier. The reporter observed that both films depicted soldiers quite differently. Unlike Kosugi’s character in Earth and Soldier, he realized that Uehara’s Nishizumi seemed to be “a humorous (yūmorasu), weak and frail person (ki no yowai hito), with the officer talking about the painful blisters on his feet from marching.” The reporter, perhaps speaking on behalf of some of the moviegoing audience who saw these films, “could not tell which one is the soldier in a real war.” Kosugi and Uehara immediately pointed out that, in real life, not only every unit but every company had a different “atmosphere” (kūki) and so it was natural that soldier films present different styles of soldierly persona. “Neither is a lie,” Uehara noted. The reporter pressed the two actors further, wondering that perhaps the different portrayals of soldiers had to do with contrasting visions of the directors. Kosugi argued that for Tank Commander Nishizumi, the director Yoshimura Kōsaburō knew that “there is a humorous side to what soldiers do and he wanted to try and bring out the soldier as ordinary guy.” For Uehara, he explained the differences by noting that “Earth and Soldier dealt with soldiers while The Legend of Tank Commander Nishizumi was about the feelings of an officer. Because of this, they are different.”

When asked by the reporter what he thought a war film should be like, Kosugi argued that war films should be more than just soldiers dramatically fighting the enemy in battle. “I think that, in the end,” he said, “the mission of war films is to connect with the people on the home front in an

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24 “Kosugi Isamu Uehara Ken taidan,” Eiga no Tomo (February 1941): 51.
easily-understandable way [to explain] why we are fighting the war, the reason why soldiers are bravely dying.” Uehara Ken added that civilians already knew about the actual fighting and battles from news films and so it would be redundant to include such realism in film dramas. “To clearly imbue the home front that which is spiritual,” Uehara began, only to be finished by Kosugi, “Is our mission (wareware no shimei desu).”25

But the actors were well aware of the criticisms lobbed by film critics and even veterans toward their films. Kosugi admitted feeling chagrined and anxious reading about such criticisms but Uehara remained defiant and dismissive. “While of course I care but lately I don’t really worry about it. If it’s not a person with actual experience, then a criticism about performance can’t be a real criticism.” Uehara also went on to accuse his critics of “having animosity” toward him with unconstructive criticism.26

The soldiers in Earth and Soldier and Tank Commander Nishizumi represented the culmination of the shift in the popular imagination of the soldier from heroic superman to ordinary everyman. This reconfiguration of the soldier as a simple, relatable individual who does his duty reflected the greater concerns of the Japanese government to prepare the home front for protracted warfare in China. With no real resolution to the war in sight, endurance and tenacious dedication more than bombastic daring and bravery was called for.27 However, this was no easy transition and the elevation of soldiers from the China War as war heroes proved to be a difficult task that required more extensive coordination and effort on the part of the military and the press.

The “Humanity” of the Wakizaka Unit

The difficulty of finding suitable soldier paragons from the ongoing China War or dissatisfaction with the “humanistic” depictions of soldiers in film drove many writers to go back to the exhilarating 1937 Nanjing campaign. In July 1938, Hanashi (Talk) magazine printed a series of dramatized accounts commemorating the Nanjing siege from the previous year. The editor reminded readers that “the voice of national joy exploded when the Nanjing capital finally fell, and the victorious news was received. Who can forget the sacrifices of the glorious human bullet deaths (nikudan sange no gisei) of the many heroic imperial soldiers, crying out true unswerving loyalty?” It was hoped by Hanashi editors that this retrospective would help “with home front preparedness (jūgo kaishin)” for a protracted conflict. But instead of the virtues of patience, endurance,
and stoic obedience, these sensationalized stories from the Nanjing campaign emphasized high-speed play such as the “first to arrive” games, reckless initiative, and quick, decisive, and spectacular victories.28

In 1939, an attempt was made by army officials and the intelligentsia to harmonize the contradictory images of the humanistic soldier with the fearsome soldier as superman by again invoking memories of the Nanjing campaign. That year, the writer Nakayama Masao wrote a book called *Wakizaka butai* (*The Wakizaka Unit*), a dramatic account of the first unit to enter Nanjing.29 Nakayama began writing the book to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the fall of Nanjing and provide “the true story of the bloody battle of the first to arrive [unit] in Nanjing.”30 The author was the founder of a pro-military publishing firm, Rikugun Gahōsha (Army Illustrated Company), which published and serialized the book through its magazine, *Rikugun Gahō* (*Army Illustrated*).

*The Wakizaka Unit* contained nonstop breathless action scenes of Japanese soldiers racing toward Nanjing, including prominent feature of the “first to arrive” game concocted by reporters. The final chapter begins with Wakizaka Unit officers seeing smoke up ahead:

The soldiers cried without thinking:
“Hey, is that Nanjing burning over there?”
“It is! It’s Nanjing!”
“It’s Nanjing!”
“It’s Nanjing!”
Oh, what divine aide, what divine help. A dream one cannot forget. Nanjing castle . . . The hopes of being first to arrive (ichiban nori) glittered like a rainbow . . . Nanjing, before their very eyes. Run! Run!31

The narrative emphasized the speed with which the soldiers raced toward the Chinese capital, even noting the sound of a sublieutenant’s clattering scabbard (katakata) and the muffled echoes of boots quickly hitting the ground (datsudatsu). Along the way, the Wakizaka Unit soldiers hacked away Chinese soldiers with swords. Like the wordplay used by reporters to describe the Hundred Man Killing Contest, Nakayama employed a bewildering variety of terms to describe the many ways Japanese soldiers dispatched the enemy: “stab” (imozashi), “skewer” (dengakuzashi), “thrust” (tsukisashi), “diagonal slashing” (kesagiri), and

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“slicing through the head” (ogami giri). The Wakizaka Unit was quite a different portrayal from the humanistic depictions of the soldier in film and literature. Here, the soldier was extremely violent, in constant motion, not a prisoner of his environment but, rather, its master, exhibiting near-superhuman qualities.

Rikugun Gahō magazine regularly ran full-page advertisements of the book boasting endorsements from leading army generals, intellectuals, and other respected public figures. Hayashi Senjūrō, former prime minister and army minister, called the book “a spiritual drill manual for citizens in wartime.” The Army Ministry Information Department granted its official endorsement to the book for “clearly describing the sincere devoted loyalty of this glorious unit, introducing the prestige and reputation of the imperial forces, and promoting the spiritual uplift of the people.” Advertisements for the book also ran in the national dailies. The Yomiuri Shinbun listed testimonials from eight eminent people: two generals, one party politician, and five intellectual writers. The ad copy claimed that “all Japanese – men and women, young and old – will read this and weep.” The Tokyo Asahi advertisement similarly listed multiple prominent endorsements “from the military, literary circles, and the education world – overwhelming all other war stories.”

Publisher Rikugun gahōsha organized events to promote the book. In February 1939, the magazine joined with the Army Ministry, local regiments, and the Ōsaka Asahi Shinbun to sponsor a public talk and exhibit related to the Wakizaka Unit in the unit’s home city of Fukui. The exhibit was held on the fifth floor of Fukui’s Fukuya Department Store and displayed medals, swords, and panoramas from the siege of Nanjing, photographs of slain unit members, and personal effects they left behind. Rikugun gahōsha editors proudly noted that “it was just as good as any department store exhibit in Tokyo.” Over the course of ten days, 7,000 people attended the exhibit. Afterwards, 3,500 people attended a public talk by the author, Nakayama Masao, at the Fukui City Hall. Nakayama spoke about “the true nature of the holy war” by citing the “great valorous deeds of the Wakizaka Unit.” But what really struck a chord with the audience, according to the summary appearing in Rikugun Gahō, was the author’s discussion of the “soldier’s humanity in the battlefield.” The article used the Japanese word ningensei (humanity or human nature) but printed phonetic script to

32 “Wakizaka butai kan,” Rikugun Gahō (March 1939): 76.
the side indicating that it should be pronounced like the English word, *hyu-ma-ni-tii*. Nakayama told the story of how the Wakizaka Unit soldiers fought to the bitter end after seizing Nanjing’s main gate, with many dying in battle. Soon the audience started to “sob” (*oetsu*) and “softly cry” (*teikyu*), while others left their seats to loudly wail in the hallway. It would seem that, despite the superhuman-like feats of the Wakizaka Unit, Nakayama was trying to tie his book with the humanistic soldier films of the day.\(^{36}\)

Columbia Records released three versions of a song based on Nakayama’s book – a contemporary “crisis song” (*jikyokuka*), an old classical song with a lute (*biwa*), and a storyteller-like version (*naniwabushi*).\(^{37}\) In April 1939, the *Yomiuri Shinbun* reported that Tōkyō Hassei studios had purchased the film rights to *The Wakizaka Unit* while the New National Theater group (*shin kokugeki*) announced plans to stage a play based on the novel.\(^{38}\) The overall success of this promotion campaign is unclear. Despite the grandiose claims made in *Rikugun Gaho*, a film was never made.

The burst of organized activity among the Army Ministry, the *Osaka Asahi Shinbun*, and an array of prominent writers to publicize *The Wakizaka Unit* and its limited success suggest that the mix of humanistic and speedy soldier tropes was an inherently challenging one for consumers to accept. Unlike the Manchurian Incident, when instant soldier heroes appeared with ease, after 1937 few readily obvious martial paragons emerged other than ones from campaigns long since finished. This was mostly due to the transition of the war from rapid advance to slow stalemate. New “military gods” continued to appear on scene but only with considerable effort on the part of the military and the mass media and often with mixed results.

Deep, emotional ties between soldiers and civilians were forged less by cinematic portrayals of soldiers and more through the cultural practice of sending “comfort packages” to the frontlines. Whether superman or ordinary boy-next-door, civilians demonstrated their patriotic virtues and support for the troops through this act of mass consumption and gift-giving. The giving of such “comfort packages,” however, further transformed the cultural construction of the soldier on the home front in ways that ultimately strained the intimate bonds between the home front and warfront.


\(^{38}\) “Eiga ni geki ni ‘Wakizaka Butai’ hipparidako,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, April 8, 1939.
The cultural icon of the decelerated soldier helped inspire countless acts of patriotism among civilians, principally through the sending of “comfort packages” (imonbukuro) to the China front for material and emotional support. Comfort packages created a powerful bond between the home front and warfront that helped rally popular support for the war. They were part of an array of patriotic rituals practiced by Japanese civilians to honor soldiers on the front and memorialize those who died in battle. However, a closer examination of the comfort package during the China War reveals that this integrative ritual of patriotic fervor evolved into a disintegrative and alienating cultural practice of conspicuous consumption.

Large-scale comfort package giving began during the Manchurian Incident. In 1931 and 1932, newspaper companies organized fundraising drives to encourage people to send money and gifts to soldiers, and not incidentally to boost circulation figures. Local communities also joined in the comfort package fever by establishing their own campaigns to raise money to send overseas to local troops. Within one year, these campaigns generated 5.3 million yen for soldier relief, 3.5 million comfort packages, and over 20 million donations of a variety of goods and accessories. The overall excitement of battlefield victories drove the popular fervor for collecting and sending comfort packages, helped reproduce mobilization for empire at the national and local levels, and fed into a greater imperial ideology justifying the military conquest of Manchuria. As Louise Young concludes, “Devoting those sums to imperial pageantry, everyone was able to share in the sense of loss, to experience vicariously the sacrifice, and to participate in the martyrdom.”

When the China War broke out in 1937, comfort packages again became part of a flurry of home front activity and helped spur on public excitement for the war similar to that seen during the Manchurian Incident war fever. Comfort packages might be sent privately by families to cheer on a son, husband, or father fighting in China but, more often, they were shipped out in large quantities by organizations such as newspapers, women’s associations, and elementary schools to entire units. Civilians would usually send a variety of items such as candy, canned food, winter clothes, and sometimes a book or newspaper, along with letters of encouragement or “comfort letters” (imonbun). This rather vast spectrum of items sent to soldiers was confirmed in November 1937, when the Army Ministry Soldier Relief Department (rikugunshō juppeibu) observed in the mass

39 Young, Japan’s Total Empire: 174–180.
40 Young, Japan’s Total Empire: 156–164 and 174–179.
magazine *Kingu* that civilians have already got into the habit of sending “candy, salted beans, flavored nori, canned items, towels, handkerchiefs, notebooks, pencils, envelopes, writing paper, ‘comfort art’ (imonga), entertainment magazines, recent newspapers, and medicine.” The Army Ministry officials recommended that civilians send candy, flavored nori, and salted beans in cans lest they melt in the package and damage other items. More personalized content was preferable though: “Comfort letters would be most welcome and business cards as mementos are fine.”

Many firms were quick to use the comfort package popularity to advertise new products as perfect items to send to soldiers. However, the beneficiaries of these products were not always clearly identified. For one thing, the advertisements usually showed young women modeling the product, suggesting that the intended target audience were for both civilians as well as soldiers to ultimately use. One newspaper advertisement from August 1938 touted the “[military] camp mosquito net” (roei kaya) for 1.50 yen as a “brand new comfort product” (imonhin no shinpin), which promised to keep away insects while sleeping outdoors. The accompanying image showed a female model blissfully asleep under the net. The high-end Mitsukoshi Department Store offered families the chance to record personal messages on a record for fifty sen, which would later be sent to soldiers in China. “If you are confident in your voice,” the advertisement proclaimed, “you can send comfort (imon) with a song.” This product was also marketed for female consumption with the advertisement displaying the image of a young woman examining a record player. Yet another newspaper article showed a young woman wearing “sock covers,” on sale for fifty sen. Sock covers would be worn over regular socks to protect the feet against severe cold. “Perfect as a comfort package item,” the headline claimed. One newspaper described several new products on display at the Sixth Annual Patent Office Invention Convention as “perfect for comfort package items.” The items included a badminton paddle decorated with an image of a young kimono-clad Japanese woman carrying a folding fan, candy shaped like a sword, and a toy pistol that could also be used as a harmonica.

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41 “Gozonji deshō ga,” *Kingu* (November 1937): 398. The Soldier Relief Department was first established during the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) as a central place to receive and distribute military donations from civilians to soldiers. See entry for juppeibu, *Nihon kokugo dai jiten*, JapanKnowledge Lib, [http://japanknowledge.com](http://japanknowledge.com).
43 “Shinpin – ‘koe no imon’,” *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun*, September 1, 1938.
Comfort packages in 1937 and 1938 became much more luxurious and elaborate as compared to previous comfort-giving campaigns. Although military guidelines suggested that civilians send comfort packages containing goods worth no more than one yen, the Mitsukoshi Department Store offered customers “comfort package sets” (imonbukuro setto) at three to five yen. The Daimaru Department Store in Osaka sold readymade comfort packages for up to six yen. The Takashimaya Department Store heavily advertised in newspapers its special section devoted exclusively to a variety of comfort package sets. The difference in scale and expense can be explained by the wartime boom lifting Japan out of the Great Depression after 1937. As military spending jumped from 3.4 billion yen in 1937 to 8.2 billion yen in 1940, total expenditure per capita also grew from 282 yen to 312 yen during those same years.46

Soldiers began to wonder why civilians kept sending over commercialized and impersonal packages. What they wanted instead, several told one Asahi newspaper reporter, were items “full of heartfelt sincerity (sekishin kometa).” Another soldier complained that 80 percent of the comfort packages his unit received were damaged and stuffed with partially unwrapped product samples. “Please,” he pleaded to the reporter, “tell the people of the home front ... We’d like them to properly rewrap items bought at department stores.” The army later issued a press release reminding the public to include handmade items in addition to department store products. One soldier on leave in Japan was stunned at the over-the-top luxurious displays of comfort packages in department stores. “If all units at the front had a choice, they would want things that are ‘heartfelt and sincere’ (kokoro no komotta mono),” he sternly concluded. In a November 1938 newspaper article, a soldier who received yet another hastily wrapped, readymade package angrily snapped at the reporter, “We’re not junk collectors (oretachi wa kuzuya ja ne)! Among the items crammed into this particular gift from the home front were an old newspaper from 1931 and a woman’s magazine.47

Perhaps whoever sent that package had read the April 1938 announcement about comfort packages in publishing giant Kōdansha’s general news magazine Gendai (Modern). In the announcement, Kōdansha acknowledged soldiers’ dissatisfaction with readymade department store comfort packages. It quoted the writer Kimura Ki who, after visiting the frontlines, declared that “what would make soldiers happiest are heartfelt and sincere (kokoro wo kometa) comfort packages from the home front.” However, Kōdansha interpreted “heartfelt and sincere” to

mean reading materials—specifically books and magazines published by Kōdansha. “Everyone, please,” the publisher beseeched its readers, “we would like you to put magazines in comfort packages. What would be most appropriate, aside from our thirty-plus volumes of interesting novels, true stories, kōdan stories, and rakugo storytelling, is the April special edition issue of our entertainment magazine Fuji, featuring ‘Imperial Forces Comfort Interesting Convention,’ ‘Famous Pop Songs and Parody Songs Picture Scroll,’ and ‘The Inside Story on Movies, Theater, and Revue.’”48 In other words, not only were comfort packages being coopted by commercial businesses to sell products, but even the soldiers’ pleas for “heartfelt sincerity” were adapted for marketing purposes.

Soldier grumbling about comfort packages continued. One soldier complained that too many comfort packages “were made uniformly by groups that don’t leave much of an impression or feeling.” He preferred that “they be made by individuals with a comfort letter always included and sent with the person’s name.” Another soldier asked that when food is sent inside a comfort package there be enough to share with the rest of his squad. Still another complained that people would carelessly throw cigarettes and dried fish (hoshizakana) together in a comfort package, rendering the former unusable.49 Police grew concerned about businesses selling unhealthy comfort package foodstuffs. In the spring of 1939, a group of merchants did bustling business from the second floor of the Maru Building in downtown Tokyo selling “Thank You Mr. Soldier” (heitai san arigatō) cookies for thirty sen each. Several months later, the police hygiene department banned the sale of the cookies after finding that they had meager nutritional value (naiyō hinjaku) and no manufacturer of record.50 The same agency later ordered merchants to add preservatives (bōfusai) in food products destined for soldiers and ensure that the manufacturer’s name, address, and manufacture date were clearly marked.51

Home Ministry police officials were equally vexed by the proliferation of private comfort package donation drives. As early as October 1937, the Home Ministry ordered police departments to rein in the commercialization of donation campaigns by various companies and department stores. There was concern that private companies “have been using the good

51 “Seizōsha wo meiki, imon shokuryōhin no fuhyō issō,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, July 18, 1939.
name of national defense donation drives and comfort fundraising donation drives to put out exaggerated billboards and advertisements.” The report noted that while companies claimed that all proceeds would be donated to the military, in reality most of the money was poured into advertising campaigns to publicize their corporate benevolence.  

A year later, in October 1938, the Home Ministry issued new regulations on comfort packages. Organizations now needed permits before participating in comfort package-giving. Donation drives were also forbidden from being used simply to cover administrative costs; real money must make its way eventually to soldiers. One police official explained that the number of local, private, and commercial donation drives for soldiers had proliferated to a significant degree: “Their goals are noble enough but it all tends to be quite annoying (hansa no kirai ga aru) and so the Police Agency Peace Preservation Department has laid out regulations and controls to centralize these donation drives.”

The military also moved to rein in the commercial excesses of the comfort package craze. In September 1938, the Army Ministry announced new guidelines to narrow what civilians could donate to soldiers recovering in military hospitals. Among the recommended items were “go [Japanese checkers board game], shōgi [Japanese chess], radio, a hearing aid (kakuseiki), a phonograph, records, film projector, film, or musical instrument.” The instructions also urged civilians to ensure that “the packages are firmly wrapped so that they arrive undamaged.” Food and tobacco items were to be packed in special can containers.

In January 1939, to provide further guidance to Japanese people on comfort package giving, the Army and Navy Ministries announced a comprehensive list of recommended items to place in comfort packages which did not overtly depart much from traditional items: everyday goods (towels, handkerchiefs, socks, toothpaste); writing utensils; candy and cigarettes; and reading materials. However, there was a renewed emphasis on reducing frivolous spending and emphasizing a personal touch. The guidelines also urged people to send reading materials that they already owned and had finished reading, rather than buying new copies. Handmade items such as cigarette boxes, chopsticks, and pictures, rather than store-bought goods, were the ideal. Thought should also be given to where the comfort packages were to be sent. Soldiers in North China

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52 Naimushō keihōkyoku, “Jikyoku wo riyō suru buppin hanbai tō no torishimari ni kansuru ken (kaku chōfuken),” [October 5, 1937], JACAR Ref.A05032039100.
53 “Jūgo kōen wo tōsei, keishichō noridasu,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, October 25, 1938.
54 Rikugunshō rikugunjuppeibu, “Juppei hinshū no seigen narabi ni chūi jikō, kōkoku no ken,” [September 1938], JACAR Ref.C01007091700.
needed things like woolen socks, gloves, hats, and frostbite medicine; soldiers in South China probably needed fans, mints (hakka), anti-perspirants (ase shirazu), and flea powder (nomitoriko). However, senders were advised not to send food to troops in the south, lest it spoil. The guidelines estimated average delivery time to be about one month.\(^{55}\)

The military continued to nudge civilians to include personalized “comfort letters” (imonbun) in comfort packages to soften the sometimes impersonal commercialized content. However, even comfort letters could be impersonal too as they sometimes took the form of formulaic letters. One soldier stationed in tropical South China during the blazing summer of 1940 received a comfort letter which read, “Dear Mr. Soldier in North China, it sure must be cold out there.” Another soldier stationed near the Soviet border, hundreds of miles from North China, also received the same form letter, “Dear Mr. Soldier in North China.” There were also scattered military police reports finding that soldiers who did not receive any letters grew resentful at those who received regular correspondence from the home front.\(^{56}\) One personnel officer stationed in northern Manchuria found that only some soldiers in his unit received letters from home. He wrote to their local National Defense Women’s Association, asking the group to send letters to all soldiers in the unit to avoid creating a sense of embarrassment or resentment among the men.\(^{57}\)

In 1939, the magazine *Yūben* (Eloquence) advertised to readers a guidebook called “A Collection of Formal Sample Greeting Letters in Wartime,” available for one yen. In the advertisement copy, an unnamed boy complains about the difficulty of coming up with things to say in every comfort letter he writes. The guide proved useful in offering common phrases of greetings for all situations. The boy concludes, “after reading the guide, writing letters became fun.”\(^{58}\)

Ironically, even while encouraging more “heartfelt” comfort giving, the military made it difficult for civilians to send personalized letters to soldiers. Postal regulations from September 1938 suspended handling of private parcels shipped from Japan to China on the grounds that the rapidly shifting battle lines made forwarding parcels too dangerous and arduous. Thus, senders could no longer specify to whom their “heartfelt”

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letters and packages could be sent. Civilians were instead encouraged to
| donate comfort packages and money through the Army Ministry’s Soldier
| Relief Department, which would send the gifts to whole units in bulk.59
| While it remained possible to send letters to specific soldiers at the
| sender’s expense, the 1939 military guidelines recommended that “it
| would be better just to address [the letter] ‘to everyone on the frontlines’
| (daissen no minasan),” citing the logistical difficulties for military postal
| service to determine the exact location of an individual soldier.60

In March 1939, a gathering of local mayors in Okayama prefecture
| issued their own comfort-giving guidelines for residents. The officials
| praised the prefecture’s “deeply moving” enthusiasm for comfort-giving
| which amounted to an astonishing 12 million items since the war began.
| However, they pointed out that items “filled with sincerity” (seii no
| komotta mono) would be better appreciated; preferably handmade instead
| of store-bought and enclosed with a handwritten comfort letter. After all,
| the local officials pointed out, “things filled with earnest sincerity are not
| necessarily limited only to expensive things.”61

By 1939, the number of comfort packages sent to the front had
| fallen off sharply. During the period from July 1937 to June 1938,
| monetary donations reached over 40 million yen and the number of
| comfort packages shipped to soldiers was an impressive 323,000
| packages. During the last six months of 1939 (July to December),
| those figures dropped down to 13.7 million yen and 100,000 items,
| respectively.62

In the fall of 1939, the famous soldier–writer Hino Ashihei chastised
| the home front for the decline in letters and packages in an article for the
| Yomiuri Shinbun.63 After coming home following the conclusion of his
| own military service, Hino discovered that the quantity of mail sent from
| the home front to the warfront was declining month by month. He urged
| civilians to send more letters overseas, arguing that such comforts pro-
| vided cheer and improved morale for soldiers. Besides, Hino testily
| added, “it is we soldiers who are risking our lives, fighting for the father-
| land.” Soldiers, he explained, want to keep a piece of their soul by

59 “Chūshi sensen kozutsumi wo chūshi, koin ate imonbukuro mate,” Tokyo Asahi
| Shinbun, September 7, 1938, 11. See also Rikugunshō, “Rikugun juppei kinpin toriatsu-
| kai tetsuzuki seitai no ken,” [November–December 1937], JACAR Ref.C01001472100.
| 60 “Ima koso heitai san wo imon shimashō,” Shōnen Kurabu (January 15, 1939): 49.
| 61 Shina jihen gunji engo shi dai ni kan (March 1940): 213–215. Reprinted in Ichinose
| Toshiya, ed. Henshu fukkokuban Shōwa-ki “Jūgo” kankei shiryō shūsei, dai ni kan,
| 62 Table adopted from “Jūgo kokumin nessei no ittan,” Heitai 14 (April 1940).
| 63 Hino earlier achieved literary fame with his blockbuster 1938 novel Mugi to heitai (Wheat
| and Soldier), based on his own experience as an officer during the Nanjing campaign.
maintaining contact with their hometown through comfort letters. “You wouldn’t really understand this if you’re not a soldier,” he explained somewhat patronizingly to newspaper readers. Hino claimed that soldiers were falling into despair: “The soldiers at the front are so lonely and sad that they are wondering, ‘Has the home front forsaken us?’” He criticized the home front for assuming that garrison duty in China meant that soldier lives were easy and morale-boosting letters were unnecessary. This, of course, was “an absolutely wrong thinking.”

Hino’s appeals for renewed home front generosity toward soldiers faced the challenge of dealing with disappointing progress in the war itself, which was entering its third year by 1939 in a virtual stalemate. Right when Hino’s piece appeared in the newspaper in the fall of 1939, unexpected drought and flooding in the colonies disrupted Japan’s supply of rice, leading to new government restrictions on production and sale of white rice. By the summer and fall of 1940, food rationing over sugar, milk, fruits, vegetables, and finally rice would begin in earnest. Growing economic dislocation on the home front amid a military quagmire were important factors in the decline of comfort packages. The best that could be done was an army-orchestrated plan in January 1940 to send over 1.36 million New Year’s comfort packages to the China front. The army hoped that this gesture would “wipe away needless worry” among soldiers about being forgotten back home. Nonetheless, it was hard to hide the fact that this largesse came not from people on the home front, but from the military itself. The decline of comfort packages reflected a broader

64 Hino Ashihei, “Kikan heishi no kotoba,” Heitai 11 (January 1940): 22; originally published in Yomiuri Shinbun, November 9, 1939.
pattern of the dilemmas faced by state and non-state institutions engaged in popular and spiritual mobilization in wartime Japan: how to excite and motivate the masses for war with messages and ideologies that failed to inspire such sentiments and that proved unable to counter growing wartime economic shortages.

Civilians were still encouraged by various media outlets to send comfort packages to soldiers but eventually a tacit understanding was internalized by everyone that personalized, “heartfelt” items were now out of the question in the growing era of material shortages. In December 1940, the popular boys’ magazine *Shōnen Kurabu* called on readers to send more comfort packages and letters to soldiers pursuant to recommended guidelines. Reminding the home front that Japan still remained peaceful despite war ravaging elsewhere in Europe and Asia, the editors urged children to thank soldiers, for “the soldiers have won the war, driven Chinese soldiers to the far distant hinterlands of the continent.” The best way to convey one’s gratitude to soldiers, according to the magazine, was to send letters and comfort packages along with the greeting, “Thank you Mr. Soldier (*heitai san arigatō gozaimasu*).” For letters, *Shōnen Kurabu* editors recommended children write about how everyone in the family is in good health and how “everyone is seriously working to get through the Incident.” As for comfort packages, the editors remained vague – “think about all the things soldiers like and stuff that in there.” The editors of *Shōnen Kurabu* then instructed readers to anonymously address letters and packages to “Mr. Soldier on the front” (*senchi no heitai san e*) and mail them to the Soldier Relief office (*juppei gakari*). Readers were assured that “these heartfelt (*kokoro wo kometa*) letters and comfort packages will bring the most joy to soldiers on the warfront.”

Despite pleas from some military leaders and even soldiers themselves for more “heartfelt” and “authentic” displays of support, *Shōnen Kurabu* magazine crystallized the overall transformation of comfort package into a ritual of set phrases, random items, and standardized anonymous letter-writing distributed through a bureaucratic office. Through the prism of Japan’s wartime mass media, these patriotic practices of gift-giving and letter-writing became in many respects “heartfelt” comfort for the home front as much as for soldiers.

The flourishing of comfort package-giving in early wartime Japan and its steady decline after 1939 can both be linked to the particular effects total war unleashes on the home front. The importance of the state to fully mobilize the populace for war opened the floodgates for

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countless private businesses and associations to participate in the comfort package craze and create their own vicarious connections to soldiers on the warfront. Comfort packages turned into consumers’ gratification of buying Mitsukoshi’s best to publicly demonstrate one’s personal patriotism. However, the waging of total war paved the way for three new trends which undermined this practice. First, the state needed to rein in some of the commercial excesses of comfort packages both to address soldier disgruntlement about the lack of serious “heartfelt” content and to impose an orderly system of restricted popular consumption so that more resources could be diverted for the war effort. With the onset of new regulations discouraging the sending of personalized comfort packages, the incentives of comfort-giving degenerated into an anonymous and expensive gift-giving duty to unknown and unidentifiable soldiers overseas. Second, the unexpectedly long conflict in China forced the Japanese government to devote enormous resources into the military, which meant that there was little cushion left when a sudden famine in the colonies disrupted the home front’s food supplies. In the face of immediate food shortages and a new rationing system in a war with no victory in sight, civilians felt less inclined to send “comfort” to soldiers.

The protracted nature of total war produced a third factor which also contributed to the decline of comfort package. Beginning in 1939, the Japanese military began repatriating back to the home islands hundreds of thousands of wounded and traumatized soldiers who could no longer fight effectively. In other words, the appearance of these so-called “returned soldiers,” alongside the growing unpopularity of a quagmire in China and the worsening economic dislocations, contributed to the fading of comfort-giving. It was in this context that the returned soldier as a new public image and the third iteration of the soldier took shape in Japanese mass culture, alongside the soldier as superman and “humanistic” soldier deserving of “comforts.” The returned soldier was ultimately the story of the state’s failure to understand and exploit the home front’s needs and desires for consumption alongside patriotism – to recognize Japanese people interfaced with war and mass culture both as consumer and as subject. The curious, despised – but also defiant – figure of the returned soldier on the home front decrowned the idealized image of the brave, noble warrior and heroic everyman and created a new and awkward relationship between soldiers and civilians. The returned soldier originated in the battlefield where he emerged out of the trauma and agony of total war.
The “Comforts” of the Warfront

To understand the later appearance of the returned soldier, it would be helpful to know the conditions from which he was returning. Following sharp international criticism against Japan for the extraordinary levels of battlefield violence against prisoners and civilians in Nanjing in late 1937 and early 1938, the Japanese army moved quickly to avoid further antagonizing the Western powers and risk armed conflict. Furthermore, the military needed to secure some collaboration from local Chinese officials to restore order and extract much-needed supplies for the field armies.70

With the goal of restoring local order and military discipline in occupied China, the army established “comfort stations” (ianjo) in Nanjing and other areas.71 Comfort stations were special facilities in camps or occupied cities where prostitutes would offer their services to soldiers for a fee collected by the military or private entrepreneurs. However, most of the women working there were not professional prostitutes but young women or girls from Korea or China kidnapped or coerced into becoming “comfort women” (ianfu) or defacto sexual slaves for soldiers.72 The policy created more disciplinary headaches for the Japanese military. Some stations were restricted to officers while others were reserved for navy personnel, which embittered rank-and-file soldiers. Vast areas of the front had no comfort stations at all. The lack of available “comfort women” for the majority of the Japanese military at the front meant that some individual soldiers or small units continued to seek out and rape

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71 The establishment of “comfort stations” by the Japanese military came out of a longer Japanese history of licensed commercialized sex dating back to the medieval era and patriarchal assumptions that men needed the bodies of women to satisfy their biological sexual desires. But more recent precedents for military comfort stations were already established by the Japanese military for soldiers in Manchuria and Shanghai during the early 1930s. See C. Sarah Soh, The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008): 115–117, 132–135.

72 Kasahara, “Senjō no otokotachi: sei to seibōryoku”: 155–157. It should be noted that the words for “comfort package” and “comfort women” are not exactly synonymous. The “comfort” in “comfort package” or “comfort letters” is imon 安問 while the “comfort” of “comfort women” or “comfort center” is ian 安女. Ironically, some former “comfort women” later recalled being given “comfort packages” by soldiers which included feminine products such as lipstick, dolls, and sandals. See Soh, The Comfort Women: 136–137.
Chinese women in isolated villages in the course of foraging for supplies.\(^{73}\)

In February 1939, the Central China Expeditionary Force Headquarters investigated 468 disciplinary incidents involving 776 military personnel and found that property crimes such as gambling or theft (*butsuyoku han*) were the most common, followed by “disciplinary crimes” (*gunki han*), “crimes of bloodthirsty savagery” (*satsubatsu han*), and “crimes of lust” (*shikiyoku han*). The report blamed the unexpectedly long stationing of soldiers in China as the cause for the breakdown in discipline. It also had a special section describing Japanese soldiers raping Chinese women, which it explained as coming from a “lust for conquest and sexual desire” (*seifuku yoku oyobi seiyoku*). Soldiers “would go out and get drunk and then, while heading toward the comfort station, happen upon a woman (*fujo*) and then suddenly feel carnal lust (*retsujō*), and resort to violence.”\(^{74}\) Thus, military police officials viewed much of the sexual violence committed by soldiers in China as natural masculine behavior of men stationed on the frontlines for too long.

During a three-month period in 1938, another military police report recorded 206 incidents of “illegal violence” committed by Japanese soldiers against Chinese people. The violence included rapes, looting, home invasion, forcing local businesses to sell goods at low prices, and “acts of violence against Chinese women and policemen.” The military police blamed the violence on soldiers getting drunk.\(^{75}\) However, there was also concern that young men with criminal backgrounds were being improperly accepted for military service, as in another 1938 military police study. The study found that over an eight-month period, 48 percent of soldiers investigated for criminal or disciplinary behavior had previous histories of “repeated crimes, drunken behavior, delinquent kleptomania, and predilection for violence” before being inducted into the military.\(^{76}\)

Harsh battlefield conditions, erratic and meager food supplies, inadequate materials, constant fear of death, and exhausting marches all contributed to an environment which dehumanized soldiers and facilitated their own dehumanization of the Chinese. Soldiers moved around on horseback or, more commonly, on foot while carrying upwards of 66 pounds of weapons, equipment, and supplies on their backs. Furthermore, the increase in the proportion of Japanese soldiers dying

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\(^{73}\) Kasahara, “Senjō no otokotachi: sei to seibōryoku”: 155–156.


\(^{75}\) “Shōwa jūsan nen chū gunji gunzoku gunki kōsatsu no shiryō”: 0245–0247.

\(^{76}\) Ibid.: 0248.
of illness in the battlefield attested to worsening hygiene conditions, overstretched supply lines, and shortages in critical medical and food supplies. The first year of the China War (1937–1938) saw 17 percent of soldier deaths attributed to disease or malnutrition. In 1939, this ratio crept up to 23.7 percent, 46.4 percent in 1940, and 50.1 percent in 1941.\footnote{Yoshida Yutaka, “Ajia-Taiheiyo sensō no senjō to heishi,” in Kurasawa Aiko, et al., eds., 

The harsh conditions of the frontlines and the emotional and physical separation from the home front contributed to breakdowns in discipline and even anti-war sentiments within the ranks, which started to be documented by army investigators in 1940. The army grew concerned about war trauma or, as it was then called, “war fatigue” (sensō kentai) or “anti-war, anti-military conduct” (hansen hangun teki gendō). The China War was the first war in which “shell-shock” syndrome afflicted large numbers of Japanese troops. During the First World War, many European soldiers experienced emotional trauma; furlough systems were later devised to allow soldiers regular leaves for rest and recovery. The Japanese armed forces, however, never established such a comprehensive system for soldiers. Emotionally traumatized soldiers thus became a major problem for commanders in the China War, but with the worsening war situation, the army had little time or resources to adequately deal with the matter.\footnote{Janice Matsumura, “State Propaganda and Mental Disorders: The Issue of Psychiatric Casualties among Japanese Soldiers during the Asia-Pacific War,” The Bulletin of the History of Medicine 78.4 (Winter 2004): 804–835.}

A September 1940 report compiled by the Imperial General Headquarters Army Department Research Group concluded that while most soldiers were “dependable, sound . . . fully conscious of their duties,” others were not. According to the report, military police investigated nearly 3,000 soldiers for “misconduct” from July 1937 through June 1939, a significant jump from the 623 annual cases recorded before the war.\footnote{Shōwa jūgonen kugatsu [September 1940], Dai hon’ei rikugunbu kenkyūkan, “Shina jihen yori kansatsu seri waga gunjin gunzoku no shisō jōkyō” (Document Three), in Matsuno and Yoshida, eds., Nihon gun shisō ken’etsu kankei shiryō: 94–96.} Citing the unexpectedly long duration of the war, the report found that:

Some soldiers have forgotten the steadfast determination from when they first departed for the front. They ask for immediate discharge or return home. They mistreat and insult their commanders. They slander measures by authorities to provide relief for bereaved families. They complain of unfairness and displeasure over pay and promotions. They are exhibiting ideas degenerating into liberalism and individualistic trends. We must pay close heed to understand the rise of war
fatigue, anti-military, anti-war [conduct], contempt towards commanders, and ways of thinking that eat away like a cancer on our ability to fight protracted war.  

In another report also compiled in September 1940 analyzing over 6,000 soldier letters, the Army Research Group found that “over 40 percent of those [soldiers] examined were ideologically affected by the peculiarities of the battlefield.” While enduring constant hardships and threats of bodily harm, the report explained, soldiers’ initial battlefield excitement waned, and they would hear of gossip and slander from others which would then lead “toward an anti-war mentality based on an anti-state, individualistic insubordination.” By “ideological” (shisōteki), the military police defined as soldiers praising communism, Marxism, socialism, pacifism, or condemning Japan’s emperor system.  

During the same two-year period from 1937 to 1939, the military police found that 12 percent of confiscated letters written by soldiers to the home front expressed an intense fear, even “despair” (kokoroboso) over death, incompetent commanders, confusing battle plans, frequent injuries, and shortages in ammunition. The police concluded that this psychological state would evoke “anxiety and agitation” (dōyō) among soldiers, making them “faltering” (chūcho), “unadventurous” (taieī), and prone to many “mistakes” (sakugo). The police also found that twenty percent of the soldier letters articulated disgruntlement toward the general physical hardships of the battlefield.”  

These conditions, the report continued, prevented soldiers from understanding and appreciating the greater goals of the war, which would give rise to fights, direct insubordination, and a general breakdown in discipline. Finally, the military police cited the phenomenon of “rage” (fundo) as another disturbing psychological consequence of protracted warfare on soldiers. Whether in battle or during garrison duty, soldiers were exposed to near-constant dangers to their lives. It was particularly “those who are not educated,” the report claimed, who “are prone to be hedonistic and desperate . . . and ignore military rules, discipline, and public morals.”  

Despite the debilitating effects of the war on soldiers’ mental and physical health, the protracted nature of the fighting required even more soldiers be conscripted to sustain the Japanese occupation of China.

80 “Shina jihen yori kansatsu seri waga gunjin gunzoku no shisō jōkyō”: 92.  
81 “Shina jihen ni okeru gunjin gunzoku no shisō ni eikyō wo oyobaseru shoin no kansatsu”: 132–133.  
82 “Shina jihen ni okeru gunjin gunzoku no shisō ni eikyō wo oyobaseru shoin no kansatsu”: 144–149.  
83 “Shina jihen ni okeru gunjin gunzoku no shisō ni eikyō wo oyobaseru shoin no kansatsu”: 144–149.
In due course, despite internal reports lamenting the criminal background of some recruits, the army lowered health and mental standards in conscription exams to draft more recruits. Recruits who would normally be placed in the second reserves or national militia because of substandard physical health or mental deficiencies were now inducted into active duty.\textsuperscript{84} In February 1938, Kōnodai Hospital near Tokyo was converted into a military psychiatric ward to house growing numbers of traumatized or mentally ill soldiers unable to fight. As a sign of the growing seriousness of psychologically disturbed soldiers, the number of soldier-patients classified as “mentally disturbed” (chiteki shōgaisha) grew from 0.9 percent in 1938 to 13.9 percent by 1945. Moreover, the proportion of soldiers whose repatriation was attributed to mental illness increased from 1.56 percent in 1938 to 22.32 percent by early 1944.\textsuperscript{85} Over 10,000 soldiers would be committed to Kōnodai by the end of the war in 1945, though because of underreporting or misdiagnoses, the real number of mentally ill soldiers was probably higher.\textsuperscript{86}

The breakdown of military discipline in China eventually prompted the army to transfer out of the front not only traumatized soldiers but most reservists in general and replace them with active-duty soldiers. In the initial stage of the China War, most of the troops dispatched were not active-duty but reservists (yobieki hei). The military held back elite active-duty divisions in preparation for a future war with the Soviet Union. The logic was to not “waste” active-duty soldiers on a war against China that would be over quickly anyway but rather send out reservists instead. The army high command held reservists in lower regard because they did not undergo the same rigorous military training as regular active-duty soldiers. They were also were suspected by military leaders of being physically weaker and less mentally prepared for battle. Reservists tended to be older, with families and civilian jobs of their own, and therefore, it was believed, more prone to homesickness and family distractions. By August 1938, 67.8 percent of soldiers in the China Expeditionary Force were either reservists or second reservists (kōbieki hei), 20.9 percent were supplementary troops (hojū heieki hei), and only 11.3 percent were active-duty (gen’eki hei). Afterwards, the new policy of rotating reservists out of the frontlines and replacing them with active-duty soldiers changed the ratio of active-duty men in China from 37.3 percent in 1937 to 68.1 percent by 1939.\textsuperscript{87}

84 Yoshida, “Ajia-Taiheiyō sensō no senjō to heishi”: 62–64.
85 Yoshida, “Ajia Taiheiyō sensō no senjō to heishi”: 64 and Yoshida, 
86 Matsumura, “State Propaganda and Mental Disorders”: 805.
87 Yoshida, 
Repatriating exhausted and worn-out reservist soldiers would seem to resolve many disciplinary headaches for the military. However, the September 1940 Army report ominously warned the General Staff of the dangers of repatriating insubordinate or “hedonistic and decadent” soldiers. The report observed a marked transformation in a soldier after engaging in battle:

Following a battle, they adopt a varied and complicated psychological mindset of relief, sense of superiority, and bloodthirsty violence (satsubatsu naru shinri). Their actions become even more licentious (hōshi), arrogant (gōman), and wild (sobō). They break military discipline and public morals. They are hated by ordinary people.\textsuperscript{88}

Although the report was referring to Chinese civilians, soldiers who returned to Japan would come to be hated by some Japanese civilians as well.

The Crowning of the Returned Soldier

The first year of the war in 1937 saw the swelling of troops in China from 250,000 to 1.5 million. In February 1938, following the capture of Nanjing and China’s refusal to surrender, the Army General Staff began transitioning toward a strategy of containment, long-term occupation, and a gradual replacement and repatriation of reservists. The numbers of soldiers discharged and returned to the home front reached 60,000 in 1938, 120,000 in 1939, and 140,000 in 1940. In all cases, most were reservists being replaced by active-duty soldiers.\textsuperscript{89}

Ideally, when a soldier returned to Japan, his arrival would be welcomed by a home front organization. For example, in the early morning of May 1939, members of the Patriotic Women’s Association (Aikoku fujinkai) and the National Defense Women’s Association (Kokubō fujinkai) lined up in rows on the train platform, impeccably dressed in white aprons. The two associations had a long bitter rivalry competing for members and credit for military support activities but decided to put aside their differences to welcome home a group of wounded servicemen. As the train pulled into the station, groups of returned soldiers with sunburned faces, wearing the Red Cross insignia on their clothing stepped onto the platform. One returned soldier representative turned to the women activists and announced, “Once we heal from our wounds, we want to go back to our comrades on the frontlines.” Representatives of

\textsuperscript{88} “Shina jihen ni okeru gunjin gunzoku no shisō ni eikyō wo oyobaseru shoin no kansatsu”: 147–148.

\textsuperscript{89} Yoshida, “Ajia Taiheiyo sensō no senjō to heishi”: 61–62.
Figure 3.3 The cover of the 1939 Army Ministry pamphlet, *For the Sake of the Glorious Returned Soldiers (kagayaku kikanhei no tame ni)*. Rikugunshō jōhōbu, ed., *Kagayaku Kikanhei no tame ni* (Tokyo: Rikugunshō Jōhōbu, 1939).
the Patriotic Women’s Association and the National Defense Women’s Association then shuffled toward the veterans in slippers and offered a “reverential salute.” This scene was repeated countless times as hundreds of thousands of Japanese soldiers were “returned” to Japan during the China War for a variety of medical or strategic reasons. However, this particular scene was publicized in the newspaper not because of the returned soldiers, but, as the reporter explained, because of the opportunity such an occasion offered to unite two bickering women’s groups. These ceremonies were not really for the benefit of soldiers but for the social cohesion of the home front (see figure 3.3).

The impending arrival of returned soldiers (kikanhei) in 1939 generated not only welcome-back ceremonies but also several military and bureaucratic pamphlets each attempting to explain what roles these veterans should have on the home front. In preparation for the first major arrival of returned soldiers in Japan, the Army Ministry Information Department released a pamphlet entitled Kagayaku kikanhei no tame ni (For the Sake of the Glorious Returned Soldiers). The pamphlet explained that returned soldiers would not simply return to civilian life. Rather, they were supposed to assume new duties as “warriors of total war” who will, “by virtue of their firm convictions and lucid understanding of the crisis derived from their noble battle experience, become the driving force to guide and encourage the people.” The returned soldier in the Army Ministry’s vision was to take advantage of his in-between status – neither a complete civilian nor a full-fledged soldier – by serving as a “moral exemplar” for the home front. He was to teach the home front all the values of hardship, sacrifice, and solidarity learned on the warfront, and thereby “instill an understanding of the crisis to the people.”

However, despite the grand new role the Army Ministry created for returned soldiers, much of the pamphlet was devoted to chastising, warning, even threatening veterans to behave and not alienate civilians. Army leaders were already aware that returned soldiers could be a double-edged sword for mobilization by potentially spreading rumors, sharing sensationalized or grotesque stories from the front, slandering commanding officers, or inadvertently leaking military secrets. The army pamphlet warned returned soldiers to “not forget humility and modesty” when speaking of their own battlefield deeds, lest they exacerbate public fears about war and “loosen home front support.” There were also concerns

90 “Futatsu no tasuki yo motsureru na, susumu michi wa hitotsu no ‘jūgo no tsutome,’ aifu yo, mata kokufu yo,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, May 14, 1939.
that returned soldiers might spread rumors about “hardships and cruelties of war” that would later serve as counterpropaganda material for the Chinese. To make sure the point was clear, the pamphlet reminded returned soldiers that rumormongering and leaking military secrets “will be punished according to the Military Secrets Protection Law.”

Accordingly, Army Ministry bureaucrats encouraged civilians to welcome home returned soldiers soberly and not degenerate into “wild and crazy jubilation (hakkyō teki na kanko),” citing the Manchurian Incident as an earlier example of such excesses. To strengthen this admonition, the pamphlet claimed that soldiers returning home during the Manchurian Incident were “grateful” for the public welcome but soldiers felt that, “We are not returning home in triumph (gaisen) but returning because of a momentary break.” And while returning soldiers were grateful for the home front’s welcome, “we should not fall into aimless welcoming, drunk in ecstasy (uchōten), while thinking about those still active on the battlefield or those who honorably died or were wounded.”

In other words, returned soldiers were to be welcomed back as heroes by civilians – but not too joyously for the war was still ongoing. They were not returning home “in triumph” (gaisen), to borrow a frequently cited wartime term, but certainly not in defeat. They returned home in limbo, and to assume a new, rather vague role as points of contact between the home front and warfront. Neither completely civilian nor soldierly, from the very beginning, returned soldiers were viewed by the home front with a mixture of sympathy, gratitude, and suspicion. The Army Ministry’s 1939 pamphlet reminded returned soldiers of the countless “favors” (ongi) the home front had done for them during their absence from home and at work, of “how you wept while reading a warm comfort letter or how moved you felt after opening a comfort package.” To not be grateful to the home front, the Army Ministry argued, would “turn the public’s gratitude into scorn.” In short, the military urged returned soldiers, “don’t forget to thank the home front.”

Military concerns about the disruptive potential of returned soldiers was also reflected in new rules issued in August 1939 by the Fourteenth Divisional Headquarters to local communities in Nagano Prefecture called “Wishes Concerning the Welcoming of Returnees” (kikansha no kangei ni kansuru kibō). Citing fears of frenzied crowds “apt to disturb the peace,” the divisional headquarters’ memorandum laid out the following rules for residents upon the arrival of returned soldiers. To prevent overcrowding on station platforms, all civilians were to wait in a designated

area and must be preapproved by the military before entry onto the platform. Family and friends were forbidden from waving banners or giving food and drink to arriving soldiers or hugging them or giving them babies to hold. People were permitted to line up along the railway to cheer the train bringing home the returned soldiers but had to follow police orders about where to stand and form lines. During the march from the train station to the town center, the memorandum instructed civilians to “be careful not to cheer too loudly or wave flags with excessive enthusiasm” so as not to spook military horses. Only the Japanese national flag could be waved during the public welcome; school or organizational flags were banned. However, people working in the farm fields or commercial shops should not waste money buying a Japanese flag. Waving little hand towels at passing troops would suffice. Once returned soldiers arrived in town, only “simple, austere, and dignified” welcome-home ceremonies should be held by residents in public sites like a school or temple. Towns and villages were discouraged from holding welcome-home banquets.  

The Welfare Ministry had a slightly more conciliatory attitude toward these veterans than the Army Ministry. This was probably because the Welfare Ministry was in charge of the infrastructure and resources to help returned soldiers readjust to civilian life following the welcome-home ceremonies. Highlighting the importance of supporting returned soldiers was a way to shine the public spotlight on the Welfare Ministry and its contributions to wartime public life. As early as February 1938, officials from the Finance and Welfare Ministries were busily negotiating the appropriation of six million yen to establish a nationwide network of government-run employment centers for returning soldiers. Several months later, the Welfare Ministry created the Wounded Veterans Convalescent Center (shōhei hogo in) to provide medical treatment and rehabilitation. The ministry also sponsored the founding of the Greater Japan Disabled Servicemen Association (Dai Nippon shōi gunjin kai) as a support group to offer veterans opportunities for job networking and retraining. Local consultation centers (minoue sōdanjo) were established nationwide to provide veterans with information about how to apply for government assistance. 

This generosity of spirit toward returned soldiers could be seen in the Welfare Ministry’s 1939 pamphlet Wounded Servicemen and the Home Front’s Mission. In the pamphlet, the Welfare Ministry reminded civilians

96 “Jotai hei no fukushoku, fuan wa nashi, kōseishō, banzen no taisaku,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, February 19, 1938.
97 Shōhei hogo to jūgo no shimei: 1–5.
always to think about the sacrifice of the wounded veterans “until it penetrates into every citizen’s daily life, becoming an unconscious custom.” The idea was that by always remembering veterans, civilians would eventually put this consideration into their everyday practice. The pamphlet gave several examples: yield an open seat in a crowded bus to a wounded veteran, become a regular customer at a veteran’s small business, give priority hiring to veterans seeking work. However, the ambiguity of the returned soldier on the home front abruptly revealed itself even in this homily about Japan’s brave fighting men. Above all else, the Welfare Ministry warned civilians when welcoming veterans, “avoid acts that descend from temporary gratitude into a blind and reckless raucous carnival (omatsuri sawagi).” The home front must honor returned soldiers – but not too much.

The Welfare Ministry, according to the 1943 Military Support Guidebook (gunji engo dokuhon), classified returned soldiers into two categories: those repatriated with no serious injury or illness, and those “discharged and repatriated due to injury or illness through the course of simple official duties.” Because many returned soldiers generally had little or minor physical injuries, social services awaiting them on the home front prioritized quick rehabilitation into the workforce rather than long convalescence. Returned soldiers were to receive up to 150 yen within three months after their arrival to subsidize costs in job-searching or job-training. In addition, the government would distribute loans capped at 500 yen through local soldier relief branch offices (gunji engo shibu), with a ten-year repayment schedule and interest levied three times a year. Returned soldiers who were unable to find work after three months could apply for a “daily life allowance.” Medical costs could also be subsided through government grants.

The 1943 guidebook hinted at previous troubles returned soldiers faced in trying to return to civilian life. The guidebook lamented the troubling practice of employers firing workers conscripted into military service, thereby exacerbating soldier anxieties about their postwar livelihood. A March 1938 law declared that, “in situations of hiring or firing any or all job-seekers or employees, employers may not discriminate against people ordered to the barracks.” However, the guidebook admitted the law lacked any serious mechanism to force employers to comply; rather it was hoped that the law would nudge employers to

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98 Shōhei hogo in, Shōhei hogo to jūgo no shime, Shōwa 14-nen 3-gatsu [March 1939], JACAR Ref.A04010447000: 15.
“spontaneously realize the appropriateness of being asked for their cooperation.”¹⁰⁰

Returned soldiers also received special exemptions from wage control legislation. In September 1939, the government issued the 9.18 Stop Ordinance (kyū ichi hachi sutoppu rei) to freeze the skyrocketing wages of industrial workers and spiraling wartime inflation. The Welfare Ministry, nevertheless, allowed business owners to give ex-soldier employees special raises to keep up with inflation.¹⁰¹ In May 1941, returned soldiers were granted a six-month extension in paying off medical bills if hospitalized within three months after discharge.¹⁰²

In November 1939, the Tokyo city government opened the Military Support Hall (gunji engo kan), which offered wounded veterans help in finding employment and “spiritual education.”¹⁰³ In April 1940, twenty graduates of the Military Support Hall’s job retraining program formed a “Rehabilitation Public Service Association” (saiki hōkōkai). This group offered a way for alumni of the retraining program to maintain a support network among themselves as they readjusted back into civilian life. There was a stark realization among these returned soldiers that public assistance was limited and the only way to survive was through mutual self-help. One veteran who found work with the municipal transportation department explained to a reporter, “We all got to know each other out in battle, but after coming home, we felt alone (sabishisa). So we decided to join together and connect spiritually. We are giving our all at work following the principle of rehabilitation through public service (saiki hōkō).”¹⁰⁴

This returned soldier’s remarks hinted at the difficulties experienced by veterans trying to settle back into civilian life, despite the elaborate institutional support offered by the government. Returned soldiers sometimes appeared in mass media more as objects of public pity than as iconic symbols of noble character. In December 1938, one veteran placed an advertisement in the newspaper seeking work as a private chauffeur: “Can also transport materials. Many years of experience. Returned from (censored).”¹⁰⁵ A week later, the same newspaper reported that the

¹⁰² “Yameru kikan yūshi ni kaihō,” Asahi Shimbun, May 11, 1941.
¹⁰³ “Kikan yūshi no tame ni shi no gunji engo kan hiraku,” Tokyo Asahi Shimbun, November 26, 1939.
¹⁰⁴ “Sa shokuba ni ikase, warera no danketsu ryoku, ‘saikikai’ jūgo no chikai,” Tokyo Asahi Shimbun, April 28, 1940.
¹⁰⁵ See kyūshoku (seeking work) category in classified section of the Tokyo Asahi Shimbun, December 10, 1938. The censoring of where the person came from Ō Ō and the use of
head of Shōchiku studios had seen the advertisement and immediately hired the man. It turned out that the job-seeker was a recently repatriated soldier from North China who then spent two months recovering at a hospital. Following military discharge, the veteran could not regain his old job and was forced to put out an advertisement seeking employment. The studio executive had been impressed upon learning of his sacrifices in battle and offered him work. The returned soldier explained to the reporter: “My body is no good and, unfortunately, I was ordered back to Japan . . . I’m just a returned soldier with not even a guarantor (hoshō-nin). And yet I was hired unconditionally. From the bottom of my heart, I am quite thankful.”

It is unclear how well-known or well-organized the Welfare Ministry’s support was for veterans. In 1942, one returned soldier asked a newspaper advice columnist how veterans go about finding work. The columnist replied that some kind of job was available at the local employment agency “so long as there is nothing wrong with your body and you aren’t hoping for any special kind of work.”

The liminal role of returned soldiers and the government’s ambivalent attitude toward supporting their rehabilitation was evident as late as April 1945, a mere four months before Japan’s surrender to the Allied Powers. That month, officials from the Welfare Ministry’s Military Protection Agency (gunji hogo in) released a new guide on the services for disabled servicemen because of continuing public confusion over who exactly qualified for assistance. According to the guide, technically, the army and navy ministers granted disabled veterans a “disabled serviceman medal” (shōi gunjin kishō) in recognition for their service, which accorded them a new status as “disabled serviceman.” However, this recognition by the military did not guarantee that state benefits would be forthcoming. The Welfare Ministry, following the provisions of the Pensions Law (onyū hō) and Pensions Law Enforcement Ordinance (onyū hō shikō rei), would then step in to categorize veterans according to the nature of their injuries in order to determine what benefits a veteran was eligible for. Even veterans recognized as a “disabled serviceman” with certified “first-degree injuries” faced a final review by the Welfare Ministry Pensions Bureau to determine actual eligibility for state benefits. The writers of the 1945 guidebook stressed this was not a rubber-stamp process for the Pensions Bureau had previously denied benefits to

the word kikan (returned) would have indicated to the reader that this was a returned soldier.

106 “Senshō yūshi ni hiraku shūshokusen, heitai san nara hoshōnin mo fuyō, san gyō kōkoku de okakei tenshu,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, December 18, 1938.

veterans already certified by the military as “disabled servicemen.” Thus, the Welfare Ministry bureaucrats concluded, “The range of people receiving pensions in accordance with the Pensions Law is narrower than the range of people certified as a disabled serviceman.” In other words, disagreement between the military services and the Welfare Ministry over what kind of returned soldier exactly qualified for state support further problematized a seemingly straightforward category. Some returned soldiers deserved the public’s full support and sympathies. And others, apparently, did not.

The Returned Soldier as Soldier-Freak

The very identity of the returned soldier carried an inherent contradiction. Historian Inoue Toshikazu astutely points out that returned soldiers were in an awkward position, for “they were not soldiers returning from war triumphantly.” When soldiers “returned” during the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), and even the Manchurian Incident (1931–1933), they did so in the celebratory aftermath of victory, what was referred to in wartime parlance as *gaisen*. The China War, by contrast, dragged on for years without victory. Soldiers who returned to Japan in the late 1930s were coming home not in triumph but because of ill-health or disciplinary problems or as part of the army’s transition from a reservist-centered military to one primarily composed of active-duty soldiers.

Despite official praise and support of these returnees, two incidents in March 1939 exposed a parallel public perception of these fighting men as threats to the home front’s safety. The first incident occurred during a House of Peers budget committee hearing in early March 1939. Baron Kikuchi Takeo questioned Army Minister Itagaki Seishirō about the recent military practice of transferring soldiers from the China frontlines to Manchuria or even back to Japan. Kikuchi had heard stories of returned soldiers “becoming a bad influence with their conduct and behavior” through drunken boasting and threatening demeanor. He complained about returned soldiers bragging to civilians about killing, or even disseminating “anti-war sentiments” to bereaved families. “This is a very unamusing trend (sōto omoshiro karanu fūchō),” Kikuchi declared. Army Minister Itagaki conceded that there were problems with returned soldiers misbehaving on the home front but claimed that this was an unavoidable consequence of protracted


warfare; specifically, the need to transfer incompetent soldiers out to bring in and promote able officers. He also added that “this doesn’t come out in the newspapers much but the number of noncommissioned officers and below who are returned to the home islands is increasing quite a bit . . . we are exerting the greatest precaution on their behavior and their influence on society.” Another budget committee member, Baron Watanabe Migiwa, demanded the military monitor the sexual practices of returned soldiers, fearing that they would spread venereal diseases caught in China to civilians in Japan: “I have heard rumors about those who come home still infected or unknowingly infected, and then transmitting the bacterium to the general populace.” Lieutenant General Machijiri Kazumoto assured the baron that the army was working to improve “quarantine facilities” in China to halt the spread of malaria and other diseases among soldiers, as well as setting up a “severe and rigorous” screening system to bar infected soldiers from returning at all. Baron Watanabe was mollified by the response but reiterated the gravity of monitoring returned soldiers in Japan: “in this time of crisis (hijōjī), the welfare of the people (kokumin no hoken) is extremely important. So I hope the military will sufficiently discuss this issue.” In other words, these public officials regarded returned soldiers as moral and even biological threats to the home front. Further, the military high command apparently agreed that returned soldiers were potentially troublesome figures who required monitoring and policing.\(^\text{110}\)

The second incident happened in late March 1939 when the Home Ministry censorship office ordered publishers to remove a short story by renowned horror mystery writer Edogawa Ranpo, “The Caterpillar,” (Imomushi), from a newly republished collection of his works entitled Mirror of Hell (Kagami jigoku). “The Caterpillar” was about a severely disabled veteran returned home from the Russo-Japanese War. War injuries had turned him into a deaf and mute quadruple amputee. He is cared for at first by his devoted wife, but she ends up mistreating and abusing him. Eventually, the veteran crawls outside like a caterpillar and throws himself into a well to commit suicide. The story first appeared back in 1929 in the mystery magazine Shin Seinen (New Youth) and continued to circulate publicly for ten years until its 1939 ban.\(^\text{111}\) The wartime ban on Ranpo’s


\(^{111}\) “‘Imomushi’ wo sakju,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, April 1, 1939. An English translation and a helpful introduction by Michael Tangeman of “The Caterpillar” may be found in William J. Tyler, ed., Modernizumu: Modernist Fiction from Japan, 1913–1938 (Honolulu,
“The Caterpillar” is usually seen as an example of wartime state repression of prewar erotic grotesque nonsense literary sensibilities. But as Mizusawa Fujio has found, the Home Ministry cited both the wife’s “perverted sexual life” and the story’s depiction of a deaf and mute quadruple-amputee veteran as the primary reasons for the ban. The banning was in preparation for the pending arrival in 1939 of massive numbers of returned soldiers to the home front. Strangely, the actual censorship of “The Caterpillar” was a rather lackluster affair. The Home Ministry Publishing Police waited six months after the story was reprinted in Mirror of Hell to act and seized only 31 out of 5,000 copies. By contrast, other Ranpo stories targeted for censorship in March and April 1939 on “morals” charges were more vigorously repressed and suffered the seizure of hundreds of copies.

The efforts by the Army Ministry and Home Ministry to cleanse the image of returned soldiers suggest concerns that these men harmed the reputation of the military in general. Outwardly, the military and government propagated a unified message to civilians that returned soldiers were “white-robed heroes” who nobly suffered and sacrificed for the nation – and, therefore, could serve as role models of even greater sacrifice for civilians. The mass media, through countless photographic spreads and magazine coverage, also did its part to portray wounded veterans through a rose-colored lens, bursting with sentimentality and cheerful optimism while dismissing serious pain or disabilities. As Lee Pennington has shown, “the extraordinary treatment of wounded servicemen in everyday culture reminded the people of Japan that their soldiers were sacrificing for the nation and thus deserved respect.”

While I do not fully dispute this interpretation, my sense of the returned soldier in the cultural imagination of the home front is of a more liminal figure who shape-shifted between beloved national hero to dangerous outsider in his own country. In this respect, he embodied the oscillating rhythms of carnival war.

His liminality rested, in part, on how inconvenient his very presence was to wartime myths celebrating active-duty soldiers. The returned soldier arrived to a subdued welcome and in a state of vulnerability; a once invincible “military god” now dependent on government aid for


112 For example, see the introduction by Tangeman in Modanizumu and Taniguchi Motoi, “‘Utsushi yo no yume!’ Senjika no Edogawa Ranpo,” in Fujii Hidetada, ed., Edogawa Ranpo to taishō no nijūseiki (Tokyo: Shibundo, 2004): 216–224.


114 Pennington, Casualties of History: 194.
survival. His presence rudely clashed with the pristine cultural image of the triumphant, god-like soldier or even the sympathetic, humanistic soldier showered with comfort packages. The iconic soldier remained intelligible to Japanese consumer-subjects so long as the home front kept a respectable distance from actual soldiers. The returned soldier rudely bridged that distance by forcing civilians to see, hear, and deal with the darker sides of total war. The efforts by state officials to police returned soldiers in Japan and belatedly silence unflattering stories reflected a tacit awareness of the fragility of the returned soldier as cultural icon. In some contexts, he was celebrated as a “white-robed hero” whose sacrifice for nation must be praised and rewarded by civilians. In other moments, he conjured up images of a dangerous figure threatening the well-being of the home front; a biological freak of nature, squirming on the ground like a caterpillar.

The Rage of the Returned Soldier

Home front suspicions toward veterans were soon met by the disillusionment of returned soldiers toward the home front. In September 1940, the Army Department Research Group compiled a secret report on soldiers’ “military discipline and public morals.” Though most of the findings focused on frontline soldiers, the Research Group reserved particular criticism for returned soldiers on the home front. According to military police statistics gathered from July 1937 to June 1939, 56 percent of the 6,452 soldiers investigated by the military police were returned soldiers. Some of these soldiers were repatriated back to Japan in the first place because of past disciplinary problems. And in almost every single category of sedition, returned soldiers composed the largest number except for the category of overenthusiastic morale.

Army researchers cited a litany of reports from the military police about the behavior of returned soldiers on the home front, “harming the honor and dignity of imperial forces, fomenting anti-war and anti-military sentiments, encouraging estrangement between the military and civilians, and being a negative influence on the home front.” Under “arrogant and insolent acts,” the report complained of returned soldiers who would “act as if they were triumphantly returning from victory” (gaisen netsu wo fukasu). That is, the military police and the Army Ministry were not pleased with the behavior and pretensions of some veterans. Most likely,

115 “Shina jihen yori kansatsu seri waga gunjin gunzoku no shisō jōkyō”: 92.
116 See Table 3, “Gunjin gunzoku yō chū tsūshin gendō no kinmu chibetsu hikaku ichiran hyō,” in “Shina jihen yori kansatsu seri waga gunjin gunzoku no shisō jōkyō”: 115.
their displeasure came from an appreciation of the fact that returned soldiers assuming the persona of war victor was alienating civilians and undermining popular support for the war. The report referred to returned soldiers who “caroused about” (yūkyō no sai) and used their veteran status to demand special favors and treatments at commercial establishments. Also, many soldiers treated at rehabilitation centers (ryōyūjo) were reportedly attacking the staff or just “behaving disrespectfully” (fukei no genji) in general.117

A few anecdotes from the report give a sense of the potential danger the returned soldier represented to the military high command on the home front. Some returned soldiers were investigated by military police for nonviolent but politically seditious acts. One first-class private in the second reserves was heard speaking “blasphemous” (fukei) words at home with his uncle while drinking heavily. The reservist told of seeing many of his war comrades severely wounded or killed in battle: “They tell us to yell, ‘Long live His Majesty, the Emperor’ (tennō heika bansai), but when I got hurt, I thought that even His Majesty, the Emperor, was not worth a damn (tennō heika mo kuso mo nai to omotta).”118

Several cases in the report involved violence against civilians. A former first-class private was riding his bicycle down a village road when a car behind him honked to pass through. The irritated ex-soldier turned his bicycle around to block the driver’s path while shouting, “I’m a triumphant soldier! Where do you get off blowing your horn at me!” (Ore wa gaisenhei da! Kohō kara kite keiteki wo narasu to wa namaiki da!) The returned soldier proceeded to punch the driver in the face and damage the car. “In this way,” the Research Group observed with great understatement, “he incurred the hostility of the common people.” In another case, a former infantry master sergeant and eight other veterans were being treated for tuberculosis at a medical facility when suddenly (it is not clear why), they became “enraged” (fungai), and attacked the staff, inflicting enough damage that they thought it best to run away.119

Many veterans were upset, wrote the army researchers, that hometown officials were stingy in providing aid to their families or for sending too few comfort letters and packages to the front. When these soldiers returned home, they unleashed their pent-up frustrations on civilians. One group of returnees abruptly switched the train schedule of their arrival in order to disrupt a prearranged “welcome home” ceremony organized by local officials. In another town, returned soldiers barged into the mayor’s home and berated him for failing to organize support for

117 “Shina jihen yori kansatsu seri waga gunjin gunzoku no shisō jōkyō”: 97.
118 “Shina jihen yori kansatsu seri waga gunjin gunzoku no shisō jōkyō”: 98.
119 Ibid.
local troops overseas. Another first-class private from the second reserves got drunk, marched to the mayor’s home, and chastised him with the following “aggressive words” (kōgiteki kotoba): “When I returned in triumph (gaisen ni sai shi), there was no welcome from the home front groups. The enthusiasm of home front support has faded . . . I call on you to represent the returned soldiers and do serious soul-searching.” Here again a returned soldier used the phrase “triumphant return” (gaisen) to lay claim to an honor that many civilians and even the military viewed as inappropriate. That is, some of the frustration felt by returned soldiers was the refusal by the home front to grant them recognition as a “triumphant soldier” like in previous wars. A returned soldier may be celebrated as a “white-robed hero,” but the home front drew the line at his pretensions for being a “triumphant soldier.” Other returned soldiers publicly condemned their hometowns for superficial acts of patriotism. An ex-reservist private was arrested by police after being caught throwing away gifts sent by the local home front association to soldier families. During this tirade, the veteran screamed in a drunken rage: “They just keep calling themselves ‘the home front, the home front,’ but it’s all a lie. I killed ten or twenty people at the front. I could easily kill one or two more villagers right here.”

The frustrated sense of entitlement among many veterans also extended to employment and economic benefits. The report found that during physical exams and skill testing to determine suitable employment tracks upon demobilization, returned soldiers tended to be “extremely arrogant” (hanahadashiku fuson) and prone to demanding “preferential treatment” (yūsenteki kentī). One former reservist with only a four-year elementary school education arrived at an employment agency, demanding a high-paying job “leading a garrison attached to the China Area Army or working with cars with a monthly salary of over 200 yen.” One veterans’ group antagonized the army by using their military uniforms as costumes in a musical comedy group act. Still others engaged in fraud to make money. A returned soldier visited the bereaved families of his dead war comrades as well as the people who had sent him comfort packages and convinced them to lend him money for made-up expenses. Another returned soldier would befriend soldier widows and then swindle them out of money.

These military accounts were highly classified and yet, even with rigorous censorship of printed materials, some of the rage of the returned soldier still filtered out for public consumption. In a 1940 book compiling

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120 Ibid. Original quote is, “jūgo jūgo’ to yobu dake de jitsu ga nai, ore wa senchi de jūmei nijūmei mo koroshite kita, sonmin no hitori ya futari korosu no wa nande mo nai no da.”

“the voices of returned soldiers,” one veteran took the opportunity to vent his frustrations since his return to Japan. The government censored parts of the remarks with XXX but the object of his ire was clear:

I Curse XXX

Whether we feel any concern about people who have no direct connection to the war or people who do not send family members to the front, I do not know. But people who go to war should be allowed to do what they please … trustworthy figures who cast aside momentary excitement and assume a calm-like demeanor like great citizens to deal with protracted wars of resistance … The scenes of the home front catch our eyes and fill us with great rage. We frequently even curse at XXX.122

The Sorrow of the Returned Soldier

Several returned soldiers took to the pages of print media to defend their reputation and criticize the home front. For example, in October 1941, at a roundtable discussion sponsored by the Wounded Veterans Association, Wounded Veterans Convalescent Center, and the City of Tokyo, a group of returned soldiers voiced resentment at their treatment by civilians. Their remarks left little doubt that new images of the soldier had already become pervasive on the eve of the Pacific War. A disabled serviceman admitted feeling anxious about doing sales work with a missing right hand. Another veteran reported that he tired easily at work and that people viewed him as simply lazy. “This hurts quite a bit (kokoro gurushii),” he lamented. One veteran described how, upon boarding a crowded train, students would “just stare at my medals and badges while refusing to offer me a seat. Girl students just pretend to be asleep.”123 Because the veteran’s injured leg prevented him from moving quickly, he would get shoved aside as people rushed on and off the train. He decided to stop wearing his war medals as doing so invited hostile glares from civilians. When the veteran asked a group of middle school students congregating at the door to move aside to allow others to board more easily, “they just stared at me as if to say, ‘Even disabled servicemen shouldn’t be so stuck up’ (shōi gunjin datte ibaru na).” Another veteran explained that wearing his uniform and medals provoked encounters with civilians that were more awkward than pleasant.

123 The medals the veteran was referring to were given by the state to disabled servicemen after their recovery and military discharge in recognition for their service. The medals were especially prized by veterans with visible battle injuries because they became the only marker that distinguished them from civilians who were born disabled. See Ueno Masumi, “Shōi gunjin, sensō mibōjin, sensai koji,” in Kurasawa Aiko, et al., eds., Iwanami shoten 6: Ajia-Taiheiyo sensō, Nichijō seikatsu no naka no sōryokusen (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2006): 186–187.
“When I wear my medals, people sneer, ‘What’s that? Is that from a group tour?’ It’s as if the common man doesn’t know a thing.” The returned soldiers all agreed that “medals are not meant to be shown to others but shown to ourselves. They are the compass to my own soul. Whenever I get angry I look at my medal, remember the Five Principles, and feel uplifted.”

The veteran was referring to the “Five Principles for Disabled Servicemen” (shōi gunjin gōkun) laid out in 1939 by the Greater Japan Disabled Servicemen Association for returned soldiers to follow in order to become “the vanguard of the National Spiritual Mobilization Movement”:

1) Drill (rensei) your spirit and overcome physical impediments
2) Carry out patriotic rehabilitation (saiki hōkō) based on your own abilities
3) Further your dignity (hin’i) and display the virtues of humility (kenjō)
4) Be strong in fidelity and discreet in your conduct
5) Learn from your own honor to become a model for the people.

The Five Principles reiterated the ambivalence of state institutions toward returned soldiers. The principles emphasized the exemplary public role veterans could still perform even after military discharge but also stressed the importance of self-help and not relying solely on public assistance. Principles three and four alluded to the tarred public image of returned soldiers and the need for more conscious self-awareness.

Despite these seemingly sacrosanct principles advocating discretion, humility, and self-help, more and more returned soldiers began speaking out against what they saw as decadence on the home front. In December 1940, Satō Kanjirō gave his impressions of the home front to the magazine Shin Seinen. Like many soldiers stationed overseas, Satō said newspapers had led him to believe that back home, “men had close-cropped hair (iga guri atama), women went out into the streets with work pants (monpe), and students wore wooden clogs (geta).” However, upon his return to Japan, he was “bewildered beyond imagination.” Despite the papers reporting that wartime austerity measures made Ginza dark at night, Satō was stunned by the garish neon lights illuminating Ginza: “I learned this was complete demagoguery (mattaku dema datta).” The veteran was particularly shocked by the great crowds of people crammed into trains and tramcars. “Whatever vehicle I ride in, Japanese people have, I feel, become unkind and unfriendly (fushinsetsu) of late. Compared to

124 “Kishō mireba fuman mo tobu, shōi gunjin ni kiku zadankai,” Asahi Shinbun, October 7, 1941.
125 “Shōi gunjin ni go-kun,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, June 2, 1939.
before leaving for the front, this is noticeable.” Even the Japanese climate was not completely to Satō’s liking. Although he claimed that he never gets sick, he said that many returned soldiers fell ill after repatriation due to the adjustment in weather: “I joke with my friends that ‘maybe our bodies are not suited for Japan.’”126 Another returned soldier also profiled in Shin Seinen, Koyama Tarakichi, felt “bewildered” by the “new trends” of the home front upon his return. “I get angry when I see bratty girls (gaki no amakko) cavorting about or silly students (funuke no yō na gakusei).” Koyama, however, perhaps keeping the Five Principles in mind, advocated discretion to his fellow veterans: “But to say this-or-that is not our job. We, as returned soldiers, must go and confront head-on without hesitation these new social trends, just like how we clearly mentally prepared for the conscription letter.”127

The Guardians of the Returned Soldier

But perhaps the most eloquent, or loudest, spokesman of the plight of the returned soldier was the famous soldier-writer Hino Ashihei. Hino achieved national acclaim in August 1938 while serving in China, when his novel Wheat and Soldier (Mugi to heitai) was published. The book, which depicted the grueling marches and noble sacrifices of Japanese soldiers on the frontlines, sold 1.2 million copies and spawned several literary sequels and film adaptations. In November 1938, Hino’s Earth and Soldier (Tsuchi to heitai) was published, followed by Flower and Soldier (Hana to heitai) in August 1939. These works also enjoyed great literary and cinematic popularity.128

As suggested in the titles, Hino’s novels depicted the soldier as a colloquial, down-to-earth, sentimental figure very relatable to ordinary civilians, thus veering towards the “humanistic” side of soldierly masculinity. Far from the superman “military gods” popular in the Manchurian Incident, the very word “soldier” (heitai) assumed a warmer and vulnerable nuance in the late 1930s, akin to American usage of the term “G.I.” After the 1938 success of Wheat and Soldier, the army understood Hino was far more valuable as a pro-military writer than soldier. He was quickly

128 For an excellent literary analysis of Hino Ashihei’s place in Japanese wartime literature, see David M. Rosenfeld, Unhappy Soldier: Hino Ashihei and Japanese World War II Literature (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002). For a closer analysis of several wartime writer’s literary work on returned soldiers, see Kagoshima Takeshi, Senjō e yuku, Senjō kara kaeru: Hino Ashihei, Ishikawa Tatsuzō, Sakakiyama Jun no egaita heisitachi (Tokyo: Shin’yōsha, 2012).
moved to the army’s press department to write more stories and reportage accounts of the ordinary soldier for home front consumption before being discharged in 1939. It was after his return to Japan that Hino began a personal crusade to fight for and defend the returned soldier from what he saw as the callous indifference or misunderstandings of the home front. Hino hoped that returned soldiers would use their battle experience to help civilians understand the real travails and sacrifices of the ordinary soldier, thereby genuinely uniting the home front and warfront. Far from seeing veterans as boorish pariahs or helpless parasites on society, Hino described returned soldiers as moral exemplars and natural leaders for building a new Japan because they had a special, sacred experience in battle that no civilian could comprehend.

Indeed, for Hino and countless returned soldiers like him, there was a deep expectation that civilians would welcome them back with great enthusiasm. Writing for the *Tokyo Asahi* in late 1939, the recently repatriated Hino said he most looked forward to a grand welcome-home celebration that equaled the ostentatious send-offs Japanese soldiers received from their local communities. “Those who say that this is mere sentimentality and just coming home is good enough know nothing about the soldier,” he declared. And yet, he was perplexed by what he found back home after a two-year absence: “Why, in the midst of war, do people of the home front forget the soldiers in the battlefield?” By forgetting, Hino meant that civilians did not truly “understand” (rikai) or feel sufficient “sympathy” (itawarete) for soldiers. Walking around his bustling hometown of Fukuoka, Hino “felt a strange sensation” over how “carefree” (nonbiri) everything was. Indeed, “things were louder and flashier (hadeyaka) than before we left for the front, extremely luxurious and dazzling, garish colors assaulted my eyes.” He felt almost at a loss. “Just as the home front knows nothing of the warfront,” he concluded, “so too the warfront does not understand the home front.”

Hino blamed the media’s sensational war coverage for this disconnect. With most of China’s major cities taken, many people believed that the war was basically over, and soldiers were simply performing routine, uneventful garrison duty. This, he insisted, was “completely wrong.” Garrison duty and mop-up campaigns remained vitally important and dangerous, Hino argued. He criticized the newspapers for sensationalizing the earlier military campaigns while giving no coverage to soldiers performing guard duty in the new situation of long-term occupation.

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131 Hino Ashihei, “Kikan heishi no kotoba (jô),” *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun*, November 7, 1939.

132 Hino Ashihei, “Kikan heishi no kotoba (jô),” *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun*, November 7, 1939.
Hino echoed a common cynicism and suspicion held by returned soldiers toward the mass media both for misleading them about the true nature of the home front and for distorting the true sacrifices of soldiers to civilians.\(^{133}\) His criticism of the home front and defense of the soldier was reprinted in *Heitai (Soldier)* magazine, thus ensuring soldiers on the frontlines would hear his message as well.\(^{134}\) *Heitai* was a magazine edited and read by Japanese troops stationed in South China beginning in 1939. It was published through the press department of the Japanese field army in South China and thus subject to rigorous military censorship. Nevertheless, *Heitai* is a particularly valuable source from which to gather some sense of the views of ordinary soldiers toward the battlefield and home front (see figures 3.4 and 3.5).

In April 1940, Nakano Minoru, another soldier-writer and close friend to Hino, told readers of *Heitai* that he had come to realize the true “strength” (takumashii) of Japanese soldiers only after changing out of the uniform and into civilian clothes. After being discharged, Nakano remained with his unit in China for another month to finish up some projects for the press department. One night, he visited a former comrade still in uniform and the conversation turned to the home front. The friend told Nakano, “We hear all kinds of news from the home islands (naichi) about how they can no longer drink sake, how there isn’t enough rice or charcoal. This truly weighs heavily on the minds of soldiers.”

Nakano, however, gave a sharply unsympathetic reply. “Those rumors may be true. And they may indeed miss us so. But I don’t see this as something unfair to the home front citizens.” Nakano explained that most of these stories came from enemy propaganda trying to undermine morale. The real problem, he said, was a lack of moral fortitude and self-discipline among civilians. Once he returned to Japan, Nakano and other returned soldiers would “take the initiative in spiritually drilling citizens to endure material shortages.”\(^{135}\)

As the initial euphoria of returning home faded, a quiet disillusionment was palpable among returned soldiers. In July 1941, nearly two years after writing his articles for the *Tokyo Asahi*, Hino wrote another three-part essay on returned soldiers for the *Yomiuri Shinbun*. Despite his earlier displeasure at the seeming divide between Japanese urban society and the frontlines, this time he declared that “there was no longer a home front or frontlines; the two have become one unified group fighting.” Since his return to Japan, Hino had met other returned soldiers who served as living

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\(^{133}\) Hino Ashihei, “Kikan heishi no kotoba (chū), *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun*, November 8, 1939.

\(^{134}\) The three installments of “Kikan heishi no kotoba” were reprinted in *Heitai* 11 (January 1940): 20–22.

Figure 3.4 Self-portraits by Japanese soldiers stationed in South China, sent to Heitai, vol. 7 (August 20, 1939).
reminders on the home front that the war was still ongoing. At the inauguration of the Tsushima Culture League in a remote island prefecture, Hino saw many local returned soldiers in attendance alongside young recruits about to depart for the front. Even in this isolated region, he observed simple farm houses with Japanese flags fluttering on the rooftops. Later, he ran into a local resident who recognized Hino from the newspaper: “The man said, ‘I’m also a returned soldier. I was in your unit when we landed at Hangzhou Bay.’” After reminiscing about their time at the front, the men parted. Hino then climbed up a hill and gazed at the sprawling bucolic countryside below. “I could see the small farmers,” he wrote, “plowing the fields with their horses. And, strangely, I worried about starting to tear up.”

In the next installment, Hino was less sanguine about the place of returned soldiers on the home front. He admitted that many harbor “deeply ingrained shock, discontent, and irritation towards life on the home front.” But he urged these men to “always contemplate” how their

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Figure 3.5 Self-portraits by Japanese soldiers stationed in South China, sent to Heitai, vol. 7 (August 20, 1939).

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136 Hino Ashihei, “Jihen yo nen me no kansō (jō),” Yomiuri Shinbun, July 5, 1941.
“pride as returned soldiers conflicts and harmonizes with their own daily life.” Thoughtful reflection on how to integrate into home front life as a returned soldier, according to Hino, would allow them to “become a fully-formed returned soldier and human being” (kikanheitaru ningen wo kansei shite yuku). “Soldiers,” he warned, “do not become great by aimlessly grumbling and complaining about the home front.” Hino again reiterated that “the walls between home front and frontlines have been torn down” by citing the increasing numbers of returned soldiers in Japan. He speculated that “the number of returned soldiers will steadily grow until they may even become greater than the number of soldiers in battle.” Perhaps in the future, he mused, “there will be returned soldiers wherever you go, and you always will hear the very word ‘returned soldier.’”

Direct public utterances against returned soldiers were rare but one notable exception appeared in the April 1939 issue of the major journal Bungei Shunjû. The novelist Kamitsukasa Shôken dismissed Hino’s frequent lament about the home front’s negligence of returned soldiers as an “absurd, baseless fear” (kiyû). The writer characterized Hino’s articles as having all the subtlety and nuance of “throwing a bomb” into a discussion. “Everyday citizens,” Kamitsukasa claimed, “all members of society seriously and respectfully want to welcome returned soldiers.” Nevertheless, Hino exemplifies the typical overdramatic “artist’s soul of an affectionate father (jifu) afflicted with needlessly worrying.” While acknowledging that soldiers, indeed, “endured mankind’s greatest trials” on the frontlines, Kamitsukasa argued that it was the returned soldier who must now conform to society. “Once the soldier has departed the battlefield, once he steps on the ground of his hometown, puts away his gun, takes off his uniform, and returns to becoming a civilian [shakaijin, literally “man of society”], he must get along (oreai) with ordinary people.” Kamitsukasa did not share Hino’s “extreme worry” about the relationship between veterans and civilians. In fact, he added, he specifically chose the word “get along” (oreai) as a “soft and easy word” in reaction to what he saw as Hino’s more “biting and severe tone.” For, “ordinary people have always and forever expressed their warm appreciation and gratitude toward wounded soldiers and soldiers who have returned safely.” Kamitsukasa concluded that “the absurd fear about ‘getting along’ held by Mr. Hino should be cast into oblivion.”

137 Hino Ashihei, “Jîhen yonenme no kansô (chû),” Yomiuri Shinbun, July 6, 1941.
There was still another perspective circulating in public discourse about the place of the returned soldier on the home front. One returned soldier expressed a more ambivalent attitude toward the home front’s qualified embrace of veterans like himself. Writing in January 1941 for *Heitai* magazine (and thus addressing more soldiers than civilians), Muneta Hiroshi said he was appreciative of the kind words of encouragement and gratitude civilians conveyed to him and other returned soldiers for their service.\(^{139}\) Despite only recently leaving the military, he was already nostalgically recalling the “beautiful life” of the soldier on the front, where “there was no ego, no secret dealings or tricks,” just a “noble, beautiful life.” But for soldiers like him, that was no longer possible. Instead, Muneta urged returned soldiers to quickly transition back into civilian life and lead the way to building a stronger Japan. Indeed, in wartime Japan, he rhetorically asked, “what need is there of anyone other than the soldier or the home front person?” Historian Kanai Keiko has cited this article to demonstrate how the returned soldier was tied to the home front. Many young men entered the military to achieve social advancement. They would first receive public acclaim after getting high marks for physical fitness at the conscription exam and then enter the military. Later, many would be promoted to First-Class Private until finally returning to their home town after military discharge to become a local official or community leader. The returned soldier was thus following a “series of processes that flowed through the ‘front lines’ and ‘home front’” uniting the two spheres. The returned soldier exemplified the ideal of veterans, men with military training and background, returning to civilian life to lead his community and, by extension, the nation. He was, Kanai claims, “an indispensable part of the total war system.”\(^{140}\)

But a closer look at the rest of the article suggests a much more mixed picture. As time passed, Muneta found the respect he received as a veteran begin to grate on his nerves. “Recently, I have been feeling a kind of dissenting displeasure at being called a ‘returned soldier,’” he wrote. “Yes, of course we are returned soldiers. But more than that, when we take off our uniforms, change into kimono, and sit down on the tatami floor, we are now home front people (*jūgojin*). This is what I’m starting to think.” Unlike Hino and other public spokesmen for veterans, Muneta found it a burden to always be categorized as a “returned soldier.” Far from empowering or ennobling, he observed that “when people say,

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‘that’s a returned soldier,’ it feels like some kind of handicap (handikyappu). I just want to get rid of that word.”

Muneta felt that “returned soldier” was a “label” (raberu) that stigmatized him and other veterans as people to be pitied and excluded from society. Suggesting that being forever mired in the status of returned soldier was infantilizing, he argued that, “We must quickly graduate (sotsugyō) from being returned soldiers. I want a label that says, ‘New Home Front Person’ (shin jūgojin) affixed on my forehead.” Muneta expressed reservation at being pigeonholed as a “returned soldier” – he wrote that he first thought that word simply meant “a soldier who has ‘returned.’” He saw little prospect in turning returned soldiers into a new vigorous vanguard force guiding the home front as initially hoped for by military authorities. Instead, Muneta preferred to think of the idea of the returned soldier as simply a “label” temporarily affixed on his personhood. Once it has outlived its usefulness, he will peel off the label and move on with his life.

Hino’s contradictory statements and Muneta’s struggle to find a new identity reflected the awkward position returned soldiers occupied in wartime society. The returned soldier’s presence on the home front signaled to everyone that all was not well with the war. The soldier was supposed to be away fighting on the frontlines and return only in the glorious aftermath of victory (or after dying in battle, to be deified at Yasukuni Shrine). He was not supposed to return home alive if the war was still ongoing. As Muneta and others discovered, the home front had no real place or use for returned soldiers. Returned soldiers in turn vented their frustrations against the home front. In 1941, as the wartime government ordered all Japanese citizens to form family-based neighborhood associations to facilitate war mobilization decrees, groups of returned soldiers decided to form their own association separate from civilians. “We’re making a neighborhood association just for us and creating a New Order for returned soldiers,” explained one veteran.

The disgruntlement among returned soldiers toward the depiction of soldiers in popular culture reflected an overall sense that the home front knew little about the war itself. Despite the enormous output of war literature, war novels, war films, news films, and reporter’s firsthand accounts from the front, returned soldiers felt that civilians were woefully ignorant of the realities of war.

141 Muneta, “Kikan senpai ni kiku”: 10–11.
142 “Kikan shite hatsu jōkai, ‘tonarigumi’ wo musubu rekisen yūshi tachi,” Asahi Shinbun, January 5, 1941.
Decrowning the Soldier

In January 1941, the Army Ministry issued the infamous Field Service Code (Senjinkun) to all soldiers, which recapitulated the mystical ideologies of the emperor system before ordering soldiers to always choose suicide over the shame of being captured prisoner by the enemy. What is less remarked upon are other parts of the code articulating years of growing public anxieties about the discipline of soldiers. The last section on “Achievements of Soldiers in Service” listed somewhat mundane admonitions to soldiers to share bullets and supplies with other units, refrain from falling into jealousy over rewards and promotions, and avoid spreading lies and exaggerations. However, the final clause in the last section of the Field Service Code was, appropriately enough, directed at returned soldiers: “Should you receive the order to return home alive after braving ten thousand deaths, think of those brave souls who will not return. Be determined to become an example to the people by being careful in word and deed, renewing your vows to serve the country.”

Like other official pronouncements over the years, the Field Service Code reminded returned soldiers to behave themselves on the home front and be cognizant of the fact they may not lay claim to the full honors of a soldier returning in triumph.

As Japan moved closer to war with the United States and Great Britain in 1941, opportunities for the home front to celebrate soldiers in grand fashion became few and far between. In July 1941, citing the need for austerity and the protection of military secrets, the government began clamping down on the costly public ceremonies celebrating soldier send-offs and welcome-home gatherings. Aside from exorbitant financial costs, military leaders feared that showy public send-offs of fighting men would reveal critical troop movements to the Soviets. That year, following the outbreak of war between Germany and the Soviet Union, the army quietly mobilized 550,000 troops near the Manchurian border for possible war with the Soviets. Newly conscripted soldiers were now to be secretly sent to the front in civilian clothes with no public ceremonies from their local communities. Later, some send-offs were allowed but restricted to more carefully controlled ceremonies held at public sites while expensive farewell banquets were still banned. The outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941 marked, in a sense, the end of both the returned soldier and the iconic soldier. With the tide swiftly turning against Japan within six months, returning thousands of soldiers to the

143 This is based on an English translation of the Senjinkun from The Official Journal of the Japanese Military Administration 3 (May 11, 1942): 241–242.
144 Kira, “Shōwaki no chohei heiji shiryō kara heishi no miokuri to kikan”: 293–303.
home front became a strategic and logistical impossibility. Allied submarine attacks severed transportation routes between the home islands and shifting warfronts, while the deteriorating war situation demanded more warm bodies to replenish massive casualties on the frontlines.  

To be sure, the heroic soldier continued to represent a hegemonic masculinity appropriate to a historical moment when militarism and the military assumed a preponderant place in Japanese society by 1941. But like a nagging cold he could never quite shake off, the heroic soldier was always followed by the shadow of the returned soldier. The returned soldier represented failure, a literal incompleteness, and emasculation. He was a freak in the sense that he could not be located within traditional archetypes of martial valor. The presence of the returned soldier in particular served as an unpleasant reminder for Japanese consumer-subjects of the hollowness of national unity, the pointlessness of the never-ending China War, and the emptiness of the culturally constructed “military gods” and humanistic movie soldiers.

145 Kagoshima, Senjō e yuku, Senjō kara kaeru: 87.
The movie star in wartime Japan was an ideological contortionist: a cheerleader for total war, a defiant symbol of individualism and “personality.” She (and here I focus on the female movie star) tantalized consumer-subjects on the silver screen with glimpses of glamour in an increasingly unglamorous world. She also lurked in the imagination and dreams of movie fans, the fears and anxieties of intellectuals and social bureaucrats, and in glossy photographs, posters, and movie magazines circulating throughout the 1930s and early 1940s. During the 1930s, Japan’s family state ideology, which emphasized the patriarchal household as a public institution and extension of governmental authority, began to radically change along with the status of women. With more and more men conscripted into the military or leaving the villages for lucrative factory work in the cities, many families across Japan found themselves being led by women. As a result, the wartime government called on women to take the lead and rebuild the broken family system as mothers of the nation. With men fighting overseas for the nation, the ideal public role for women rigidified into that of a mother protecting and raising future soldiers.  

It was within this rapidly shifting environment about the role of women on the home front that the movie star acquired even greater cultural cachet. The wartime government mobilized her popularity to prod women into the new wartime roles as “Military Mothers” (gunkoku no haha), dutifully having children and raising sons to send off to war. The 1939 promulgation of the Film Law triggered a lively debate in the mass media over how to identify and exploit the mysterious ability of stars to command the devotion of people like no government slogan could. These public debates about creating a new generation of captivating movie stars

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to promote wartime motherhood and sustain home front morale crystal-
lized into a 1940 registration system and then reinforced by the 1943
founding of the Japan Film School. Parallel to the proliferation of new
wartime institutions and discursive arguments seeking to manage star-
dom for state goals, several actresses in their own way continued to
embody the deepest desires and fantasies held by Japanese consumer-subjects, effortlessly sweeping into the worlds of other carnival kings to
provide entertainment for workers, comfort for soldiers, and maternal
solace for aviators.

I should clarify at the outset that I am not interested in writing another
historical overview of Japanese wartime cinema or cinema culture as
conventionally understood by film scholars. It is already painfully obvious
that the movies and movie stars were a product of Japan’s capitalist
modernity and helped promote and glorify Japanese imperial conquests
in Asia.² Rather, as part of a greater inquiry into the intersection between
total war and mass culture, I am more interested in exploring the con-
struction of the Japanese actress as “star” in a variety of movie fan
magazines and intellectual and bureaucratic treatises under the condi-
tions of war mobilization during the late 1930s and early 1940s.

By “star,” I follow Hideaki Fujiki’s definition of movie stardom in the
prewar Japanese context. A movie star is an actor whose popularity is
promoted by the mass media primarily through images. The star is
differentiated from an actor by modeling a specific mode of capitalist
behavior and consumer lifestyle at once highly exclusive and accessibly
democratic. The star is essentially constructed by overlapping institutions
such as the studio system, bureaucratic agencies, and the mass media
which shaped production and circulation of the image of actors.
Accordingly, one cannot understand movie stars only by looking at their
films but must also think about the images and discourse about them in
the popular press. Movie fans as consumers would encounter movie stars
through such cultural texts and attach their own meanings to these iconic
personas. All of this is to say that the production, circulation, and con-
sumption of the movie star in mass society is a multivalent process open to
multiple conflicting interpretations and social meanings coexisting side
by side.³

² Topics which have already been addressed by, for example, Peter B. High, The Imperial
Screen: Japanese Film Culture in the Fifteen Years’ War, 1931–1945 (Madison, WI:
University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); Michael Baskett, The Attractive Empire:
Transnational Film Culture in Imperial Japan (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press,
2008); and Ginoza Naomi, Modan raifu to sensō: sukuriin no naka no onna tachi (Tokyo:
Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2013).
³ Hideaki Fujiki, Making Personas: Transnational Film Stardom in Modern Japan
While we know that the Japanese star system derived from Hollywood influences in the 1910s and 1920s and how war movies helped promote the state’s nationalist and imperialist agenda in the 1930s and 1940s, what is less clear is how we should think about the star in popular wartime fantasies. To put it another way, what was “wartime” about the wartime movie star? How did total war transform the movie star and how did the movie star reconfigure the experience of total war for Japanese people as consumers as well as subjects?

These questions explicitly depart from previous studies which position prewar and wartime Japanese movie stardom as antithetical to war, incidental to national mobilization, or simply an extension of institutions and practices already established in the 1920s. Fujiki looks mostly at the prewar origins of the Japanese star system, stopping in the 1930s. The cinematic aura of the wartime movie star, he briefly concludes, was rooted “in the prehistory of the star system and colonial modernity’s complex interactions and conflations.” Although major wartime stars seemed to suggest new cultural practices such as Ri Kōran’s border-crossing roles and ambiguous ethnic persona offscreen, Fujiki sees this as merely an extension of the capitalist studio system well in place before the war.4 Ginoza Naomi looks more extensively at movie stars in the 1930s and contends that they offered escapist visions of a peaceful and tranquil “modern life” onscreen, which enabled mass audiences to “forget” the true violence and repression of war. In this respect, she suggests that Japanese cinema and stars did not follow in lockstep the state’s total war mobilization project by refusing to “cast aside the theme of modern life.” However, after 1940 with the rise of the New Order movement and the profusion of state controls over cultural practices, she sees movie stars being reduced into “spokeswomen of the state, praising the 2,600th imperial anniversary of 1940.”5 Although offering escapist fare quite different from visions of a grim home front, Ginoza concludes, movie stars contributed to the war effort by obscuring the realities of wartime aggression.

These perspectives characterizing wartime stardom as derivative of prewar cultural trends, or offering only blissful escapism from war, share the presumption that war was antithetical to modern life itself. These unspoken assumptions about the nature of Japanese wartime culture are directly laid out in Peter High’s magisterial, exhaustive overview of wartime cinema.6 High finds that through skillful manipulation, subtle

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5 Ginoza, Modan raiju to sensō, 8: 184.  
6 High, The Imperial Screen, xiv–xv. Or, as Peter High has written, “how (meaning, by what process) so many individuals – many of them as alert, broad-minded, and cosmopolitan as the best of us today – were induced to put their creative talents and inspiration in service to
coercion, and increasingly repressive legislation, the state quickly bent the entire film industry to its will. He concludes:

The filmmakers’ slavish embracement of control had been brought on by a neurotic capitulation before the incomprehensible mouthings of the bureaucrats. With this capitulation, they surrendered to the state their creative powers. Thereafter, it was up to the state . . . to decide what to do with this power.7

It is time to move beyond facile observations about the “incomprehensible mouthings of the bureaucrats” and “slavish embracement of control” among filmmakers to better historicize the cultural politics of wartime Japan. By looking at the repeated crownings and decrownings of the movie star as total war and movie stardom became increasingly entangled, this chapter will illuminate the possibilities and limitations of mobilization encountered by state bureaucrats. This is ultimately a story of the challenges faced by the Japanese wartime state trying to tame and harness a carnival king or, rather, queen for national goals.

Controlling the Movie Star: The Road to the Film Law

While well established as cultural icons in Japan since the late 1910s, the cultural influence of Japanese movie stars reached unprecedented levels by the 1930s. That decade witnessed the rise of talkies, film industry consolidation, and increasing government interest in exploiting the power of film for propaganda purposes. The popularity of talkies led to the demise of silent films and many silent film actors, and the debut of a new generation of stars whose images and voices commanded far greater attention among the moviegoing public. After the successful release by Shōchiku of Japan’s first talkie, The Neighbor’s Wife (Madamu to nyōōbo), in 1931, most 1920s stars faded into obscurity as studios transitioned away from silent films. Many silent film stars had thick regional accents or inexperience with saying lines and thus could not successfully transition into talkies. In silent films, actors were required to only mimic speaking and the acting schools did not offer courses on script reading. Thus, by the mid-1930s, a new generation of actors with no ties to the now-obsolete silent film era dominated Japanese cinema.8

a regime that utterly rejected the rational tenets they once believed” (Emphasis in original). The film industry was, according to High, “no match” for the visionary wartime bureaucrats determined to forcibly mobilize cinema for boosting home front morale.

7 High, The Imperial Screen: 341.
At the same time, a flurry of movie magazines began to appear in the 1930s to cater to the growing number of movie fans, thereby magnifying the spaces for public discussion about stardom. By December 1937, there were 47 movie magazines and 37 newspapers. The number of theaters and moviegoers also sharply rose in the late 1930s. In 1931, there were 1,449 movie theaters and 164,710,000 moviegoers recorded. By 1941, there were 2,472 theaters and 438,330,000 moviegoers. The shift from silent films to talkies also necessitated greater capital and consolidation for studios to stay competitive, resulting by 1937 in an oligopoly of three huge studios: Nikkatsu, Shōchiku, and Tōhō. By 1937, the three studios enjoyed vertical monopolies controlling their own distribution networks and exclusive theater chains. The cultural scholar Minami Hiroshi dubbed the years 1936 to the enactment of the government’s Film Law in 1939 as the “the golden age of Japanese cinema.”

Movements by the state to regulate and exploit the growing power of cinema over mass society were initially slow but then rapidly accelerated following the start of the China War in 1937. In 1935, the Home Ministry and Education Ministry sponsored the creation of the semi-official Greater Japan Film Association (Dai Nippon eiga kyōkai) as a civilian entity to advocate for state film controls via its journal, Nippon Eiga (Japanese Cinema). The Film Association and Nippon Eiga became the main outlets through which officials pushed for the purging of perceived negative, mostly American-influenced, social effects and the creation of a more “rationalized” and state-controlled mode of film production.

When the China War began in the summer of 1937, the Home Ministry issued detailed instructions to the studios to produce films with “popular spiritual renovation.” In July 1938, the studios agreed to more extensive demands from the Home Ministry to eliminate from films American-inspired individualism and frivolous language and behavior in favor of themes promoting public sacrifice, the family system, filial piety, and the Japanese spirit. Studios generally responded with enthusiasm to guidance from the state. Throughout the war, they produced films featuring

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10 Tōhō is now well known among Western audiences for releasing films directed by Kurosawa Akira, Miyazaki Hayao, and the Godzilla franchise. Shōchiku later became famous in the West for Ozu Yasujirō’s famous film Tokyo Story (1953) and, later, popular anime films such as “Ghost in the Shell” (1995). Nikkatsu, after a postwar renaissance in the 1950s and 1960s, transitioned into pornographic films in the 1970s.
11 Furukawa, Senjika Nihon no eiga: 34–43.
female characters who stoically accepted the harsh fate war brings to families and communities. Women were portrayed as self-sacrificing and hardworking mothers who remained on the home front to help the community get through the crisis. Wartime films thus echoed the pro-natalist family state ideology that reified the ideal role for women as a mother serving the state by producing and rearing future soldiers.\textsuperscript{15}

At the same time, movie fan magazines promoted a different picture of what movie stars should be like. For artist Fujikawa Eiko, writing in late 1937 in \textit{Sutairu (Style)} magazine, “global stars are actually full of inexhaustible beauty that is fresh, gorgeous (gōjasu), unique (koseiteki), multifaceted (takakuteki), sensuous (kankaku), or romantic (romanchikku).” Fujikawa wanted to lay out the specific qualities of a star’s beauty because, she claimed, ordinary moviegoers only see it on the silver screen for a fleeting moment before forgetting. She listed such qualities by citing a series of Western stars:

- Unique, unforgettable beauties like
- The passionate pose of Pola Negri
- The bold Spanish costumes of Raquel Meller
- The futurist style of Nathalie Lissenko.\textsuperscript{16}

In October 1938, an article by Seo Atsushi outlined more characteristics of a star:

- First, Beauty!
  A. The eyes of Jean Parker
  B. The hair of Madeleine Carroll
  C. The nose of Carole Lombard
  D. The mouth of Myrna Loy
  E. The breasts of Bette Davis
  F. The waist of Joan Crawford
  G. The feet of Marlene Dietrich
  H. The heels of Ruby Keeler

However, Seo added, “Personality is most important.” The article used the word \textit{kosei} for personality but later added small phonetic script to indicate that it should be pronounced, \textit{pāsonaritii}. Seo went on to cite an array of American and Japanese stars as possessing different but important aspects of this transnational quality:

By “personality,” we mean nowadays “personal magnetism.” You can see this throughout Hollywood. The sharpness of Katharine Hepburn, the wisdom of


\textsuperscript{16} Fujikawa Eiko, “Star Style” [English in original title], \textit{Sutairu} (December 1937): 60–61.
Myrna Loy, the toughness of Luise Rainer, the intensity of Miyake Kuniko, the sophistication of Kuwano Michiko, the purity of Todoroki Yukiko — these qualities eloquently speak to the strong points of personality.\(^{17}\)

The trend in movie magazines of celebrating movie stardom as a transnational phenomenon shaped by both Western and Japanese characteristics continued throughout the late 1930s. In July 1938, Takami Jun offered his opinions on specific Japanese actresses in *Sutairu*. Takasugi Sanae was praised for her indomitable spirit and outspoken personality, which, he observed, resembled older standards of female beauty represented by Clara Bow. The “commanding presence and splendid physique” of both Yamada Isuzu and Edogawa Ranko were favorably compared with Kay Francis and Janet MacDonald, although Takami lamented that there has not yet been a film in which Edogawa’s “personality” could really shine through. Todoroki Yukiko was another of Takami’s favorites for her remarkable ability to disappear into characters from “aristocratic lady” to “shop girl.” Todoroki could be naturally tragic and sunny simultaneously.\(^{18}\)

In September 1938, Okada Shinkichi listed his favorite female stars – American actress Anita Louise, French actress Annabella, and the Japanese actresses Todoroki Yukiko and Miyake Kuniko. Todoroki had a “good personality” (*yoki pāsonaritī*). She was like the “daughter of a good family who doesn’t bring to mind a café waitress or dancer.” For Okada, Todoroki is “the best in the Japanese film world” for being able to play “elegant young ladies.” But he still wished she would be “more cheerful” like French actress Danielle Darrieux. Miyake Kuniko excelled in playing a young housewife, he claimed, and had the education and presence that no other actress had. Okada found Hara Setsuko to be “quite sweet and lovely … For me, I like her Japanese maiden-like resolute attitude.”\(^{19}\)

In November 1938, Tamura Tajirō described “stars I like the most” and “stars I dislike the most.” His favorite female stars were Todoroki Yukiko and Hara Setsuko. Tamura cited Todoroki’s “grace,” “liveliness,” and “impish looks.”\(^{20}\)

While movie fan writers reflected on what qualities made up the ideal star, government officials became increasingly wary of the uncontrolled excitement movie stars inspired among their fans in the form of autograph-seeking. In July 1938, the Home Ministry Security Bureau issued new regulations to bar young female students from asking celebrities for

autographs. Bureau officials criticized autograph-seeking as “disgraceful behavior” (shūtai) that could lead (presumably if the celebrity is male) to inappropriate sexual conduct or, more generally, promote “the ideology of blindly worshiping foreign countries” while degrading Japan’s national “dignity” (ishin) and “disrupting social mores.” The Home Ministry ordered police to detain autograph-seekers, lecture them on the dangers of asking for autographs, and then release them into the custody of parents. The Ministry of Education similarly concluded in an August 1938 report that girl students were falling into “licentious” behavior by following movie stars, famous athletes, and foreigners to ask for their autographs. Official concern with autograph-seekers was exacerbated by speculation of mental health experts in newspapers. In April 1938, a psychologist wrote an article claiming that the autograph craze among young women was a form of mental illness and recommended that those afflicted sell their autograph books. In September 1938, the Home Ministry Police Agency announced a wholesale ban on “autograph-seeking,” explaining that “this is unsuitable for a strictly enforced life of the citizenry in the [China] Incident. This spectacle should be obliterated from the capital.” Repeat offenders were threatened with detention (kōryū). By October 1938, the police requested studio bosses and representatives from baseball, boxing, and sumo to turn down all autograph requests sent by mail. On top of that, the police urged actresses to “refrain from walking around the city in ostentatious clothing.”

Other more commercialized activities stemming from movie star culture attracted the ire of the police for redirecting militarism toward unexpected directions. In February 1939, the police agency ordered stores to halt the sale of a popular calendar showing female movie stars posed in military uniform, calling the product a source of “bad influence” (aku eikyō) on the people. Before the ban was announced, thousands of calendars had already been sold together with cigarette cases and “jack-in-the-box style erotic toys” (bikkuri bako shiki ero omocha). Among the photographs shown were of Kuwano Michiko dressed like a sailor from the Yokosuka base and Yamaji Fumiko posing as an army sublieutenant. As stars mobilized to support the war effort onscreen, state officials were realizing the challenges in managing stardom offscreen. These small

24 “Yūsō irai no mono mo dame: sain kyōyūsha gawa ni sokubaku kuwawaru,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, October 1, 1938.
25 “Gunsō joyū no buromaido kinshi,” Yomiuri Shinbun, February 3, 1939.
incidents demonstrated to officials the power of the movie star to inspire fervent devotion and consumption among fans and her potential as agent promoting state goals. But they also illustrated the dangers of letting stardom unfold without restraint at a time when the state was imposing rigid controls on identity and austerity on the home front. Thus, there were two competing visions of the movie star. One imagination of the star drew aura and glamour through mass consumption and fan devotion. The other was a carefully controlled version who would channel that glamour for state purposes excised of the disruptive aspects of consumption and desire.

While the glamour of the movie star ably served the wartime state’s goals in rallying public support for the war, many officials and intellectuals found such intensive popular devotion could also forge a deeply personal, intimate relationship between the movie fan and movie star that seemed to leave little room for the state. However constructed or artificial it might have been, fan obsession with stars threatened the state promotion of the emperor as the center of all public life and national identity. In contrast to school principals leaping into burning buildings to rescue the emperor’s sacred portrait (as lionized in national memory since the Meiji period), some movie fans were apparently devoting equally fervent energies seeking and treasuring signed photos of their favorite movie star. A growing bureaucratic effort in 1938 and 1939 unfolded to tame the iconic power of the movie star, but also to exploit it for state purposes without diluting its effectiveness.

**The Film Law and the Registration System**

As the China War intensified in 1938, some bureaucratic officials imagined a more radical role for the movies and the movie star in particular to mobilize home front morale. The Home and Education Ministries were the first government institutions to recognize the power of film in molding public opinion for national goals. Inspired by the April 1938 Diet passage of the National Mobilization Law, these officials began marshaling support for a similar enabling act for film. Through state intervention, it was believed, the industry would produce higher-quality films starring a more dedicated group of actors and better inspiring the masses. The Ministry of Education also pushed for a comprehensive law to protect students and minors from the negative influence of decadent film dramas and

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centralize efforts to produce educational films that could instill morality among young people. The film studios as well came to advocate for a closer state relationship to enhance the legitimacy and respectability of the film industry and ensure its solvency in an increasingly competitive business environment.\textsuperscript{27}

In April 1939, after months of planning and lobbying by the Home and Education Ministries, the Diet passed the Film Law (\textit{eiga hō}). The Film Law was modeled on film control legislation in Nazi Germany. Japan and Germany, as well as other countries at the time, recognized the power of film in swaying public opinion in favor of state policies. In addition to imposing new preproduction censorship over preexisting postproduction censorship, Japan’s Film Law required anyone wanting to become a director, cameraman, or actor to be registered and licensed by the Home Ministry through a Film Association-administered exam. The exams tested general film knowledge but also more ideological topics such as “national history” and “national common knowledge,” to weed out those with leftist political tendencies and further inculcate nationalist fervor among film personnel.\textsuperscript{28} Those in the industry working without such special licenses or “carrying out acts injurious to the public interest” would be banned from the industry.\textsuperscript{29}

The implementation of the registration system was delayed until April 1940 to allow time for the Film Association to set up the examination criteria and infrastructure. In the meantime, film critics and Home and Education Ministry officials began discussing in film journals how the registration process would transform movie stardom. Writing for \textit{Nippon Eiga} in October 1939, the influential journalist and publisher Kikuchi Kan threw his strong support behind the new registration system. Kikuchi complained that Japanese cinema compared unfavorably with foreign films and lacked the artistic standards adhered to in other areas of Japanese culture. For this he blamed greedy, profit-obsessed studio executives and their “system based on popular actors” (\textit{ninkī haiyū hon’i seido}). The profit-based studio system meant that “even actresses (\textit{koto ni joyū}) who have no experience and completely lack the characteristics of an actor will simply ride the capricious waves of mass popularity up to success.” By forcing would-be actors to go through a rigorous examination on moral character and intelligence before being granted a license, Kikuchi argued, “then the rude and reckless practice of randomly pulling people off the streets and having them perform will disappear . . . no doubt

the quality of actors will improve.” Over time, the journalist hoped that the system would contribute to greater state support for film “as an important field of Japanese culture,” which in turn would give the actor “a sense of pride” (puraido).  

The registration system and proficiency exam were heralded by the Education and Home Ministries and their allies in the film industry as the key mechanisms to construct a new, more educated, and more dignified movie star who could model onscreen the Military Mother for the home front. To that end, in March 1940, shortly before the registration system was to commence, the Home Ministry ordered a “purification of stage names” (geimei shukusei) in the entertainment industry. Actors with stage names that “dishonor the dignity of the imperial household, parody the names of famous historical figures, slight the honor of the people, or promote the bad custom of worshipping foreigners” were now to return to their original legal names. For good measure, the newspaper articles publicizing the decree printed a list of stage names of famous entertainers targeted for abolishment like Miss Columbia, Dick Mine, Miss Wakana, and Fujiwara Kamatari.  

Actors who did not return to their original names would not be registered by the Film Association and thus prevented from working in the industry. In this way, the Home Ministry’s decree was an attempt to “purify” stage names of their foreign influence and cultural irreverence. But it was also an effort at finding a more authentic persona of movie stars. Like film critics, the Home Ministry also valued “personality” in movie stars but interpreted here as finding the actor’s true “authentic” core self.  

However, as the registration system approached its April 1940 launch, it faced several bureaucratic hurdles. To begin with, the registration system had almost no effect on stars who were already famous. Over two thousand established actors, directors, and cinematographers working in the field were granted “vested rights” (kitokuken) by the government, which provided an automatic Home Ministry license and exemption from any proficiency exam. Thus, the registration system could only gradually change the film industry personnel with new hires.  

31 Fujiwara no Kamatari (614–669) was a seventh-century Japanese aristocrat and the founder of the famous Fujiwara clan which later dominated Japan’s imperial government for centuries.  
32 “Ki wo terau geimei ni ‘shukumei’ mou shiwa wattashī, mazu yaridama ni eiga haiyū,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, March 29, 1940; “Myō na geimei yurushigata shi,” Yomiuri Shinbun, March 29, 1940; “Mazu roku-me ga kaimi: eiga haiyū no geimei shukusei,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, April 6, 1940.  
33 Tanaka Eizō, Haiyū junbi dokuhon (Tokyo: Eiga Nipponsha, 1941): 2. See also Fuwa Suketsoshi, Okudaira Yasuhiro, and Satō Tadao, “Kaisō eiga hō,” in Satō Tadao, Sensō to Nihon eiga (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1986): 262. Fuwa Suketsoshi, a former Education Ministry official, mentioned that one notable exception was the popular movie star Ri
The registration system also faced challenges in February 1940 from studio executives and producers who expressed “outrage” (keshikaran) that they would be excluded from administering the proficiency exam. The Film Association appeased the studio executives by appointing them to an “advisory committee” (shimon iinkai). A more serious obstacle appeared in March 1940, shortly before registration was to go into effect. A new Welfare Ministry hiring restriction ordinance threatened to derail the goal of the Film Law’s registration system to infuse the Japanese film industry with new, young, and patriotic movie stars. To deal with chronic labor shortage in factories, the hiring ordinance restricted the number of young men between 12 and 30 years old and young women between 12 and 20 years old from working in non-munitions sectors. The measure effectively prevented young people to be licensed as actors and hired by film studios. The ordinance even specified “entertainment sites like film, theater, and vaudeville” as worksites where young women could no longer work. After appeals from the Home Ministry and Greater Japan Film Association for an exemption for film industry personnel, the Welfare Ministry issued a lukewarm announcement in June 1940, “acknowledging the object of the Film Law” and agreed to implement unspecified “relief measures in order to improve and develop the national culture while awaiting the active participation of all studio training facilities.”

This was likely a reference to a loophole in the hiring restriction ordinance which granted exemptions to youths who graduated from certain technical schools. To take advantage of the loophole in the hiring ordinance and with the encouragement of the Film Association, the movie studios quickly set up their own acting training centers as technical schools offering a brief four- to six-month course in preparation for the proficiency exam. A 1941 guidebook for aspiring actors recommended young people first enroll in a studio training center before taking the exam. There, students would “deepen their understanding as public persons about the importance of film performers in society,” which would then give them the foundation to pass the proficiency exam. Nonetheless, the scuffle between the Welfare Ministry and the Home Ministry and its film reform allies illustrated how even advocates of mobilization disagreed over whether to

Kōran whose vested rights were not recognized by the government because she was based in Manchuria, not Japan. Ri later had to go through the exam to keep working in the film industry.

34 “Ritsuansha ni hakyū ka, momeru ‘ginō shōmei hakkō kitei’ mondai,” Yomiuri Shinbun, February 25, 1940.
35 Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, June 2, 1940. The full name of the ordinance is Youth and Juvenile Hiring Restriction Ordinance (seishōnen yatoïre seigen rei).
36 Tanaka, Hōyū junbi dokuhon: 4–5.
prioritize labor or spiritual mobilization. Fuwa Suketoshi, a Ministry of Education official and one of the architects behind the Film Law, later hinted that the Welfare Ministry may have harbored a grudge for being excluded by the Home and Education Ministries from the drafting of the legislation. Fuwa recalled that in 1939 the Welfare Ministry blocked the bill at the last minute until its welfare inspectors were given the same “pass” to investigate movie theaters granted to the Home Ministry police. This concession by the Home Ministry, in turn, angered the police and sparked “vociferous opposition.”

Having weathered these early hiccups, the Greater Japan Film Association’s Proficiency Exam Committee (ginō shinsa iinkai) proceeded to hold the film industry personnel exams twice a year, April and October. The Exam Committee was made up of both film industry representatives and bureaucrats with experience in film regulation from the Home Ministry, Education Ministry, and later the Cabinet Information Bureau. The exam consisted of three broad topics: character test (sei-kaku kōsa), academic and “common knowledge” test (gakka oyobi jōshiki kōsa), and “a test on qualities necessary as a performer” (engisha toshite hitsuyō naru soshitsu kōsa). The character section looked at the applicant’s “principles” (shisō), “abilities” (saikan), and “judgment” (handan). Applicants first filled out a survey sheet with their personal information such as number of family members, profession, marital status, financial status, school education, hobbies, and religion. The questionnaire then posed more opinionated questions such as, “talk about a recently-read book, essay, or novel that moved you” and “give [titles of] two or three recently-seen movies which moved you.” And, demonstrating the influence of earlier debates in movie fan culture about the importance of “personality” in stardom, the character test also required applicants to fill out a “personality test form” (kosei chōsa hyō) which consisted of a series of yes or no questions such as:

- Are you good at memorization?
- Do you speak candidly?
- Do you tell jokes and puns?
- Are you carefree?
- Are you reticent?
- Are you a dreamer?
- Are you smart and sensible?
- Are you a shy person?
- Are you easily moved to tears?
- Do you get embarrassed when you read or talk in front of people?

The academic and common knowledge section was a series of patriotic essays for candidates to reflect on. For example, the essay topics in the February 1941 exam were:

- A comfort letter to send to frontline soldiers.
- The 2,600th Imperial Anniversary.
- A letter reporting on recent conditions.
- State the advances of our country since the Meiji period.
- Why must we study our national history?

The next part of the academic section measured “national common knowledge” ( kokumin jōshiki ), which was defined as “things all people must know as common knowledge since they are Japanese subjects.” In other words, things that all Japanese were presumed to know by heart by virtue of having grown up in Japan attending the national school system. Typical “national common knowledge” questions were based on current war-related events:

- For what reason is Japan sacrificing tremendously and carrying out a major project in China?
- What is National Spiritual Mobilization?
- Write what you know about the international conditions which tie our country with Germany and Italy in the Tripartite Pact.

The third section of the proficiency exam tested applicants on technical knowledge more directly related to the film industry. Questions included:

- What is the difference between performance on film and performance on stage?
- State your method for studying lines.
- What is the meaning of Article One of the Film Law, “the qualitative improvement of film?”

A related performance test had the applicant demonstrate his or her ability in speaking ( hasset ), gesture ( shosa ), expressions ( hyōjō ), and performing with makeup and costume. The so-called aptitude test ( soshitsu kōsa ) had applicants perform a brief scene from a script in front of the committee. 39

From the questions of the proficiency exam, it would seem that the Home and Education officials were trying to fulfill two goals. First, they wanted to prevent anyone with political views not in line with government policy from entering the film industry. The many loaded questions related to wartime propaganda, home front activities, and national history would presumably weed out political malcontents and encourage only the most patriotic and dedicated citizens to become actors. Second, the examiners were trying to identify the qualities that made an actor into a star. That is,

a performer who transcends the movie screen with an arresting, compelling personality and style that can capture the audience’s attention and devotion. The many questions about “personality” alongside testing of performance suggest that the examiners conceded that there was something intangible in stardom beyond technical stage skills. And that once the secret was deciphered, a powerful resource for swaying the masses would become available for the state.

**The Movie Star in the New Film Order**

The examination system was part of a broader movement backed by the government and film industry leaders to renovate the film world onto a new wartime footing. In the wake of the inauguration of the proficiency examination system in 1940, the film industry and mass media celebrated the founding of a “New Film Order” (*eiga shintaisei*). Just as similar “new orders” were already announced by public figures for politics, economics, and labor, so too would the movies have their place in the new wartime order. In March 1941, *Eiga no Tomo* (*Friend of the Movies*) explained to readers what the New Film Order in a post-Film Law world would look like through a series of photographs depicting scenes of the “Old Order” and “New Order” (see figure 4.1). Instead of relying on private chauffeured cars in the Old Order, wartime movie stars would now incorporate frugality and physical activity in their daily lives by taking public transportation or simply walking. Stars of the New Order will no longer be discovered by a studio scout and leap into sudden fame and fortune through the studio system. Instead, new stars of the New Order will have to study at studio-based training centers and then pass the state-licensing exams. The route to stardom would now be orderly, rationalized, and purged of randomness. Movie stars would now be proper “women of the Japanese home front,” participating in new female wartime patriotic duties such as sending off or welcoming back soldiers. Finally, *Eiga no Tomo* imagined the New Film Order to be defined by the elimination of rowdy behavior of fans hounding actors for their autograph and of “actors who greedily dream of nothing else but becoming a star.” Now all actors would “heroically stand up as great people of society.”

In an April 1941 profile in *Shin Eiga* (*New Film*), several directors called on young women to become “movie warriors” (*eiga senshi*) – analogous to patriotic munitions workers dubbed by the media as “industrial warriors” (*sangyō senshi*) – by acting in films that serve the interests of the nation in

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time of war. Director Yoshimura Kōsaburō claimed that what he now looked for in up-and-coming stars was not a “maiden” (musume) but a “woman” (onna): “Everyone thinks of ‘maidens’ when they say ‘actress.’ But I want people rich with life experience.” Yoshimura did not mean someone like a café waitress, “for I want a person with a pure and chaste (kiyoraka na) life.” He wanted actresses of tomorrow to be a “beauty” (bijin) but also have the “ability to understand” (rikai ryoku) both the director’s instructions and the movie’s themes and “strong expressions” (hyōgen yoku no ōsei). Yoshimura found current actresses like Takamine Hideko and Mito Mitsuko to have elegance and understanding but no real sense of expression. Another director, Mizoguchi Kenji, felt that beauty is still important for stars to have but, beyond that, they require real ability, “sexiness” (iropposa), and an “intellectual flair” (chiteki na hirameki). These qualities, Mizoguchi insisted, could be acquired through hard work – implicitly endorsing the concept of a centralized acting school. The director emphatically distinguished between an “actress”
(joyū) and a “star” (suta): “To enter this world with the sole wish of only becoming a so-called star is now taboo (kinmotsu). This current obsession with stars is harming young people trying to be movie actresses.” Stardom encourages laziness among aspiring actresses who simply “hope and dream of some chance that they will become famous.” The real secret to actresses now, he concluded, was “beauty, but not dumb beauty (hakuchibi), keen sensitivity (kanjusei no surudoi), and persistent, lifelong hard work.” A third director, Shimazu Yasujirō, agreed that actresses need to be less focused on stardom and more devoted to promoting a “national people’s culture” (kokumin bunka) through film. He found some current stars such as Hara Setsuko, Yamada Isuzu, and Tanaka Kinuyo as “lacking” in the ability to perform such a task for being too star-like but expressed hope that they could change after more training.

Although many of these qualities appear to be no different from previous discussions found in movie magazines, the key theme is a growing rejection of stardom as incompatible with national goals of war mobilization. The directors all agreed that the war demanded that actresses should become, in essence, professional actresses trained in acting schools and who eschewed the frivolous fame-hungry path of prewar movie stars. However, director Yamamoto Kajiro subtly criticized the proficiency exam and test-prep path promoted by the studios and the government: “So far when it comes to theories on performance, there have been plenty of literary statements (bungaku teki ronjutsu) which lack practical and empirical perspectives, and which have made Japanese actors bad.”

The Case of Mito Mitsuko

One major obstacle to the Film Law cultivating a new generation of actors was that established actors were exempt from the Film Law’s registration and exam system. Thus, not only were major stars mostly immune to the dictates of the ideal actress outlined by the directors and the Film Association, they performed their own interpretations of the movie star parallel to the Film Law model imposed on newcomers.

While movie stars exemplified quite different aesthetic styles from temptress to wholesome girl-next-door, Mito Mitsuko (1919–81) represented a particularly potent wartime persona onto which a variety of public commentators projected their visions of what new movie stars would now become. Having been plucked from obscurity and positioned for instant stardom by the studios in the 1930s without benefit of careful and rigorous training, studying, and vetting by state-sanctioned officials,
Mito was the typical movie star that the advocates for the New Film Order wanted to eliminate. Mito was working as a hotel resort waitress when she was discovered and immediately hired by Shōchiku studios in 1936. She had her big break in 1939, the same year as the passing of the Film Law, starring in the melodrama *The Warm Current (Danryū)*. Like other established actors, Mito was granted a “vested right” and exemption from the Film Law’s registration requirements. Nevertheless, the secret to Mito’s cinematic glamour became the topic of intense scrutiny in film magazines among film critics, directors, and bureaucrats over how the registration system would create new kinds of movie stars. In February 1940, a writer in *Nippon Eiga* broke down what made Mito’s portrayal of Ishiwata Gin so compelling in *The Warm Current*. The writer praised Mito’s portrayal of Gin for modeling the ideal Japanese woman, noting that the role vaulted her to star status, “like an active volcano exploding at once.” Previously, her roles merely led to murmurs of “Mito is nice” (*Mito wa ii na*). But following the success of *The Warm Current*, the modest murmurs transformed into “loud cheers.” The writer felt that the buzz created by Mito’s performance was “qualitatively different from the empty popularity of comet stars” who make splashy debuts and then quickly fade away. He admits that Mito “is not naturally endowed with great talent.” And yet, “her personality (pasonaritii) is the Ishiwata Gin-type. This is fortunate for her and very fortunate for the Japanese film world as well.” Although it may seem like “countless” actresses could also have played Gin, “right now no one comes to mind who can play Gin’s essential spirit except her.” The writer contrasted Mito Mitsuko as the ideal Japanese woman with the rebellious, foreign-inspired “Modern Girl”: “She may be a Modern Girl (*modan josei*) in Western clothes. But I am against blindly putting her up onscreen in Western attire . . . her simple and clean body would be somehow lost within the latest Western clothes.” The plain but elegant kimono she wore in *The Warm Current* was, he contended, “most appropriate.”

Mito Mitsuko’s aura came out of her ability to tap into something innately Japanese despite her “Modern Girl” look with bobbed hair. The writer admitted that she also exemplified the Modern Girl, a transnational cultural construct intimately tied to a global consumer culture, bobbed hair, short skirt, and alluring physical gestures which all suggested an autonomous subjectivity resisting state controls. But he insisted this was not her

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true authentic self; by cloaking her in traditional Japanese garments, Mito Mitsuko could personify a highly nativist ideal of modest and demure Japanese femininity.

And yet, an October 1940 short story in *Eiga Fan (Movie Fan)* by Kitamachi Ichirō suggested a Modern Girl-like side to Mito full of alluring physical gestures that cut across national borders. A male Japanese shop clerk named Hanaoka, a fan of weepy romantic films, went to the theater one day and was surprised to encounter an American watching a Mito Mitsuko film. The scene was of Mito “playing a young maiden tormented by tragedy.” He thought the American was a “weird guy” and speculated the man might be a spy (an allusion to growing anti-American sentiments in Japanese society) but approached him during intermission to ask in simple Japanese, “Do you like Japanese cinema?” The foreigner responded in simple Japanese, “Yes I do. I watch it a lot.” Intrigued, Hanaoka asked the foreigner if he could understand the words in the film, to which the foreigner replied no, he could not. “But I can understand with faces.” At that moment, Hanaoka recalled how, just a few years earlier, Japanese people would flock to the movies to see foreign talkies with no subtitles. “And yet,” he observed, “Japanese people watched, pretending to understand in this manner.” The foreigner then added that he thought Japanese actors were “really good” and that he knew their names. To prove his point, he pointed to a large poster on the theater wall: “That person . . . is Miss Mitsuko Mito (*kono hito . . . Misu, Mitsuko, Mito*).” Despite returning to the same theater several times, hoping to continue their conversation and even bringing a “foreign language conversation” book to facilitate discussion, Hanaoka never encountered the foreigner again.45

Although Kitamachi titled his story “Mito Mitsuko,” he was really trying to convey more broadly the transnational power that movie stars like Mito wielded through the silver screen. The story suggests that even during a time of heightened xenophobia, stardom could pierce through national boundaries and temporarily bring together a Japanese and American as consumers who loved the movies and emotions evoked by stars like Mito Mitsuko. Indeed, the accompanying image in the story is a photomontage of a photographic headshot of Mito gracing an illustrated movie screen surrounded by an enraptured audience. What Kitamachi suggested is that Mito Mitsuko had a mysterious star power difficult to completely quantify and duplicate. The foreigner told Hanaoka he could

not understand what she was saying onscreen, but he could grasp the story and emotions through the physical appearance, presence, and gestures of the star. As further evidence of the intangible quality of stardom, the foreigner then quickly identified the image of Mito on a movie poster—“This person is Miss Mitsuko Mito.”

Mito could embody both a quintessential Japanese maiden celebrating state-sanctioned traditions of feminine modesty and humility, and a transnational star who could make an emotional connection to a foreigner with only a rudimentary understanding of Japanese. But who was the real Mito Mitsuko? An article appearing in the same issue as Kitamachi’s story in Eiga Fan attempted to answer this question by giving a “glimpse” (gurinpusu) into the actress. In the article, the film critic author praised Mito for her “humble modesty” (tsutsumashi) and “sweet loveliness” (kawairashisa) onscreen. However, Mito was “definitively not a beauty, nor does she have a look that is conspicuously modern.” What is she, then? The film critic goes on to give an almost schizophrenic description:

She is always modestly humble and yet gives a sense of strength and fortitude. Even with a girlish innocence that can charm men inside, she shows a refreshing crispness that draws in our love as mother and child. Mito Mitsuko is always filled with a sound and reliable charm (kenjitsu na miryoku) whether in Western attire or Japanese attire . . . Furthermore, she has of late stirred sexual passion (shikijō), steadily bewitching people in a good sense.46

The film critic found Mito Mitsuko to be simultaneously many things: an innocent maiden, a warm maternal figure, a Modern Girl with “steady charm” whether in Japanese or Western clothing, a relatable ordinary woman of no great beauty but apparently still a seductress “bewitching people in a good sense.” In other words, Mito Mitsuko represented the essence of wartime movie stardom—a blank slate and moving target onto which fans could project their own fantasies and dreams without much concern for incoherence or dissonance.

The Limits of Mobilizing Movie Stars

Growing discursive interest in discerning the popularity of established movie stars like Mito Mitsuko in the early 1940s coincided with disillusionment among advocates of the film proficiency examination system to train up-and-coming new movie stars. After several rounds of proficiency exams by the spring of 1941, the Film Association declared that the studio-based training method was insufficient. In April 1941, Education

Ministry official Matsuura Susumu, who served on the Exam Committee multiple times, gave his frank appraisal in *Nippon Eiga* of the quality of applicants he saw. Matsuura observed that the young people applying to be actors were generally mediocre at best. “The biggest flaw now with the training centers,” he wrote, “to sum it all up, is that they are degenerating into cram schools” (*yobikō*). When asked to name and analyze a recently seen film, Matsuura found that “many have not seen any recent films. The reason, a vast majority say, is that they were too busy studying for the exam.” He was also dismayed when every young 18-year-old aspiring actress, in answer to the question about the purpose of the Film Law, flawlessly regurgitated word for word the entire text of the law’s first article “in a mechanical tone.” When Matsuura pressed them to explain why the Film Law was important in their own words, “they are unable to answer at all. Even a parrot can just recite the text of a law.” He realized that the training centers followed a “completely rote memorization style of studying” (*mattaku anki teki benkyō*). Would-be actors “parroting” back memorized texts “have no value,” he declared. Having sat through three exams at that point, he was not particularly enthusiastic about even the few applicants who did pass and receive the certificate permitting them to work as actors: “I have my doubts whether or not it is good for the future of the film world to have over a hundred people with only these qualifications sent out as performers every year.”

Matsuura’s suspicions that the training centers were turning into cram schools where students just memorize entire texts was inadvertently confirmed in *Nippon Eiga* a month later. In May 1941, the journal published several accounts from aspiring actors studying for the proficiency exams to demonstrate the rigor of the registration process and the serious dedication applicants devoted to preparation. While undoubtedly the editors selected and edited these essays to place the exams in the best possible light – all applicants stressed how challenging but rewarding the process was and how the exams made them better appreciate the importance of film for the nation – one aspiring actress from Kyoto described her process in preparing for the test this way: “Before the exam, I was in a daze memorizing the newspaper and historical events over the past week.” She and other students in the studio training center also took to memorizing a copy of a film terminology dictionary which was used so much that “it was stained with fingerprints.”

Another examiner, actor Kosugi Isamu, was a little more impressed with the quality of applicants at the February 1941 exams, where 177 out

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of 322 applicants ultimately passed. “In total,” he wrote, “the quality of test-takers has improved from last time. This is a good thing.” However, he too shared Matsuura’s frustrations with the answers applicants provided, especially in the history and “national common knowledge” portions. “Everyone just kept repeating Article One of the Film Law and no matter how much we tried to coach them out of their shell, many just gave answers like, ‘I want to serve the nation through film.’” Unlike Matsuura, the applicants in front of Kosugi apparently could remember the last good film they saw when asked. But everyone gave the same movie titles – Spring on a Small Island (Kojima no haru) and Tower of Introspection (Mikaeri no tō) – “like clockwork (han wo oshita yō na),” Kosugi grumbled. “There needs to be much more youthful dreams and passion,” he insisted. “They need to have a way of looking at a movie as a performer.”

The last exam section on performance also did not go well. As he and his fellow examiners observed aspiring actors and actresses reading lines and moving around in costume, Kosugi was left “dumbfounded” (azen taru). While most everyone could memorize their lines, they did not seem to, in his mind, really understand the role they were playing. It was not enough to just read the script for “one must move toward a way to show they understand this role and create a certain impression.”

Thereafter, the proficiency exams faced a renewed threat from the Welfare Ministry’s hiring restriction ordinance. Despite the earlier agreement on exemptions from the ordinance the previous year, in March 1941, the Tokyo National Employment Agency blocked the movie studios from hiring newly licensed and registered actors for violation of the hiring ordinance. The Film Association appealed to the Welfare Ministry, which oversaw employment agencies. The Welfare Ministry eventually agreed to reclassify actors as “special technicians” (tokushu ginōsha) to get around the wartime hiring restrictions. However, according to the newspaper account, “coordination between the Welfare Ministry and local government was inadequate, which created this current problem.” The Welfare Ministry then passed responsibility back to the Tokyo municipal government for further guidance, but the Film Association and studios were still “at a loss over what to do.”

Meanwhile, in February 1941, the power of established movie stars to inspire frenetic, even disruptive, behavior among movie fans despite the passing of the Film Law was vividly demonstrated when popular actress Ri Kōran appeared at the famous Nichigeki Theater in Tokyo for a live

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50 “‘Haiyō boshū wa fuka,’ Kokumin shidōjo kara tsūatsu,” Yomiuri Shinbun, March 27, 1941.
singing performance. Police were overwhelmed by the huge crowds clamoring to get inside. Over 150 officers tried to manage 100,000 people lined up but the scene descended into chaos. An anonymous columnist in the *Yomiuri Shinbun* later criticized the movie fans lining up “smiling at the vulgar songs and singer.” The columnist urged the Cabinet Information Bureau and the Imperial Rule Assistance Association to do more to “bring true wholesome leisure to the masses” and get rid of the production of “stupid, pseudo-national policy films” with “records of shallow melodies.” The need for the examinations to produce more “wholesome” stars who could inspire more orderly fan behavior became more urgent.

The disappointing outcome of the actor’s registration system to find new stars seemed to intensify media interests in seeking the source of stardom in established stars like Mito. Other sources claimed they knew the definitively real Mito Mitsuko. After Mito answered a series of personality questions in September 1941, *Eiga no Tomo* classified the actress as an “ABC-type.” This meant she was the “incarnation of good fortune” and exceedingly mild-mannered. She was not stubborn, but courageous in her convictions. She listened to others and would not hesitate to fix her own mistakes. A hard worker who did not shirk from duty, Mito was also described as a near-flawless individual who was humble and not easily deceived or swayed by flattery. She was also talented, though *Eiga no Tomo* conceded that she “regrettably lacked a sense of humor and tends to take the trivial seriously” (see figure 4.2).

Mito’s ability to blend “Western” and “American” identities was again hinted at in a September 1941 advertisement montage in *Eiga no Tomo*. The advertisement featured a headshot of a smiling Mito Mitsuko in a Western blouse and modern, shoulder-length permed hairstyle beneath a photo of the grim-faced actress Miyagi Chikako dressed in kimono and premodern hairstyle for a scene from the historical drama *Miyamoto Musashi*. On the opposite page was a full-page advertisement for the American film *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* with large images of Jimmy Stewart and a beaming Jean Arthur. While these images of apparently essentialized Japanese and American womanhood and popular culture may appear contradictory, the position of Mito Mitsuko hints at her more ambiguous connection with both dichotomies. Mito was clearly someone

51 “Yūrakugai ni himajin jūman no dotō,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, February 12, 1941.
52 “Dokusha no me” “Ri Kōran to taishū: hizoku na kokusaku goraku,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, February 16, 1941.
53 “Mito Mitsuko, Kogure Michiyo, Wakahara Harue No seikaku wa?” *Eiga no Tomo* (February 1941): 74–76.
who embodied cherished Japanese feminine virtues and aesthetics like Miyagi but through her attire and expression suggested a less specific, more universal idea of a modern woman, complete with the same bobbed haircut and bright smile as Jean Arthur.\footnote{For a different interpretation of this advertisement, see Miriam Silverberg, “Remembering Pearl Harbor, Forgetting Charlie Chaplin, and the Case of the Disappearing Western Woman: A Picture Story,” \textit{Positions} 1.1 (1993): 60–61.}

The quest to discover the authenticity of stars like Mito Mitsuko continued to interest film critics and government officials alike into the Pacific War era. In December 1941, days before Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor, Mito Mitsuko was among several actresses singled out by the Home Ministry for having an inappropriate stage name that must now be changed. Expanding its earlier decree, the Home Ministry now banned all stage names, irreverent or not, and ordered entertainers to “return to their original name” (\textit{honmei kangen}). Home Ministry officials explained that stage names were “not appropriate for the development of a national people’s culture.” Instead, it was argued, the star should achieve fame through his or her own acting performance onscreen, which would allow

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4.2}
\caption{Mito Mitsuko. \textit{Eiga no Tomo} (September 1941).}
\end{figure}
for a “sincere earnestness” (shinshi) to shine through. The *Yomiuri Shinbun* printed a list of actors’ stage names, including Mito Mitsuko as one of several stars who will switch back to their birth name (in her case, Sekiba Mitsuko). ⁵⁶ Nevertheless, newspaper advertisements for upcoming films with Mito continued using her stage name and never once used her real name. ⁵⁷ In March 1942, the *Yomiuri Shinbun* advertised an appearance by “Mito Mitsuko” at the Shibuya Shōchiku Movie Theater in large bold print and with a headshot of her face. ⁵⁸ Later newspaper advertisements for her films in 1943, 1944, and 1945 all consistently used her stage name. ⁵⁹ Clearly, the studios decided Mito Mitsuko’s name recognition was already too well established and popular to change. At least in her case, the Home Ministry’s insistence for authenticity had to wait.

Mito Mitsuko’s stardom and efforts to dissect its inner workings continued into the Pacific War era, albeit an air of mystery stubbornly clung to her persona. In December 1941, *Eiga no Tomo* printed the transcript of a staged “conversation” (taidan) between director Yamamoto Kajirō and the actress. The photo showed the two celebrities casually sitting on the grass in mid-conversation outside a studio building. Yamamoto, who did most of the talking, emphasized the importance of actresses to study for the roles they would play on screen such as a nurse or farming daughter as well as a tailored study of the arts to become a well-rounded performer. Mito replied with brief, elliptical responses of agreement. ⁶⁰

In February 1942, the director Shimazu Yasujirō offered his own theory to explain the popularity of Mito Mitsuko. He said there were two kinds of actor in the world—“big stars” (dai sūtā) and supporting actors (wakiyaku). He likened them to the “main street” (hondōri) and “back street” (uradōri). Like the main street of a big city, the “big star” is glamorous, exciting, beautiful, overwhelming. After a while, visitors to the main street become exhausted and find relief in the less crowded back streets, where people are leisurely “walking around smoking, lovers are strolling together talking happily [and there we find] neat little restaurants and quiet melodies.” Shimazu warned that while “big stars” are alluring,

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⁵⁶ “Suta no geimei gohatto: subete honmei ni kare, Naimushō ga tsūcho,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, December 6, 1941.
⁵⁷ For example, see advertisements for *Suzhou Nights* (*Soshū no yoru*) in *Yomiuri Shinbun*, December 14, 17, 24, 27, 28, 1941.
⁵⁸ (Advertisement) *Yomiuri Shinbun*, March 7, 1942.
⁵⁹ For example, see advertisements for *Three Men, Two Women in the House* (*Ie ni sandan nijo arī*), *Yomiuri Shinbun*, March 6, 1943; *Port of Flowers* (*Hana saku minato*), *Yomiuri Shinbun*, July 4, 1943; *Jubilation Street* (*Kanko no machi*), May 20, 1944; and an article on *The Maiden in the Base* (*Otome no iru kichi*) in *Asahi Shinbun*, April 30, 1945.
they are not keeping up with the changing times. “If the people who go to
the movies remain locked into this so-called old-fashioned ‘big star’
mentality,” he claimed, “they may come to resent the star.”

What Shimazu was hinting at was that, taken too far, the glamour of the
star system could alienate the audience by stirring up jealousy and pre-
venting any deep emotional connection. He further noted that stars have
many different qualities which attract some people but repel others. In
this sense, wrote Shimazu, “the big star is tragic.” By contrast, supporting
actors are “fortunate” because they are like side streets. Shimazu placed
the actress Mito Mitsuko into this category: “She is quiet, modest, neat,
and pretty like a side street . . . with clear, beautiful eyes and a rather small,
ordinary nose . . . just like the typical shy girl you encounter on the
streets.” An actress like Mito Mitsuko could wield even more influence
than a distant “big star”; “A young maid every morning applying makeup
in front of a mirror, might well think, ‘my nose kind of does look like Mito
Mitsuko’s . . .’ A young lady putting on eyebrow liner might think, ‘one
day, I’ll have a tidy figure like Mito Mitsuko.’” Shimazu speculated that
these female fans would go to a Mito Mitsuko film just to catch a glimpse
of the star who looks just like them.

In June 1942, a Shin Eiga reporter visited the home of Mito Mitsuko for
a special article on “how enthusiastically actresses with flower-like beauty
on the home front express their gratitude to soldiers on the frontlines.” In
this context, Mito was portrayed as deceptively “ordinary.” The reporter
entered her front gate and met her fluffy white pet dog barking about.
Mito was standing nearby in the yard doing some gardening. She took the
reporter to her parlor, “a small Western-style room decorated with roses,
French dolls, a weather barometer, a gramophone, and her own self-
portrait.” Despite the grand setting, the reporter noted approvingly that
the movie star “came and brought over tea and candy all by herself. And it
looks like she also does the cleaning herself.” Then the reporter asked if
the “donuts” (dōnatsu) were handmade. While Mito only replied with a
simple nod, “she moved her body loosely and restlessly.” The reporter
suspected that “she well knows that a unique sensuality (iroke) comes out
when doing this.” It was only at the very end of the visit that the two
brought up the ostensible purpose of promoting comfort package-giving
to soldiers. Mito agreed to let the reporter draw a picture of the donuts she
made and put them in comfort packages. The star also sang the song,
“Red Dragonfly” (Aka tonbo) but then stumbled at the end having

62 Ibid.
forgotten the rest of the lyrics. The reporter assured her, “that’s ok, we have enough. The comfort package is full.”

However, the same issue of Shin Eiga also circulated a short but critical piece by Murouchi Saburō about the plight of the actress in wartime. Murouchi pointed out that the production of quality films was stymied by a shortage in both scripts and actors. He blamed the new distribution system set up to conserve film stock for the lack of resources which was forcing studios to replay old films. The result was that “the release of insincere, expediently-made films is becoming a normal thing. This is making the New Film Order pointless.” Murouchi lamented that “the poverty of having only Hara Setsuko in the role of contemporary movies (gendaibutsu) is a frightening reality for people who truly think about the importance of acting.” In addition, Ōfuna Studios, once boasting a lineup of major actresses, had witnessed the recent defections of Kuwano Michiko and Miyake Kuniko to other studios, “with just Takamine Mieko and Mito Mitsuko as the leaders of maiden roles.” New actresses were slow to make their mark, which led to what Murouchi called “reckless misuse” (ran’yō) of existing actresses. Beneath a large headshot of a glamorous Mito Mitsuko in Western clothes and permed hair, Murouchi observed that the actress already appeared in six major films in the first half of 1942. While her supporters praised Mito for always playing a “sweet and docile” (otonashii) role in every film, Murouchi dismissed this as an “exaggerated tale of glory” (bidan): “Seen from the perspective of performance in the Japanese film world, this is the damage from serious misuse.” While Mito “may have been a necessary performer” in When Father Arrives (Chichi ariki), the writer thought she was “completely miscast” in The Spy Is Not Yet Dead (Kanchō mada shisezu). As for Suzhou Nights (Sushō no yoru), Murouchi called Mito’s appearance there “completely unnecessary” given that it also starred the glamorous actress Ri Kōran.

In September 1942, film critic Okada Shinkichi wrote a long profile on Mito Mitsuko questioning whether the “sweet, docile” persona who “always smiles” and “seeks to please everyone” in the movies is even real or not. Mito had a rough childhood, he noted, losing her father at a young age and having to work outside the home to support her family. She also recently rallied from illness and returned to work earlier than the doctor’s recommendation. “She has the character of someone who does not flinch from hardship,” Okada wrote. What’s more, despite her sweet and unassuming portrayals of characters (and contradicting Eiga no

63 “Zensen no heitai san, Jūgo de wa hana no yō ni joyū san ga, heitai san arigatō, to konna ni genki de harikitte orimasu,” Shin Eiga (June 1942): 83.
Tomo’s finding that she was a humorless individual), Mito has an “unex-
expectedly lively sense of humor,” fond of jokes and teasing. Okada specu-
lated that her resilience and humor were shaped by a difficult childhood
when “she could not enjoy the fun of adolescence like an ordinary young
girl.” Since her big break in the 1939 film The Warm Current, Mito finally
“was able to have the life of a fully-adult woman and begin to retake the
girl-like fun of adolescence.” Nevertheless, Okada saw in Mito things
needing improvement. He complained that since The Warm Current, her
roles tended to be in “low-grade, weepy” melodramas that call for little
acting talent and contributed to a public perception of being an actress
with a “common-touch attitude” (shominteki fūkaku). Okada urged Mito
to work on improving her “cultural education” and become a greater
actress who can convey a sense of the sharp intelligence and toughness she
had in real life. “Otherwise, she will forever just be a performer of ordinary
women, gradually lose her presence as a major star, and end up becoming a
clown (sanmaime).” Through careful study of the traditional arts like tea
ceremony or flower arranging, Okada argued, Mito could infuse her
performance with a “spiritual beauty and strength.” What was important
was that she avoid leaving the audience with an “old miss impression”
(orudo misu teki kanji). He concluded with the quote, “A good person is
not the same thing as a great actress.”

The intense public attention on Mito Mitsuko’s performance in war-
time cinema was reinforced by her popularity among the moviegoing
public. While capturing audience reception is fraught with difficu-
ties, one imperfect though revealing source can be found in the “Third Eiga no
Tomo Public Opinion Survey” of September 1942. The magazine
received over 1,700 responses from readers answering questions about
Japanese cinema. For the third question about favorite actresses, Mito
Mitsuko ranked third out of ten actresses with 182 votes, with Takamine
Mieko coming in first (348) and Yamada Isuzu second (224).

Advocates for film reform were divided over how much of stardom and
the “star system” Japan should discard in favor of a more technical,
professional vision of the “actor.” In a January 1942 roundtable, the
Education Ministry official Matsuura rejected calls from his bureaucratic
colleagues to rid once and for all Japan’s Hollywood-like “star system”
(suta shisutemu), arguing that “star actors” (suta haiyū) would always be

Okada Shinkichi, “Eigakai jinbutsu ron 1: Mito Mitsuko ron,” Nippon Eiga (September

“Watashi wa kō kangaeru: Dai san kai Eiga no Tomo yoron chōsa,” Eiga no Tomo
(September 1942): 36–37. The rest of the top ten were as follows: 4. Takamine Hideko
(131); 5. Tanaka Kinuyo (121); 6. Hara Setsuko (79); 7. Yamane Hisako (71); 8. Miura
Mitsuko (61); 9. Todoroki Yukiko (35); and 10. Kazami Akira (34).
an important part of cinema. However, he distinguished between an acceptable star system and the “evil practice” of a system which is “star-centric” (suta chashinshugi) where film production, writing, filming, and marketing are all built around the individual star. Matsuura believed that the star should support the film, not the other way around. Films that derive their cinematic power from story, writing, and production and are not dependent on star glamour would also be easier to export to the growing empire in East Asia, the bureaucrat added. At the same round-table, the Shōchiku studio executive Kido Shirō also found “star-centric” films harmful because the actor would overwhelm the role without ever capturing the entire film’s mood and themes. Kido called on studios to create original scripts with characters that perfectly matched the personality of stars. He believed Japanese cinema needed to cultivate new stars but found the current technical examination system set up by the Film Law to be deficient as a recruitment device: “I am quite doubtful whether the current method of skill testing being done will have any effect in the end. I think there needs to be a reexamination of this way of training actors.”

In another article from 1942 appearing in Shin Eiga, the film critic Hazumi Tsuneo approached the star system from a more unequivocal stance. “To put it simply,” he wrote, “for the masses, the star is the biggest attraction in seeing the movies.” Therefore, he reasoned, “to correctly guide the masses, we still need to use the star system.” Hazumi, like Kido, worried about established stars getting older and losing popularity and no new stars to replace them. He observed that “there is a fear that the masses will be permanently estranged from film.” Thus, he concluded on two points: “The proper use of the star system is essential. On the other hand, cultivating new stars will be an important matter in the future for Japanese cinema.” Thus, Hazumi followed Matsuura’s argument that the “star system,” and its baggage of desire, consumption, and “personality,” was an unavoidable necessity toward the successful mobilization of people through film.

There were still defenders of the examination system as an effective replacement for the star system. Writing in November 1942, Shikiba Ryūsaburō argued that the old, Hollywood-style films in which the beauty of the star was paramount and plot and acting ability were secondary were no longer possible. Shikiba, who was the director of the Kōnodai Military Hospital, believed that “new actors must arise” to perform in “entertainment and guidance films” for a “new Japanese cinema” purged of

Hollywood influence. He despised the superficial “dumb beauty” (haku-chibi) of traditional stars and sought out new stars with more “cheerfulness and wholesomeness.” These new stars, according to the writer, would be found not among the glamorous café waitresses or department store clerks but in humbler, more working-class settings such as the small shop clerk (ten’in) and the farm maiden (nōka musume). Shikiba still held hope that the examination system would be the mechanism by which Japan could discover these new, humbler “cheerful and wholesome” actresses.

Exams for 1942 did not inspire confidence among Education Ministry officials for the future movie stars of Japan. Following the conclusion of the spring 1942 proficiency exams, Matsuura Susumu from the Ministry of Education again wrote for Nippon Eiga to express even greater dissatisfaction with the whole registration system. He lamented seeing applicants fail at the “national people’s common knowledge” section. On topics such as “reasons for the majesty of the national polity” and “the importance of the Greater East Asia War and future citizen readiness,” Matsuura found that the written responses from applicants demonstrated “how superficial their self-awareness and understanding are toward these facts.” For “the majesty of the national polity,” applicants would “look here and there for abstract words.” This was “absolutely terrible” since these concepts were supposed to have already been naturally and intuitively known by all Japanese subjects. On the “significance of culture” question, no one could provide a coherent answer to Matsuura’s satisfaction. On academic subjects, Matsuura grudgingly admitted that though the results “were not particularly high, a certain level was reached.” However, he had the same complaint as last time; namely that “the great majority are nothing more than parrots with good memory. They are just diligently memorizing and writing down what they are taught.” When asked to explain Japan’s national polity (kokutai), all applicants gave the exact same answer: “An oracle granted to the heavenly grandson by the sun goddess Amaterasu” (Amaterasu ōmikami ga tenson ni okudashi ni natta shinchooku). For the second academic question, Matsuura found all the answers to be “incoherent and inconsistent” (shiri metsuretsu). By the third question, “the majority could not answer at all.” Matsuura blamed the studio training center instructors for creating a “preparatory school-like existence for the proficiency exam.”

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In January 1943, *Eiga no Tomo* announced a slate of new stars making their debut in films to be released that year. But the article began by noting that such an announcement had been “long in coming.” The reason was the scarcity of any new exciting stars appearing recently. The culprit was clear: “The three main areas of directing, filming, and acting have to go through a certain journey because of the Film Law’s registration system. This means that there are no longer sudden splashy, spectacular debuts [of stars] like before.” Before the Film Law, the article continued, there was greater fluidity and rapidity in who became stars – such as a director deciding one day to become an actor, or a stage performer moving to movies, or even “someone who becomes a star (sutā) overnight because of beauty.” But now anyone wanting to work in the film industry had to go through the laborious registration system and meet the standard requirements. On the one hand, such a system meant that there were few “failures” among new actors but, on the other hand, the “glamour” (hanabanashisa) of movies had disappeared.71

Following the exams held in spring 1943, the Film Association removed the academic test (gakka kōsa) and common knowledge test (jōshiki kōsa) from the proficiency exam, leaving behind only the acting test (engi kōsa) and character test (jinbutsu kōsa).72 The highbrow film journal *Eiga Jumpō* (*Film Biweekly*) explained that the examiners felt there was too much emphasis on the written portion of the exam, which prevented many people from passing the exam. Only 38 percent of applicants passed the spring 1943 exams, which was a decline from the 48 percent pass rate in 1942. The high failure rate led to fears in the film industry of an eventual shortage of qualified actors, which would hamper future film production. Reforms were also motivated out of sympathy for “promising, hopeful young newcomers who do not do well on the written exam questions, fail, and then shut out of the film world.” As to why so many aspiring actors kept failing the written portions of the proficiency exams, the *Eiga Jumpō* writer ultimately placed the blame on the nature of war mobilization, which “easily pulled superior elements out of the ordinary group and into various military and munitions industry sectors.” This left behind only “applicants of secondary quality in other sectors, especially the cultural field.”73 Thus, the mobilization of human and material resources for total war created an impossible situation where labor mobilization spearheaded by the Welfare Ministry and the military services undermined the fervent wishes of the Home and Education Ministries to

71 “Shinjin wo nobasō! Asu wo kitai sareru tachi,” *Eiga no Tomo* (January 1943).
73 “Jiji rokuon,” *Eiga Jumpō* 82 (May 21, 1943): 8–9, 10–11.
cultivate a new generation of movie stars through which to spiritually mobilize the masses.

A solution to the declining quality of new film personnel seemed to be realized in April 1943, when the Film Association finally opened the Japan Film School (Nippon Eiga Gakkō). For several years up to then, influential figures in the film industry had been pushing the government to authorize and fund a single national acting school to replace the uneven quality of studio-based training centers. In March 1941, the Film Association, Kikuchi Kan, and the Imperial Rule Assistance Association announced plans to create a “film actor’s school” (eiga haiyū gakkō) “to cultivate superior new faces or else Japanese cinema standards will not rise.”

In Nippon Eiga, director Nakada Haruyasu expressed his support for a unified acting school to replace the various studio training centers. He complained that there was too much varying quality in the training centers with some graduates doing very well on the proficiency exams and others consistently doing poorly. However, part of the long delay in the school opening was due to difficulties faced by the Film Association in securing sufficient government funding for the school as well as finding space in Tokyo to build the facilities. The Film School also needed exemptions for its graduates from wartime labor regulations which restricted the employment of young people in non-military-related sectors. This required long negotiations with the City of Tokyo, the Ministry of Education, and the Cabinet Planning Board (see figure 4.3).

With the launch of the Film School in 1943, the Film Association announced with great fanfare that its declared mission was “in light of the increasing importance of film in the war, to cultivate character and technology appropriate for true imperial subjects.” The school offered separate tracks for cinematography, film projecting, and acting. The acting curriculum lasted for one year and was open to both men and women with only a minimum elementary school education required. The most important feature of the school was that graduates of the acting track would automatically receive the proficiency certificate previously given only to applicants who passed the proficiency exams. In effect, the Japan Film School replaced the functions of the proficiency exams as the mechanism through which the government could train and license people to be film actors.

76 “Jūji rokuon,” Eiga Junpō 82 (May 21, 1943): 11.
By the May 18, 1943 deadline, the school received 394 applications for the acting track (enjū ka). An academic entrance exam was carried out on May 26 by officials from the Education Ministry and Information Bureau as well as film critic Iijima Tadashi. This was followed by a physical examination and tests on character and aptitude. In the end, 62 (37 men, 25 women) out of 394 aspiring actors were admitted into the Film School.

The Film School entrance exam questions were similar to the proficiency exam questions, with sections on “national common knowledge” and history (albeit substantially reduced), as well as tests on personality and performance.

If the Film School examiners, who were mostly the same group who administered the proficiency exams, had hoped this new format for

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79 A sample of the questions asked for the entrance examination may be found in “Nippon eiga gakkō: Nyūgaku shiken mondai,” Nippon Eiga (June 1943): 54–55.
vetting a new breed of actors would be more successful, they were quickly disappointed. In June 1943, Japan Film School official Aoyama Toshio did not mince words in reporting on the results of the school’s first entrance exam: “Overall, they were really disgraceful,” he wrote in Nippon Eiga. For the essay section, “Yesterday’s Diary,” students were instructed to “write down things you did and felt about yesterday.” Instead, “many people just wrote abstractly about readiness and preparedness under this Greater East Asia War. They were like a patchwork of newspaper clippings, failing to make it their own. I think they wrote this under the mistaken belief that this will please the examiners.”

The real purpose of the essay was to measure the students’ “ability to observe everyday life and surroundings.” From there, “readiness” and “preparedness” would “naturally exude forth.” In other words, the examiners had hoped for a “diary that was honest, direct, with no lies.” That few students actually did this was, for Aoyama, “disappointing.” On “national history,” the school official was surprised to find that “there were quite a few who could not write anything at all.” He speculated that most just memorized historical trivia, so the real difference was if people took the time to do a last-minute review of the textbook before the exam. Students also did poorly on the physical exams. Many “did not have good chests” (mune no yoku nai mono), despite physical strength being important for film production. Many would-be actors also turned out to be colorblind.

The “character test” (jinbutsu kōsa) consisted of “observing the person’s character and whether the person is appropriate for the profession desired.” Many applicants were found to be too “irresponsible” (iikagen na mono). The fourth and final component of the acting track was the aptitude test (tekisei kōsa). Students read aloud from a script and were judged on speaking voice and regional accent. While most students could read aloud with a standard Japanese accent, examiners discovered others who could not read the text at all, misread the words, or “had a nonsensical way of reading things” (detarame no yomikata).

Matsuura Susumu, the Education Ministry official who previously participated in the film proficiency exams, also took part in the new Film School entrance exams. Like Aoyama, he was not impressed with the applicants. By this point, Matsuura admitted that it had now become almost a routine habit for him to write down his complaints after administering an acting test. Yet, this time he was hopeful. In the past, he noted, there was a consistent problem in the film industry where training centers were scattered across different studios with their own strengths and

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weaknesses. This, he argued, had led to an uneven quality of applicants trying to become registered as actors, directors, or cameramen. The studio-based training centers also shared the characteristic of being like an “extreme cram school.” Thus, Matsuura was “tremendously happy” upon hearing about the founding of the Japan Film School as the solution to the problems he had been raising for several years. While disappointed that the course of study was only for one year and graduates were automatically exempted from the proficiency exam, he recognized that “in the current emergency, we must think about ideas like quickly sending out excellent technicians (gijutsusha) to the film world, and create organizations of training facilities for them.”

After 1943, enthusiasm over the Film School as the key to unlocking the secret to movie star magnetism started to fade. By August 1943, film critics began to speak of a “star famine” (haiyū kikin). Echoing director Yoshimura Kōsaburō’s call two years earlier for actresses to play more “women” and fewer “maidens,” film critic Saotome Takeshi complained that well-established and older movie stars like Kuwano Michiko, Miyake Kuniko, and Takamine Mieko were continuing to play “maidens” (musume) or “young ladies” (reijō). The 34-year-old actress Tanaka Kinuyo, the critic sarcastically noted, is called the “eternal maiden” (manneren musume) and yet “this is impossible to see.” The famous star lineup at Shōchiku was still there but for Saotome, “it seems like one or two essential things are missing among the actresses and no new stars (shinsei) are being trained.” The few new Shōchiku actresses who did appear recently were a disaster, according to the critic: “Their personalities were gloomy and their camera face was quite awful, which must have been particularly painful as actresses.” The same problems among new actresses could also be found at Daiei studios (successor studio to Nikkatsu). The critic called one big newcomer “stiff and awkward.” “This famine of new actors,” the critic concluded, “is a major problem for wartime Japanese cinema.”

Discussion of a “star famine,” in many ways, represented an admission by the film industry that the suppression and regimentation of the star system had gone too far and needed to be pulled back. Furthermore, the shortage of popular stars by the early 1940s conclusively demonstrated that movie stars were inextricably linked to cinema—without stars, it was difficult to drum up popular reception of wartime film. And that stars with

an effective mass appeal apparently could not be trained and mass-produced at will by the state.

An August 1943 survey by Shin Eiga offered further evidence of the challenges in training new movie stars who could be popular with the moviegoing masses. The magazine noted that “of late, there are not as many student uniforms in the theaters like several years earlier.” The reason was simple: “recently students say that movies they want to watch are disappearing.” Most of the students referenced here were of the intelligentsia class attending higher school, community college, or university. Therefore, the magazine writer reasoned, what they were lamenting was the lack of foreign films being shown in the theaters. But the writer identified a second group of lower-class students – youth school students – who, he believed, “would compose the masses of tomorrow.” They also were dissatisfied with the selection of films in wartime but complained that the number of “intense historical samurai films have disappeared.” When asked, “What catches your eye when watching a movie?” the survey found that the two most frequently cited categories among youth school students were “plot” (suji) and “actors” (haiyū).83

The disastrous war situation strained almost all resources needed for film production, most critically raw film stock, and appeared to have loosened state controls over the film industry. In January 1944, the Greater Japan Film Association was restructured from a “legal foundation” (zaidan hōjin) to an “association” (shadan hōjin). This legalistic sleight of hand, explained the Cabinet Information Bureau, would allow the association to become a full-fledged “control organ” (tōsei kikan) that could consolidate control over the entire film industry in production, distribution, and exhibition. The Film Association, which previously lacked regulatory enforcement powers that other wartime industrial groups enjoyed, would now “have the character of an extremely powerful body.” The more likely motive for the restructuring was that it allowed the Home Ministry and Cabinet Information Bureau to effectively delegate tedious pre- and post-production film censorship work to the Association.84 The Film Association also announced its own reorganization, adding that “the government will ‘delegate’ (ishoku) to the extent possible the powers of film administration to the Association.” With respect to training actors, the restructuring announcement merely noted, “we will enrich the substance of the Film School and strengthen the training of new people of talent.”85 By that point, evidence of Film

School activities and even students had dwindled, with no more advertisements for school admission appearing in *Nippon Eiga* after March 1944.\(^{86}\)

Rapidly disappearing film stock and chaotic film controls issued by various state agencies as the war reached its final, disastrous conclusion frustrated the studio executives and unleashed surprisingly harsh backlash against the bureaucratic overseers of cinema. In January 1945, the leaders of the big three studios of Tōhō, Shōchiku, and Daiei criticized the government’s “unyielding attitude” toward the industry without guaranteeing sufficient supply of film stock. The studio bosses issued an ultimatum to the Cabinet Information Bureau to either retreat from further interventions or just shut down the entire industry. A meeting the following month between the Information Bureau and film studios resulted in a promise by the government to maintain a more stable supply of film stock. A more drastic change took place in June 1945, when the Information Bureau merged the Greater Japan Film Association with the state-run companies overseeing distribution and exhibition to create a unified Film Public Corporation (*eiga kōsha*) to fully centralize all aspects of the film industry.\(^{87}\) The Film Public Corporation was a concession by the government to restore some authority to the industry – “a plan to protect film with just civilians, no bureaucrats.” The Tōhō studio chief later recalled that the studios by then were fed up with “military men and bureaucrats monkeying around (*ichikuri mawashite*) with movies.”\(^{88}\)

## Conclusion

An examination of the movie star in wartime reveals several insights about the nature of national mobilization in Japan. First, total war called for mobilization of all levels of society and yet such a complex endeavor experienced significant challenges and limitations due to the conflicting interests of labor and spiritual mobilization. As witnessed in the clashes between the Welfare Ministry on the one hand and the Home Ministry and Ministry of Education on the other over permitting young people to enter the acting profession through the new registration system, the advocates for a new movie star in wartime encountered indifference at best and obstruction at worst from advocates of other forms of mobilization. Second, even within the insular world of proficiency exams for actors administered by the Greater Japan Film Association, the government examiners were surprised to learn the uncomfortable truth that some

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young people on the home front did not fully understand seemingly sacrosanct wartime ideologies such as the national polity and the Greater East Asia War. Thus, the efforts by the state to test and license actors to enforce ideological conformity paradoxically exposed the superficiality of such ideologies.

In looking at the public discussions about the movie star and repeated state attempts to define and train a new generation of movie stars, one is struck at how different the star’s femininity was to other iconic female constructs of the period – the Modern Girl and the Military Mother (gunkoku no haha). The movie star, in many ways, mimicked the characteristics of the prewar Modern Girl who is usually presumed to have disappeared from the cultural landscape of the 1930s as a more militant form of nationalism swept through Japanese society. The movie star and the Modern Girl modeled modes of feminine behavior highlighting their powers of mass consumption through clothing and hairstyle, and an eroticized persona constructed from physical beauty. The movie star as seen in the case of Mito Mitsuko also resisted a clear, stable identity, thereby echoing the Modern Girl’s transnational, fluid nature. On the other hand, following the enactment of the Film Law’s registration system, movie stars acquired a new “professional” identity alongside other technicians of the film industry such as directors and cameramen. In the eyes of the state at least, the movie star now assumed an air of respectability who contributed to the empire’s mission in wartime and thus required important training and licensing. Her labor, in other words, was now recognized by the government as deserving of national support (and regulation). Thus, unlike the Modern Girl, who was seen by critics as a frivolous member of the leisure class, the movie star after 1939 was firmly embedded in a state structure and promoted by the Home and Education Ministries and their allies in the film industry as a professional working woman – an educated, state-approved, and valued member of the home front. In this sense, she represented a wartime successor to the prewar modern ideal of the professional working woman.

Movie stars continued to appear in many war films, ably serving the government’s wartime propaganda goals. From this perspective, the movie star may be closer to another feminine construct influential during the war, the Military Mother. Indeed, the established movie stars frequently played stereotypical Military Mothers onscreen who stoically


supported their husbands or sons going off to war, while keeping the home front safe and secure. They modeled a behavior encouraged by official ideologists for women to be devoted mothers to future soldiers, run an efficient and frugal household, and participate in various home front activities and the occasional factory work. Reinforcing this public expectation of female behavior on the home front were new laws starting in 1940 banning permanent waves, discouraging luxurious Western-style clothing, and other signs of the liberated, consumerist lifestyle associated with the Modern Girl. The Japanese government was torn between promoting a pro-natalist family–state ideology based on fertile mothers producing future soldiers, and mobilizing female labor to replenish the perennial worker shortage in the munitions sector. In this sense, the conflict between spiritual and economic mobilization found in the difficulties of training and registering new movie stars was reproduced at the national level for all women over whether they should strive to become fulltime mothers or factory workers. The movie star as carnival queen seemed to offer a way to embody both contradictory goals: performing the proper role of the Military Mother onscreen while being publicly celebrated offscreen as a professional working woman with a life and identity detached from family.

Nevertheless, the movie star was not a carbon copy of the Military Mother either. While portraying such figures onscreen, actresses such as Mito Mitsuko displayed rather different behavior offscreen in the same media universe. Mito was praised for her “sweet” and “humble” personality by film critics, but clearly had an eroticism no Military Mother would ever be associated with—recall the Shin Eiga reporter who observed Mito “loosely” swaying her body during their conversation, noting that she “knew well” what she was doing. The interview also took place at Mito’s ostentatiously bourgeois home with a private gated garden, a pet dog, and an elaborate parlor stocked with French dolls and a self-portrait. Mito did partially play a maternal figure by serving the reporter some refreshments, though the reporter noted several times the refreshments were actually exotic American “donuts.” So unusual that he suggested that drawings of the food be included in comfort packages for soldiers. Most conspicuously, Mito Mitsuko was a single woman during the entire war, never marrying or having children. Thus during these at-home interviews, it was clear she was an independent, professional working woman who supported herself and was not controlled by a male figure. The precise

91 Saitō, Modan gāru ron, 198. 92 Silverberg, Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: 71. 93 Miyake, “Doubling Expectations”: 268–269. 94 She was later briefly married to comedic actor Morikawa Shin from 1945 to 1946 and had one daughter.
combination of mass consumer, cosmopolitan glamorous celebrity, devoted mother, and working professional differed among wartime actresses, with some leaning more heavily on certain stereotypes over others. But it was the ability of the movie star to effortlessly shapeshift between aspects of the Modern Girl and Military Mother by virtue of her fame onscreen in movies and offscreen in fan culture that accounted for her cultural cachet in the Pacific War era.

The wartime allure of the movie star made at least one brief and unexpected appearance long after the war. In March 1974, the Japanese media extensively covered the return of soldier Onoda Hiroo, who had been fighting in the jungles of the Philippines for 30 years, thinking that the war was still ongoing. At a Tokyo press conference, one reporter facetiously asked Onoda what he looked for in a woman. The soldier, who still fervently held onto the strident militarist ideologies inculcated in him decades earlier, replied simply, “a Mito Mitsuko type.”95 The remark triggered widespread media excitement; one Shōchiku studio executive speculated that during the Pacific War, Mito’s films exuded a sense of a “common-touch, familial woman” (shominteki de kateiteki na josei) who provided solace for soldiers fighting in the Philippines. As for the actress herself, the long-retired Mito Mitsuko retained her trademark mysterious air and refused all media requests for interviews.96 The only public acknowledgment she made was sending Onoda a bouquet of flowers in an oxcart-shaped vase.97

The final and most powerful king of carnival war was the youth aviator who dazzled the home front with visions of consumerist desire, before inverting into the kamikaze pilot during the last year of the Asia-Pacific War. His 1940 debut in the mass media occurred as the home front began to shift attention from the ground war in China to potential aerial warfare in the Pacific against the United States. Through glossy pilot recruitment posters, state-sponsored aviation events, aviation movies, and aviation fan magazines, he became the object of desire and admiration for millions of Japanese as consumers and as subjects.

Coming into his own in late wartime Japan, the youth aviator derived his magnetic power by mimicking the characteristics of other carnival kings. Like the munitions worker and the movie star, he offered tantalizing possibilities of consumption and glamor within wartime austerity for the Japanese consumer-subject, while also serving state goals to mobilize war technology and violence. Much like the reporter as thrill hunter during the Shanghai–Nanjing campaign, the youth aviator helped sensationalize and commercialize death in battle, albeit in the skies rather than on the ground. Like the soldier as “military god,” he ably performed as an avatar of martial courage and daring but unlike the emasculated returned soldier, he represented a younger, more vigorous idea of soldierly masculinity rooted in triumph and technology.

The youth aviator was the most powerful of wartime Japan’s carnival kings for he operated on multiple levels in mass culture. For youths normally excluded from elite educational institutions, he represented an attainable military career track that transcended traditional class barriers to social advancement. From the perspective of those seeking a highly individualistic, glamorous persona to assume in wartime, the youth aviator, like the movie star and the worker, exuded a modern and arresting sartorial persona that was paradoxically restricted to the chosen few admitted into flight schools and yet vicariously accessible to all through images circulating in aviation magazines. Indeed, several movie stars in
military-sponsored aviation films during the Pacific War era glamorized the immense power wielded by a military pilot in the skies. Finally, the youth aviator served as the pillar around which revolved a dynamic and cosmopolitan fan culture where aviation fans “consumed” aviation through model airplane making, model airplane tournaments, and correspondence promoted by a variety of new aviation fan magazines. Through these different modes of economic aspiration, glamorized violence, and consumer desire, Japanese consumer-subjects interacted with aviation as loyal subject serving the nation, mass consumer satiating personal desires, and transnational airplane fan creating an imagined aviation subculture quite apart from state concerns (see figure 5.1).

Within an intricate aviation subculture presided over by the aviator archetype, many Japanese youths celebrated two distinctive modes of

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1 For example, The Sea War from Hawaii to Malay (Hawai-Marei oki kaisen, 1942), Toward the Decisive Battle of the Skies (Kessen no ōzora e, 1943), The Katō Flying Falcon Unit (Katō Hayabusa sentōtai, 1944), You’re the Next Wild Eagle (Kimi koso tsugi no arawashi da, 1944), and The Last Homecoming (Saigo no kikyō, 1945).
wartime culture – glorified military service for nation and transnational consumer-fandom. As loyal imperial subjects, they aspired to one day serve the nation as military pilots. As mass consumers, they became rabid airplane fans who consumed photographs of every warplane they could find, and avidly studied “enemy planes” through model-making activities. Aviation magazines provided the sites where young Japanese men and boys could learn about exciting careers as military pilots flying advanced aircraft against the American enemy, and also pore over glossy images of American planes, obsessively memorize statistics and specifications of the Lockheed bomber and a Vultee fighter, and then reproduce these machines as miniature models. Understanding the intersection between consumer desire and national duty through the lens of aviation also helps us rethink the significance of the kamikaze pilot, one of the most famous figures in wartime Japan.

The Tragic Kamikaze Pilot

The kamikaze pilot emerged out of the confluence of situational war factors and long-term cultural tropes coming together in the final year of the war to create the conditions in which the Japanese military adopted this extreme tactic. Prewar ideologies glorifying the aesthetics of death, stigmatizing prisoner-of-war status, and enshrining fallen soldiers at Yasukuni Shrine had by October 1944 coalesced with the dwindling supplies of war materiel to drive the Japanese military to resort to suicidal air attacks. Furthermore, a precedent for suicide attacks was already set by “banzai” charges – waves of suicidal Japanese infantrymen charging into the American line, beginning with the May 1943 Battle of Attu. In the face of near-certain defeat as the war turned decisively against Japan, these soldiers were glorified by the state as “shattered jewels” (gyokusai) who bravely sacrificed their lives for the nation.


Within this broad scholarly consensus, some writers view the kamikaze as young men brainwashed by the mystical emperor-system ideology or coerced by both senior commanders and their own cohort groups into enlisting into the suicide squads. In either case, they are seen as tragic and unwitting victims of the all-powerful totalitarian capacities of the wartime state, deserving of much sympathy. The brainwashing of the young pilots to sacrifice their lives for the state was also said to have extended to the general home front population. David Earhart has examined the state-published journal *Shashin Shūhō (Photographic Weekly)* during the Pacific War years and found that the Japanese state used kamikaze imagery to urge the home front to furnish a suicidal defense against an anticipated American invasion. Earhart concludes, “In the final, desperate year of the war, the warrior-god dynamic was used in the kamikazeification [sic] of Japanese civilians, even children.”

Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney has sought to further humanize the kamikaze image by focusing on the surprisingly eloquent and thoughtful posthumous letters and diaries left behind by pilots who graduated from elite universities. She concludes that these young men were not crazed, irrational fanatics but rather educated, cosmopolitan, and thoughtful individuals. Their letters demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of European philosophy and literature, but also an inability to thwart the state’s ideological blurring between genuine love of country with loyalty to the emperor. However, the group studied by Ohnuki-Tierney comprised only a quarter of all “special attack force crewmen” (*tokkōtai*in) – the official Japanese term for kamikaze pilots. Most pilots were not elite college graduates but young men who came up through the ranks via competitive flight schools. This larger, working-class group of pilots is less studied, since they did not leave behind a rich corpus of posthumous writings, filled with allusions to French literature and German philosophy.

In addition, as Nakamura Hideyuki has pointed out, much of the analysis of pilot letters ignores the context in which such letters were written. Most letters were by kamikaze pilots killed in March and April 1945 during the Battle of Okinawa. We have very few writings left behind by the first kamikaze pilots in 1944 and early 1945.

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Furthermore, the young men knew they would die and were pressured by commanders or by their own conscience to salvage some kind of meaning from their inevitable deaths through letter-writing. Without problematizing the power structure framing the very act of writing in such a highly charged environment, Nakamura concludes, “we run the risk of repeating and reproducing the ‘coerced meaning’” of the letters by conflating what the state wanted pilots to write about with what the pilots actually felt about their deaths.\(^7\)

Nakamura has instead looked at visual representation of kamikaze pilots in wartime films and government periodicals from 1944 to 1945 to find their “social meaning” on the Japanese home front. He suggests that more fruitful work on the kamikaze can be done by studying them as ideological or cultural constructs as opposed to being actual real-life figures. Looking at photographic periodicals and films of the period, he found that the initial media coverage of the kamikaze in the October 1944 Battle of Leyte Gulf emphasized a grand heroism and fearless bravado. However, this image of the heroic kamikaze pilot later shifted to the pilot as a “living god” (ikiteiru kami) – glorified, yes, but reduced to an object of sadness and pity, no longer heroic icons for public emulation.\(^8\)

This chapter follows Nakamura’s call to think about the kamikaze pilot more as cultural construct but will broaden the sense of time and space traditionally associated with his origins to illuminate the final stage of carnival war on the Japanese home front. If we slightly expand our sense of time back to the early years of the Pacific War, we find circulating in mass cultural artifacts images of “youth aviators” imbued with the carnival war values of consumption, desire, and fandom, along with their patriotism. If we expand our sense of space, looking beyond the state-sponsored propaganda journals and the formulaic farewell pilot letters and into other artifacts of wartime mass culture such as aviation fan magazines, we discover a new dimension to wartime aviators beyond banal observations about resistance or “brainwashing.” Young Japanese readers encountered aviation as not only imperial subjects inspired to become pilots to defend the nation in a time of crisis but also as mass consumers and members of a closely knit community that highlighted the importance of consumer desire and fandom.

Examine aviation in wartime Japanese mass culture points to a distinctive aviation version of “scientific nationalism” where both state and civilian actors promoted “a kind of nationalism that believes that science

\(^7\) Nakamura, “Tokkōtai hyōshōron”: 301–303.
\(^8\) Nakamura, “Tokkōtai hyōshōron”: 305–311.
and technology are the most urgent and important assets for the integrity, survival, and progress of the nation.” Under scientific nationalism, technology is promoted as useful for serving national goals, but the diversity of technology advocates meant that this was “a contested, multifaceted endeavor.” Scientific nationalism, furthermore, has an inherent contradiction because it combined “the universality of science and particularity of nationalism.” The cultural celebration of aviation intensified these tensions between serving the nation in wartime and embracing the cosmopolitan spectacle of flight. Aviation became an ideological tool wielded by military representatives in the mass media to mobilize popular enthusiasm and support for Japanese air power among young Japanese subjects during the Asia-Pacific War. On the other hand, aviation also became a site where these same people asserted their identity as mass consumers with fan interests that paid little heed to national boundaries and loyalties even in wartime. Understanding this fact facilitates a richer understanding of the tragic kamikaze pilot as cultural construct, as the inverted successor to the youth aviator, and as the final iteration of carnival war.

The Foundations of Aviation Culture

With the first successful airplane flight in North Carolina by the Wright brothers in 1903, public fascination with aviation quickly spread throughout the United States and Europe. The worldwide flight craze soon reached Japan in 1909 when the military began experimenting with developing aircraft for military use. By 1919, the army built its first flight school at Tokorozawa, two new air regiments, and an army air force headquarters in Tokyo. Since the opportunity to ride or fly an airplane was restricted to a select few, most Japanese people in the interwar era consumed aviation vicariously through media images, architectural designs, and airplane stunts. The 1920s and 1930s growth of military and civilian flight schools in Japan fueled public interest in commercial advertisements that featured various artistic designs based on the airplane, propeller, and wings. Amusement parks set up towering steel structures dangling real airplanes for the amusement of spectators. Outstretched airplane wing designs were used in commercial design to symbolize the angelic freedom of movement.

Newspaper companies also teamed up with the military to put together large aerial stunts to generate publicity and popular interest in aviation. By the 1930s, newspapers sponsored international goodwill flights to generate sales and demonstrate the technological sophistication of Japanese aviation to the world. In 1934, the Osaka Asahi dispatched two planes on a much-publicized European flight. Meanwhile, the Osaka Mainichi caused a stir by sponsoring a 1936 goodwill flight from Japan to Siam. The flurry of newspaper-sponsored flights reached new heights in April 1937 when the Asahi, this time with army assistance, announced that its Kamikaze (Divine Wind) plane flew over 15,000 kilometers from Tokyo to London in 94 hours, setting the first aerial world record by a Japanese plane.¹³ Not to be outdone by the Asahi’s 1937 aerial triumph, in July 1939 the Mainichi teamed with the navy to send a Mitsubishi Type-96 attack plane later dubbed Nippon (Japan) on a one-week goodwill world tour. To promote the campaign, the paper sponsored a naming contest for the plane and sold maps of the flight route, pamphlets, picture postcards, posters, photographs of the plane, stickers, bookmarks, model planes, and commemorative stamps.¹⁴ Highlighting the national and international importance of Japan’s around-the-world flight, members of the Japanese cabinet and the Tokyo diplomatic corps, including the ambassadors from Great Britain, the United States, Germany, and Italy, attended the Nippon’s homecoming festivities.¹⁵

Aviation through these media events became connected in the public mind with three characteristics that would shape the later cultural construction of the youth aviator. First, newspaper sponsorship of heavily publicized goodwill world flights reinforced the connection between aviation and national power. These flights were meant to demonstrate to the world that Japan’s high degree of scientific advancement was equal to the aviation technology of other great powers. Second, as the flights bolstered popular awareness of Japan’s own technological prowess, they also served as goodwill tours that grandly showcased Japan’s cordial relationships with Europe and the United States and membership in an international network celebrating aviation. Seen in this light, aviation as a technology that penetrated and transcended national borders and vast geographic

¹³ Tsuganesawa Toshihiro, “‘Osaka Asahi’ ‘Osaka Mainichi’ ni yoru kōkū jigyō no kyōen,” in Tsuganesawa Toshihiro and Ariyama Teruo, eds., Senjiki Nihon no media ibento (Tokyo: Sekai Shisōsha, 1998): 91–111 and Table 1, 97–100. Kamikaze or “divine wind” originally referred to the storms that destroyed a late thirteenth-century Mongol invasion fleet.

¹⁴ Tsuganesawa, “‘Osaka Asahi’ ‘Osaka Mainichi’ ni yoru kōkū jigyō no kyōen”: 91–111.

¹⁵ “Sekai isshū dai hikkō naru: kokusen ki, hōjin no te de, hajime no eikan, Nippon-gō Haneda gaisen,” Yomiuri Shinbun, October 21, 1939.
distance became a particularly fascinating lens for some Japanese consumer-subjects to form a cosmopolitan worldview that continued into wartime. Finally, media publishers found ways to sell aviation-themed products or generate publicity within the framework of supposedly non-commercial, selflessly patriotic motivations. Such techniques by publishers to capitalize on the popularity and national importance of aviation would be refined in the war years.

**The Crowning of the Youth Aviator**

Within this cultural setting linking aviation with nationalism, transnational ties, and consumer desire, emerged the new wartime media icon of the youth aviator. This was a heroic figure for Japanese young men to emulate for he embodied a concentrated mix of military valor and mastery of cutting-edge military technology. The army began recruiting “youth aviators” in 1930, with a nationwide call for two hundred applicants with “very good grades.” By 1933, the army reported receiving three thousand applications for its flight school.

The term “youth aviator” (shōnen kōkūhei) was used by the military services to describe a category of pilot trainees educated in their respective flight schools. From the very beginning, the youth aviator was most definitely seen by the military and society as different from the soldier. While all Japanese men upon reaching twenty theoretically became eligible for the military draft, youths between the ages of 14 and 19 could instead enlist in a variety of alternative military preparatory training programs to fulfill their service obligation. This option offered the advantage of finishing military service much earlier or being placed on a fast track to officer rank. These “youth soldiers” (shōnen hei) were divided into different tracks such as communications, artillery, sonar, sailor, tank, or military band. The most coveted of all the tracks was to become a “youth aviator.” Aviators were recruited not conscripted and had to pass a rigorous physical and educational exam process in order to gain admission into flight schools. Because almost all aviators on this track started

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16 “Shōnen kōkūhei rikugun de mo boshū, rainendo kara 200 mei,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, August 22, 1930.
17 “Sora no shōnen hei ni sugoi shigan no mure, rikugun kōkū honbu dake de 3000 nin,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, April 14, 1933.
18 This term tended to be used in a general sense by newspapers, magazines, and readers. When referencing military service-specific pilots, Army aviators tended to be called shōnen hikōhei (literally, boy flight soldier) while in the Navy they were also known as shōnen hōkōhei (boy or youth aviator).
training as teenagers, they were portrayed by the media as perpetually youthful, as opposed to conscript soldiers who enrolled after reaching the adult age of 20, or reservists, who were usually older and married.

The full transition from a civilian-based culture of aviation to military-focused wartime aviation took place in the fall of 1940. That year marked the 2,600th anniversary celebrations of the founding of the Japanese empire, sparking nationwide festivals, parades, historical commemorations, tourism, and frantic commercialized activities blending patriotism and consumption.\(^{20}\) The year 1940 also saw the return of Prince Konoe Fumimaro to the premiership, the dissolution of political parties, and the launching of a “New Political Order” and “New Economic Order.”\(^{21}\)

Amidst the exciting national commemorations and hopeful campaigns for idealistic political reforms, on September 18, 1940, the government announced a new holiday called “Aviation Day” (kōkūbi) to celebrate Japanese aviation technological achievements and encourage popular interest in the fledgling Japanese air forces.

Commemorating the first Aviation Day on September 18, 1940, an Army Air Force spokesman declared in the government journal Shūhō (Weekly Report), “The airplane is the key to determining victory or defeat in modern warfare.” The spokesman noted the role of aircraft in previous battles in China and Manchuria and the growing number of air routes linking Tokyo to far-off cities like London and Bangkok. According to Shūhō, “Aviation Day” was to further the “advance of Japanese aviation” (yakushin kōkū Nippon) by encouraging young people to understand the basic foundations of “aviation knowledge” (kōkū chishiki). Specifically, the article noted, the Army Air Force hoped to use Aviation Day to publicize Japanese aviation history and the role of the Japanese pioneers who had first introduced the idea of flight to the country.\(^{22}\)

Later commemorations of Aviation Day would drop the emphasis on history (and change the date to September 20th starting in 1941) but continued to stress the importance of air power for Japanese military strength.\(^{23}\) More broadly, the Army Air Force used Aviation Days to educate the public about the importance of aviation for Japan’s national


\(^{23}\) For the 1942 commemoration of Aviation Day, the Army and Navy Air Force articles in Shūhō spoke almost exclusively about the military importance of aviation in winning the war and the various technical and scientific knowledge future pilots should have. See Shūhō 310 (September 16, 1942): 2–21.
security. In the same article from September 1940, Army officers described a changed world in which airplanes were playing an increasingly dominant role in modern warfare: “without aviation, there is no national defense.” They claimed that for Japan to develop and maintain its aviation power, there had to be concentrated national focus on cultivating “human resources” and “material resources,” which in this context meant training as many skilled pilots as possible, developing new aviation technology, and securing sufficient supplies of iron, steel, and other key metals for aircraft production.24

On the second anniversary of Aviation Day in September 1941, Shūhō published an article on “Aviation and Daily Life” (kōkū to seikatsu) put together by the Communications Ministry Aviation Bureau. Like their military colleagues, the Aviation Bureau stressed the importance of aviation as a measurement of a nation’s power in time of war in terms of superior planes, pilots, and aircraft facilities. But, reflecting its role in overseeing civilian aviation, the Aviation Bureau argued for the importance of aviation beyond calculated military means: “in order to demonstrate the full strength of aerial power as national strength, aviation itself must be deeply connected to every level of national people’s daily lives.” The bureau made the case for the cultural significance of aviation based on individual desires, adventure, and even beauty. It cited poems from the ancient seventh-century Japanese poetry collection the Man’yōshū that showed how people from Japan’s ancient past have always yearned to “escape from this world, where they groan in the depths of daily life setbacks and despair, and fly away like a bird.” Japan in 1941, the civilian officials contended, continued to face the same dilemma – “today, we must struggle hard to overcome all until the end, no matter the hardships, in order to complete the holy war.” The airplane was not only a tool for military domination in wartime but a resource for personal rejuvenation and exhilarating escapism: “When our minds and bodies become tired, we can refresh our spirits and restore our energies by flying a glider high into the skies.” Their hope was to expand the teaching of gliding in schools to inculcate popular appreciation and skills of flight. Promoting a cultural, individual, even visceral connection between aviation and youths was seen as important by the Aviation Bureau to get people to become skilled in air defense and thwart future enemy air raids.

The Aviation Bureau identified four ways to connect aviation with daily life. First was the airplane itself, which could become useful not just for the military but also for civilian purposes. By expanding the uses of the airplane and improving their operation, the airplane would “infiltrate

deeply into national daily life.” Second, was the aircraft industry. People could adapt their daily life habits to conform to the advancement of the aircraft manufacturing industry by “improving the level of scientific knowledge” so that new techniques to process raw materials would be developed and skilled workers would always be available. The third way aviation could interface with daily life was teaching children “aviation science” (kōkū kagaku) as the “foundation to develop the scientific learning related to aircraft.” Finally, the officials recommended the public embrace of “aviation thought” (kōkū shisō), which essentially meant developing general interest and affection for all things aviation in people’s everyday life “through aviation literature, aviation art, aviation photography, and aviation ballads.”

Thus, there took shape by 1941 two movements within the military and government to promote aviation to the home front as a military necessity and an arresting cultural experience. This duality by competing institutional interests would be projected onto the figure of the youth aviator.

Several months later, when the Japanese navy attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and plunged the empire into a new total war against the United States and Great Britain, the stage was set for the debut of the youth aviator in mass culture. The opening of a vast new theater of war in the Pacific was greeted with euphoria on the home front. Ideologically, the attack and the launching of what the government called the “Greater East Asia War” against the Americans and the British brought about a sense of relief that Japan could finally resolve long-simmering tensions over whether to follow an older Asian-centered world order or an Anglo-American-dominated world system. The tensions could now be resolved by following a third path of building the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere,” which would allow Japan to retain and celebrate its Asian roots while enhancing its Great Power status in an Anglo-American geopolitical world.

The Pearl Harbor attack was also celebrated in the mass media as a marvel of aerial technology. The Pacific War would not only decisively end Japan’s quagmire in China and vault her to unquestioned dominance in “Greater East Asia,” it would be won by sophisticated, lightning-fast aviation technology and not slow-moving ground units which had defined the frustrating quagmire on the China front.

In the months leading up to the Pearl Harbor attack and into 1942, publishers launched a number of new boys’ magazines devoted to aviation and model airplanes, such as Kōkū Asahi (Aviation Asahi, 1941), Kōkū

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25 Kōkū kyoku, “Kōkū to seikatsu,” Shūhō 258 (September 17, 1941): 11–16.
The popular boys’ magazine *Shōnen Kurabu* (Boys’ Club) also did its part to contribute to “aviation knowledge.” In October 1941, to commemorate Aviation Day, the magazine joined with the Army Air Force to co-sponsor a nationwide call for children’s essays on the theme of “defending the sky.” Among the recommended essay topics, the magazine listed “visits to airplane fields, glider training facilities; something about sky warriors and youth aviators; comfort letters to sky warriors, letters of thanks to people who make or repair airplanes; designing and making model airplanes; air defense drills; and your hopes and preparations as Japanese boys and girls.”

The army and navy also jointly sponsored with film studios the production of aviation movies such as *The Sea War from Hawaii to Malaya* (*Hawai-Marei oki kaisen*, 1942), *To the Decisive Battle in the Skies* (*Kessen no ōzora e*, 1943), and *The Katō Falcon Fighter Unit* (*Katō hayabusa sentōtai*, 1944). Such productions thrilled fans by depicting airplanes in battle on the silver screen. In December 1942, on the first anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Tōhō studios released *The Sea War* to rapturous public acclaim. The film centered on a young man’s training to be a navy pilot and culminated in a recreation of the Pearl Harbor attack as a spectacular special effects-laden sequence. The navy aggressively promoted the movie to encourage young men to enlist in the air force. *The Sea War* would become the most financially successful film during the entire Pacific War era, earning 1.14 million yen at the box office. The film also served as the model for subsequent wartime aviation films.

In contrast to the grim and sober Army infantry war films which characterized the dominant cinematic trope during the early China War, films starting with *The Sea War* marked a distinctly technological, aviation-focused cinematic shift during the Pacific War.

The attack on Pearl Harbor and the expansion of the war to the Pacific against Allied forces in December 1941 only heightened the sense of urgency on the home front to militarize and promote aviation among young people. On the third anniversary of Aviation Day, in September 1942, when the home front was still swept up in the excitement of early Japanese victories in the Pacific theater, the government periodical *Shūhō* explained to readers that despite Japan’s initial victories, the Americans had the industrial capacity to quickly replenish their naval

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27 As in model airplanes.
and aerial forces for a counterattack. To be ready, the editors urged the home front to “expand even more our aviation technology” by recycling every bit of scrap metal, “mobilize all resources within the Greater East Asia sphere,” “nurture the aviation industrial capacity so as not to be inferior to the enemy,” and “raise in large numbers the necessary superior aviation personnel with cooperation from the military, government, and people.” The mobilization of future pilots provided a nationally recognized direction and focus in aviation fan culture.

The mobilization of future pilots among young men was particularly pronounced in aviation magazines of this era. One of the most popular aviation magazines in wartime Japan was Kōkū Shōnen, published by Seibundō Shinkōsha. The magazine regularly printed articles and photographs describing to readers the procedures for applying to the military flight schools and the daily routine at the schools. Although the publisher was jumping onto the military aviation craze of the early 1940s, in many ways Kōkū Shōnen fit nicely into Seibundō’s longtime dominance of the juvenile science literature market. Since the 1920s, the company had published science-oriented magazines for children, notably Kodomo no Kagaku (Children’s Science) and Kagaku Gahō (Science Illustrated). Kōkū Shōnen thus continued Seibundō’s mission of cultivating a “sense of wonder” (kyōi) in science among children through a focus on aviation technology.

Shortly after the start of the Pacific War, Kōkū Shōnen explicitly tied aviation with victory against the Allied Powers. In the opening of the April 1942 issue, the editors framed in the follow way the importance of aviation in the wake of Japan’s stunning military victories in the Philippines, the Malay Peninsula, and the Dutch East Indies: “The Asian races are now rising up with Japan as their leader ... We Japanese have saved them from the unjust rule of the English and the Dutch ... By conquering the land, the seas, and the skies, we are realizing the ideals of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.” The magazine editors warned that everyone must be vigilant against future aerial attacks from America and Great Britain. “In order to fulfill these great ideals, we must strongly fortify our air defenses.”

In an article the following month called “Enemy Sighted, Certain Annihilation,” the magazine editors stressed the spiritual inferiority of Allied soldiers when faced with capture as compared to Japanese soldiers. The article described a scenario in which a captured American or British

31 For more on Kodomo no Kagaku and Kagaku Gahō, see Mizuno, Science for the Empire: 143–171.
officer is easily taken prisoner by the Japanese military, “despite being an officer and having no injuries.” According to the editors, this thinking reflected the Allied forces’ strategy based on simple calculation of material strength. Should such calculations prove to be wrong in battle, they claimed, the Allied soldiers would immediately surrender. By contrast, according to Kōkū Shōnen editors, Japan followed its own unique philosophy based on “warrior spirit” (bushidō seishin). Warrior spirit taught two things. First, a Japanese warrior should, “without hesitation, continue fighting until his last breath.” Second, upon losing a battle, a Japanese warrior “should end his own life with his own hands, rather than be captured by the enemy.” In other words, unlike the cowardly Allied soldiers who surrendered when defeated, Japanese “warrior spirit” required that all Japanese young men fearlessly fight to the bitter end and then take their own lives to avoid capture. “In Japan, since ancient times, to be taken prisoner has been a great humiliation,” the editors declared. This ancient tradition continues to be inculcated among Japanese soldiers and sailors, according to the article, “and perhaps more so in the education of the navy’s youth aviators.”33 In this respect, the youth aviator embodied the “warrior spirit” all Japanese soldiers were expected to embody. It was also a tacit recognition of Japan’s material disadvantage against the Allied Powers and an attempt to show that both aviators and soldiers possessed an intangible, spiritual strength which could overcome such an obstacle.

The youth aviator was understood to have a unique look and uniform that differed from the ordinary army conscript. Particular attention was placed on his attire and accessories, which emphasized his technological sophistication as pilot. His flight uniform, flight cap, gloves, shoes, and flight goggles were all designed to maximize efficiency and comfort in flying an airplane. The airplane was described in highly aesthetic terms: “high in the blue skies, our wild eagles fly away, flapping their silver wings. The falcon-like fighter, the kite bird-like spy plane, the eagle-like bomber!!” According to an October 1942 article by a researcher from the Imperial University Aviation Research Center, the airplane had achieved leaps and bounds in technological innovation in terms of speed, firepower, and altitude. However, the flight uniform had barely kept up to match these new changes in aircraft capabilities and better protect the pilot from danger. To correspond with new airplanes, aviation designers had now created flight uniforms that were skintight for protection against the wind and other harsh elements and for retaining body heat. But the flight uniform was also designed to enhance comfort and flexibility to

facilitate ease of movement in the cockpit. In other words, the flight uniform was restrictive but still free-flowing, protective but flexible. Thus, the uniform’s aesthetic beauty was located in its utilitarian role in enhancing the flying of an airplane. Like the glamorous race car driver, the researcher observed, the aviator may even wear a flight scarf though “flight soldiers are careful when using a muffler” lest it get caught in some device (see figure 5.2). 34

In another article the following month, the researcher expanded on the cutting-edge, technologically sophisticated flight uniform and accessories worn by aviators. The uniform, he explained, was made out of a “light and soft, strong and durable” fabric, such as tanned leather, furs, woolen fabric, and colored fabric. There was even some stylistic influence from the uniforms worn by munitions workers, “with the pockets worn at the chest and thighs and no flapping covers. Instead a metal fastener is used to easily and securely close the large opening.” A tacit recognition by the aviator uniform designers of the cultural cachet of the munitions worker among young people. Aviators also were distinguished by accessories beyond the uniform such as the flight cap (hikōbō) made from leather or cloth and lined with fur on the inside. Dangling down from the cap were flaps covering the ears and cheeks. Resting on top of the flight cap were typically flight goggles (hikō megane) made of a thin film of shatterproof, clear, transparent glass. Small openings to the side of the goggles allowed for airflow to prevent the goggles from fogging up with water vapors. Aviators also wore fur-lined flight gloves (hikō tebukuro) made out of soft leather. The gloves were long-sleeved to protect the arm from cold winds. There were also flight shoes or water-resistant leather boots that went up to the knee. Other accessories aviators frequently used in the cockpit included a safety belt (anzentai), earplugs, and a fur-lined face mask. 35 Young readers of the magazine would learn not only about the elaborate uniforms aviators could wear but also how the uniform itself, along with the airplane, literally transformed and empowered them into a new superman.

Aside from describing the very look of the aviator, the most common types of article in Kōkō Shōnen were those that explained the application process for military flight schools and the training program required to become an army or navy aviator. For the Army Youth Aviator School (rikugun shōnen hikōhei gakkō), applicants had to be between the ages of 14 and 17, “in robust health,” and an elementary school graduate. Recruitment of aviators apparently targeted a wide group of young men.

throughout the empire. Applicants could send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the Army Air Force headquarters in Tokyo, the nearest local city hall, or regional offices in Korea, Taiwan, Manchukuo, the Kwantung Leased Territory, or even offices on the warfront.  

Answering official calls to bolster the number of trained pilots for the war effort, 空軍（Kōkū Shōnen）regularly published articles such as “Guide to Flight Schools Page” (September and October 1942), “Daily Life of Army Youth Aviator” (August 1943), “Army Youth Aviator Application Guide” (September 1943), and “A Visit to the Army Youth Aviator School” (March 1944), complete with photographs of flight school training and interviews with officers and cadets. Army and Navy air force officers wrote special articles for the magazine to commemorate the anniversary of the “Greater East Asia War” (December 1943, December 1944). The magazine also published letters from readers proclaiming their patriotic enthusiasm in entering military flight schools to serve the empire. In July 1943, Mizuno Kiyohashi wrote: “We are junior citizens (shōkokumin) of Greater Japan. In the future, we will hold up the Empire of Greater Japan, nay, the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and do our best when asked to keep Greater Japan the best in the world!”

While aviators were charged by the nation with the sacred duty to destroy the enemy and win the war for Japan, their youthfulness was often emphasized in the press. In September 1944, 空軍（Kōkū Shōnen）sponsored a Boys Decisive Air War Convention (sora no kessen shōnen taikai) in Tokyo. Two thousand elementary and middle school students, many of whom were applying to be army and navy youth aviators, gathered at the Military Conference Hall (gunji kaikan) in Tokyo. According to the magazine’s later profile, the participants “burned with sincere determination to destroy America and Britain during the grand decisive war convention.” Following speeches by several 空軍（Kōkū Shōnen）editors, five student representatives and one current flight school cadet gave their own inspiring talks to the audience. Lieutenant Colonel Morimasa Mitsuo of the Army Air Force headquarters spoke next, leading everyone in the convention hall to pledge in a loud voice, “We vow to become youth aviators and destroy America and Britain! (danjite shōnen hikōhei to nari BeiEi wo gekisai sen!).” The convention concluded with a march to the imperial palace and shouts of “banzai” for the emperor.

The magazine’s coverage of the Boys Decisive Air War Convention not only highlighted the masculine soldierly virtue and patriotism of flight cadets but also their youthfulness and connection with wartime motherhood. According to the article “Baby Eagles and Mothers” (hinawashi to haha), cadets from the Tokyo Army Flight School were on stage giving

37 空軍（Kōkū Shōnen）(July 1943): 70.
38 “ Özora e no netsui wo bakuhtatsu sase ta, Kōkū Shōnen shusai, dai ni kai sora no kessen shōnen taikai,” Kōkū Shōnen (October 1944): 18–19. The convention was also reported in the Yomiuri Shinbun, “Sora no kessen shōnen taikai,” September 18, 1944.
speeches to an audience full of aspiring aviators. Behind the applicants were a group of women who, the editors revealed, were the mothers of the cadets on stage. The mothers were “surprised and overjoyed” at how, in just six months, their sons had already become mature, “strong and great.” The cadets “wore their neatly-pressed uniforms, insignia that indicated the honor of the flight soldier, and had a wonderful attitude of sitting properly without moving at all for a long period.” Later, the audience watched a film called Birth of the Land Eagle (Rikwashi tanjō), which depicted youth aviator cadets engaging in intense advanced training at the army flight school. In the film, the mothers encourage the cadets to be brave and steadfast as they prepare for their next dangerous mission: “‘It’s going to be tough when you fly out like that,’ the mother onscreen whispers. The son smiles without saying anything but beneath his smile, a determination clearly came through, ‘I’ll do it! I won’t let my classmates down. I’ll shoot down those American demons right away!!’”

Another article from September 1944 summarizing the application process to the Army Flight School referred to elementary school students as “Baby Eagle Applicants” (hinawashi shigansha). In September 1943, prominent female educator Itō Shizue wrote a piece explaining her reasons for “happily allowing her eldest son to advance to the skies” and enter the army’s flight school: “I hear stories of many mothers who put a stop to that, saying it is dangerous. But I think now especially is the time to voluntarily push our beloved children into the skies for our Emperor (ōkimi no otame).” She claimed that the last words of dying soldiers in the current war were not only “Long live the Emperor” (tenno heika banzai) but also “More airplanes” (motto hikōki wo). Itō argued that everyone knew that building powerful airplanes and training skilled pilots were the keys to victory in war. Interestingly, she was comfortable sending her son to flight school because she herself had a long history with aviation, having ridden in airplanes in the past and developing a long-standing interest in “promoting aviation thought” to the public as an officer in the Greater Japan Aviation Women’s Association (Dai Nippon kōkū fujinkai). Thus, she appealed to boys all over Japan:

Your future is the great hope and expectation of us all. You must fulfill that which your ancestors and parents could not do. And so, everyone, even by making one model airplane, please have a patriotic enthusiasm that will make you truly useful for the state. Make sure to grab the key to future world air supremacy.

The writer Akagawa Busuke also highlighted the importance of mothers in raising youth aviators. He profiled the life of a young aviator who had died during the Battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942. During middle school, young Yamada Dai tried to enlist into the navy’s air force but twice failed the physical exams due to his small stature and nearsightedness. His mother actively took charge in helping her son to try again “next year” with a rigorous training regimen. After closing up the family-run inn late at night, she would go to the local shrine to pray for her son’s admission into flight school and then return home to wake her son up at 2:00 in the morning to study. Yamada would finish studying by 6:00, and then went to climb up the local mountain with his dog. There he would practice for an hour staring at the distant horizon to cure his nearsightedness before returning home to get ready for school. On his third try, Yamada finally won admission into the navy flight school in spring 1941, just as Japan and the United States were preparing for war. Even after learning of their son’s death in May 1942, Yamada’s parents realized that “Dai was no longer our child but a child of the Japanese nation.”

A year later, Akagawa visited Yamada’s home to prepare for his article. While the father was not there, the mother was and served as family spokesman. “I don’t feel the least bit sad,” she told the writer. “I don’t feel that Dai has died. Whenever I see an airplane fly in the sky, I feel that Dai is still fighting in the south seas, flying just like that. I am so blessed.” Akagawa observed that the mother’s expression was “that of a mother’s pride in having a heroic Wild Eagle as a child.”

Here we can discern several key facets of the iconic youth aviator. First, he was imagined to be perpetually young, whether as a pilot trainee or a pilot flying on his first mission. The aviator was not a conscript, 20 years old or older when most Japanese men become eligible for conscription. Instead, he was between the years after elementary school but just under 20 years old, during which time opportunities to become a “youth soldier” in the military services opened. He was both naïve and sophisticated. He represented a juvenile innocence empowered with the technical knowhow to pilot a powerful plane in the skies. Second, because he was imagined to be perpetually young, the youth aviator was often tied to the Military Mother. The aviator’s mother played a key role in nurturing and caring for his educational well-being, making sure he was physically fit and studied hard and encouraging interest and enthusiasm in aviation, so he could pass the flight school entrance exams. In many ways, the Military Mother was a perverse figure in the youth aviator’s life. She cared and nurtured him in childhood only to send him off to death. The military

mother attached to a budding young aviator became a powerful trope in wartime aviation films such as The Sea War from Hawaii to Malay (1942), Our Planes Fly South (Aiki minami e tobu, 1943), and The Last Homecoming (Saigo no kikyō, 1945). These films featured stoic mothers who carefully suppressed their personal reservations to ultimately encourage and support their young sons to become a youth aviator.45

Finally, the youth aviator was imbued with a specific sartorial glamor defined by highly utilitarian flight uniform, cap, goggles, gloves, boots, and scarf. The clothing and accessories were explained by Kōkū Shōnen editors as being carefully designed to conform with new and powerful capacities of advanced aircraft. Thus, the style of the aviator was glamorous because it empowered him to become one with the airplane.

In this respect, the youth aviator also appealed to the personal socioeconomic ambitions of many lower-class young men normally excluded from Japan’s elite ranks of higher education. While elementary school education was compulsory in Japan, owing to the exorbitant tuition costs of post-elementary education, only about 10 percent of elementary school graduates in prewar Japan went on to middle school; 34 percent continued to vocational school, but the remainder stopped formal education after elementary school to seek out employment.44

Aviation provided an alternative route for those shut out of the traditional educational paths to success through middle school, higher school, and finally university. Boys between 15 and 17 who graduated from elementary school were eligible to apply to the various military-run flight schools. These flight schools promised a level of education equivalent to middle school without the onerous application process and exorbitant tuition expenses. Admission to the flight schools was based on a written application, a physical examination, and an oral examination. Kōkū Shōnen regularly featured detailed guides and helpful hints on how to pass these tests. Once admitted, a flight cadet could look forward to free tuition, room and board from the military, and even a small monthly stipend. Thus, parallel to the glamorous image found in media, flight schools were also an attractive alternative for poor boys looking for post-elementary education as a step toward economic and social advancement but without the burden of costly tuition. Once enrolled, cadets took an aptitude test to determine which aviation track they should focus on – piloting (sōjūka), mechanical repairs (seibika), or communications (tsūshinka).45

43 High, Imperial Screen: 399–405.
Many private companies cited state rhetoric about the national importance of aviation to hawk a variety of study aids in *Kōkū Shōnen* aimed at young men seeking to pass flight school entrance exams. The road to becoming an aviator was promoted in advertising as accessible to everyone through “home-study.” Without having to go to middle school, a boy could subscribe to these lecture series, study from them at home, and theoretically apply to and enroll in the various pilot schools. The Imperial Education Middle School Lectures reminded young readers that “a middle school level education is the academic foundation ensuring your success.” However, because most boys would not go to middle school, the company offered a series of courses designed to help them pass the aviation school entrance exams through “home-study” (*dokugaku*).46 Another company advertised a 15-volume set of *National People’s Aviation Guide* for 1.80 yen. The advertisement promised that “you can become an expert in aviation reading this guide. It’s the perfect guide and fully complies with current national requirements.” The National Defense Science Knowledge Promotion Society offered an Airplane Lecture Transcript series that totaled over one thousand pages and was available with installment payments of 80 yen per month. Despite the rather hefty price, the advertisement reminded young readers that Japan was now at a historical moment when everyone must be knowledgeable about aviation “for the building of the National Defense State.” The transcript series, according to the company, “covers all airplane studies and is easy to understand at the level of a National School [elementary school] graduate ... Study with this authoritative lecture transcript and become the flower of the age as pilots, airmen, mechanics, and gliders.” The Imperial Education Middle School Society similarly advertised a middle school lecture series to help applicants prepare for army and navy flight schools. The curriculum offered a shortcut for working-class youths to break into elite educational tracks. Or, as the test-prep company explained succinctly, it was for “young men and boys who want to reach for the skies but cannot go to middle school. You can attain the actual abilities equivalent to middle school through self-study in the comfort of your own home, during breaks from work.”47 *Shōnen Kurabu* magazine also ran advertisements for guides to help boys gain admittance to military flight schools. The Imperial Test-Taking Communications Academy announced in its notice that “anyone who has graduated from National School [elementary school] and is 15 years old can enlist to become our Army Youth Aviators and Navy Youth Aviators, who

astonish the world with the honor of the invincible air force.” Beneath the image of a young aviator wearing an aviator cap, goggles, and a determined expression was a description of a four-month lecture course series at 1.30 yen per month.48

The technological wonder of aviation itself was an object of enormous attraction for many youths. In November 1942, the magazine organized a roundtable of pilot cadets from the Tokyo Army Aviation School. After noting that part of the army’s most important priorities was to expand its air force and recruit more aviators, the article declared that, “the gallant figure of the pilot-soldier, blooming on the frontlines like a cherry blossom, is the object of national inspiration.” When the magazine reporter asked about their motives for enlisting in the air force, the cadets explained that the intricate workings of airplanes were the primary factor. Nagamizo was inspired by his father who was a pilot and told stories about the many types of airplanes he flew. Akai had always liked “tinkering” with machines since he was young and used to watch in fascination airplanes taking off at nearby Yonago Air Field. Becoming an aviator was also viewed as an occupation clearly superior to that of a soldier. For Hamada, the decision to become a “flight soldier” (hikôhei) was due to the fact that everyone in his hometown was simply an ordinary soldier or sailor. He also “heard about all the wonderful workings of the airplane and so I decided to enlist and become a flight soldier.” Sakae similarly saw aviation as a way to stand out among the crowd as a heroic aviator. His six brothers were all soldiers “but none have flown in the skies. So I enlisted to surpass them and became a flight soldier.”49

The excitement of military aviation particular to pilots was also reiterated in the October 1941 issue of Shônen Kurabu. Here, the Army Air Force organized a roundtable discussion introducing young boys to the youth aviator as career option. Two fighter pilots described to the reporter their feelings of excitement, tension, and fear as they dueled with enemy planes over China and Nomonhan. A reconnaissance plane pilot explained his job of taking precise photos over enemy positions while a bomber pilot told of his ability to evade enemy antiaircraft fire.50 The roundtable also conveyed to readers a sense of play available to a pilot. The bomber told the reporter about the “happy competition” (ureshii kyôsô) between army and navy pilots during the bombing of Chongqing from March to June of 1940. One contest involved seeing which military service dropped the most bombs on the Chinese capital.

In another contest, army and navy pilots competed to see who could first reach Chongqing from their respective bases, thus echoing the “First to Arrive Games” during the Shanghai–Nanjing campaign. When asked for advice for boys interested in joining the air force, the pilots stressed the importance of good health, excellent vision, and “the ability to discern by sound whether or not the engine is working right or whether the propeller is turning correctly.” “And also,” one of the two fighter pilots added, “great spirit.” The bomber felt that learning how to make model airplanes would be “very good” and cited himself as an example: “When I was a child, I was crazy about making model airplanes.” At the end of the interview, the magazine editors printed a two-page detailed explanation about the proper procedures to apply to the army and navy flight schools.  

Although the aviator also served in the military, the fact that the selection process was competitive (unlike the conscription exams) and required some basic prerequisite education gave aviation an aura as a distinctly prestigious and glamorous channel of national service—still accessible for those sufficiently determined and talented enough. By contrast, a touch of “tragedy” pervaded media depictions of ordinary army conscripts. In a 1939 Shônen Kurabu article entitled “These are Japan’s Officers and Soldiers” (Kore ga Nippon no shôhei da), a reader sees a pen drawing of a line of soldiers grimly marching through China with bayonets resting on their shoulders. The faces of the infantrymen are obscured by shadows from their military caps and helmets, blurring any distinguishing facial features. The text above the illustration of the marching soldiers reads, “With rain water flowing down my steel helmet like a waterfall and holding my drawn sword in the deployed troop trench (sanpeigô), waist-deep in mud, another violent battle has ended. With relief, I sigh, ‘Aah, I’m still alive today.’”  

A September 1942 poem appearing in Shônen Kurabu suggests that the youth aviator’s relationship with the airplane made him stand apart from the infantry soldier. Although called “Japan’s Young Eagles” (Nippon no wakawashi) – a popular nickname for pilots – the poem spends most of the time talking about the airplane rather than the pilot:

Aah, high so high
A silver eagle rising to the surface
A Japanese plane
It is tremendous
It evades the barrage of antiaircraft gun

And calmly dances about
Then soon, the nose goes down
A direct vertical descent
And just when you think
It will hit the ground
It soars back up to the sky

The poem then shifts from the dexterous acrobatic litheness of the airplane to its deadly firepower against enemy targets on the ground:

One by one, they are shot down and destroyed
Aah, like a demon’s roar
In the midst of enemy fire and above enemy territory
It still calmly flies about
A silver eagle, a Japanese plane

Then at the last lines of the poem, the reader finally encounters a reference to the “Young Eagle”: “The person on board/Youth Aviator/Smiling like a cherry blossom.”

To recapitulate, the youth aviator represented an alternative path to individual success and glory for ambitious youths normally shut out of the traditional elite school system; it was also regarded as a more attractive option than conscription to fulfill military service. These beliefs combined for young readers the appeal of mastering aviation technologies with prospects of military glory. However, the military and media always framed the technological glamour and individual career success associated with the airplane within the rhetoric of national service and patriotic duty. The promotion of aviation by the magazine served the Japanese wartime state’s demands for the recruitment and training of skilled pilots. The magazines thus functioned as agents of war mobilization and as sources of young consumers’ gratification.

The Youth Aviator as Consumer-Fan

The iconic image of the youth aviator who proudly served the nation as military pilot also provided a focal point for a culture of aviation fandom. For alongside the gallant figure of the aviator stood the aviation fan. Before young imperial subjects were admitted into flight schools and became youth aviators, they could right away become aviation fans by participating in the lively fan culture constructed in magazines like Kōkā Shōnen. The aviation fan possessed a formidable body of knowledge

about minute specifications of many different Japanese and especially American planes. Fans became conversant in an aviation language full of specialized terms and vocabulary. They also had little hesitation in demanding that magazine editors publish more or fewer photos of certain planes or rebuking the editors for errors in labeling.

Aviator fans were more engineer than pilot. Until they actually gained admission into military flight schools, their interaction with aircraft would be primarily visual, imaginary, and miniature in size through model-making. But through at times manic obsession with aviation as displayed in the pages of *Kōkū Shōnen*, they reproduced, expanded, and reconfigured the glamour of the youth aviator with a distinctive cultural cachet emphasizing technical expertise and knowledge of aircraft.

In aviation magazines, fans consumed the allure of aviation visually and materially. In letters to the editor from the September 1942 issue of *Kōkū Shōnen*, readers frequently asked for bigger and more elaborate photographs of airplanes. Mori Kisaburō praised the art section as “quite pretty” and requested more German and Italian planes. Kawamura Kōtarō suggested the editors publish pictures of airplanes from all countries every month. “Also, please show a picture of a hydroplane,” he added. A reader from Wakayama asked that the art page be enlarged because the shrunken dimensions made it difficult for him to fashion model airplanes from the design: “There are lots of people like myself who get confused [by the small pictures].” Miyamoto Kōhei, writing from Manchukuo, asked for “clearer photographs.” Reader interest in higher-quality images of airplanes suggested some success in the Japanese military’s campaign to promote interest in aviation to Japanese boys. A two-page photograph of “the Invincible ‘Falcon’” appeared in the same issue of *Kōkū Shōnen*, along with a note stating that the image was approved by the Army Air Force Headquarters.

However, detailed photographs of Japanese airplanes were less common in *Kōkū Shōnen* compared to images of foreign planes. During the Pacific War, foreign planes rather than Japanese aircraft became objects of visual consumption in lavish pictorial sections. The October 1943 issue featured photographs of three English fighters juxtaposed with images of German fighters. Beneath each picture was a caption identifying the make, model, and horsepower of the plane. There was also a two-page spread showing close-ups of 36 different tail insignia for British and German fighters.

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The attention of the magazine’s editors, however, focused on American planes. In May 1943, in a “Special Issue Illustrated Pictorial” on “Enemy Bombers,” highly stylized and arranged photographs of American planes appeared. The Boeing B-17D Flying Fortress heavy bomber is depicted flying at an angle with shadows covering its bottom half. Other planes, such as the Douglas A-20A Havoc attack plane, North American B-25 bomber, and Martin B-26 Marauder bomber, are shown resting on the ground with clear shots of their profile, wingspan, and propellers. Images of the Lockheed Hudson reconnaissance bomber and the British Fairey Battle bomber are shown in tight shots with a small caption below listing the name, model, type, and country of origin. While magazine editors regularly profiled enemy planes ostensibly to educate Japanese youths about aviation and inspire them to become pilots, the planes themselves became objects of consumer desire. The desire rested in the visual beauty of the planes, their technology and engineering, and in their destructive capabilities (see figure 5.3).

In August 1943, Kōkū Shōnen published an elaborate two-page photographic spread of “The Latest Planes of the American Enemy.” The captions underneath each photograph provided some recognition of American technological superiority. For the Martin B-26 bomber, the editors wrote, “This improved version of the B-26 bomber, which the American enemy boasts is the fastest bomber in the world, has experimented with a new design in which the gunner seat is in the tail. The engine in the prototype is a Double Wasp, 1850-horsepower, maximum speed is 540 kilometers per hour.” The Consolidated B-24D bomber was described as “typical of the new four-engine heavy bomber.” The same issue also contained a two-page spread of six “trainers” (renshūki) of the “American enemy,” with captions listing the name, model, engine-type, and horsepower. Readers would also have been familiar with silhouettes of enemy aircraft through civilian air defense pamphlets distributed by the military.

Perhaps to counter the impression of Allied aviation superiority, in September 1943, the editors published a series of dramatic photographs showing a Japanese fighter pursuing and shooting down a British Spitfire fighter, as well as images of a downed Curtis P-40E Kittyhawk fighter and Martin 139 bomber being examined by Japanese officers with the caption, “Behold the fate of British and American enemy planes that tried to resist the imperial forces!” Occasionally, the magazine also published glossy photo

spreads of new planes from the Japanese military. In October 1943, two photographs appeared showing the latest fighters from the army. “This is an invincible, high-speed fighter that will appear like a sudden flash of lightning in the midst of the Greater East Asia War,” the editors exclaimed. Readers learned that the speed, velocity, and firepower of the new army bomber would “overwhelm the enemy’s North American B-25 and Martin B-26. Dear readers, we want you to quickly become great pilots, board these gigantic wings (kyoyoku), and fly out to the skies of the American homeland.”

*Kōkū Shōnen* editors frankly conceded to readers the technological sophistication of American planes, but insisted that Japanese planes could still emerge victorious. In a September 1943 message framed as a letter “from Big Brother on the Frontlines . . . to Younger Brothers on the Home Front,” the editors boasted that American planes “needed to have an absolute superiority twice as strong as our own, or else they will quickly run away.” For “among the enemy planes, even among the same fighters, the Curtiss, Grumman, Vought Corsair, or sometimes

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the twin-engine, twin fuselage Lockheed, their actual strengths and abilities being the world’s best are just in name only.” Furthermore, Kōkū Shōnen editors argued to readers that the Japanese air force possessed not only “machine power” but also “fighting spirit” (kantō seishin) and “supernatural” piloting skills. The editors were suggesting a way to still appreciate the technological beauty of American airplanes without provoking anxieties over the level of Japanese aviation power by reminding readers of their country’s own superiority in spirit and human talent. “So rise to action under the faith of certain victory,” the editors heartily concluded, “become a youth aviator, seize the initiative, and struggle forward toward the skies of the American enemy homeland. That is the only hope we have for you.”61

A fixation on not only the technological power of American aircraft but also purely on their aesthetics was found in a June 1943 photo album entitled “Captured American Military Planes.” Here, again, Kōkū Shōnen showed American bombers and fighters posed in different angles that showcased the nose, wingspan, and propeller. Running alongside the photos were images of mascots used by American air squadrons such as Felix the Cat holding a bomb, an Indian chief headdress, and a black top hat.62 Although the images were meant to demonstrate the ability of Japanese military forces to overpower American planes and display them like war booty, the visual arrangement transformed the captured machines into objects of consumer desire for young readers. Not only were the technical features of the planes visualized in detail, the visuals highlighted references to American popular culture. The magazine Mokei, though specializing in model airplane making, also published images of foreign planes for its readers. In June 1942, the editors printed pictures of the “emblems” (hyōshiki) of American, British, and Chinese warplanes along with instructions on how to make such emblems out of paper. The editors claimed that being able to make and identify the airplane emblems of all countries was part of “national aviation knowledge” and even recommended that readers paste their creations on the walls at home or school.63

Magazine advertisers also sold various aviation-themed products which made some allusion to America or the English language. In April 1942, the Lion Insignia Company sold aviation-themed fountain pens, an album to hold airplane photographs, and silver aviation badges decorated with a variety of designs for fifty sen each. Some badges consisted of

63 “Kaku koku gun'yōki no hyōshiki wo tsukuru,” Mokei (June 1942): 23.
a frontal shot of an airplane nose and propeller with the words “ARAWASHI” (wild eagle) carved in English letters above or below. Others featured an elaborate eagle perched on top of a plane. One badge showed the flags of the Axis countries of Japan, Germany, and Italy. In August 1943, the “Glider No. 1” consisted of a stylish badge with the word “SLIDER” written out in English. The “Glider No. 2” showed a bird flying. The “No. 305” badge was a tennis racket with a ball in front, wrapped by a sash that said “TENNIS” in English. Apparently, advertisers believed their customers would be attracted to the exoticism of English words. Other badges were more nationalistic, such as an image of a globe with the word “Patriotism” (aikoku) written in kanji. In November 1943, Lion Insignia advertised 15 different badges at 45 sen each. Some of the badges contained Japanese characters for “machine” (kikai) and “electricity” (denki), speaking to readers’ engineering interests. Others displayed flashy English words such as “B.B.” (short for baseball as indicated by accompanying images of a baseball and bat), as well as the “SLIDER” and “TENNIS” badges, again in recognition of the exotic appeal of the American enemy (see figure 5.4).

The editorial policies of Kōkū Shōnen confirmed the advertisers’ judgments about what readers wanted. The editors found that American planes had a particular appeal to many young aviation fans. In April 1943, for example one reader wrote to the magazine and requested that it, “please print enemy aircraft blueprints, just like in the February issue art page.” In this respect, aviation fandom opened a way for the magazine to pursue commercial interests and perhaps, ironically, maintain a cultural connection with America during the height of total war and even at the risk of glamorizing the enemy. Demonization of the Americans was surprisingly muted in other sites of mass culture celebrating aviation. In his examination of several Pacific War-era aviation films, Peter High has found that the enemy was rarely seen. Instead, in these so-called “spiritist” films, “the only true enemy resides within oneself, as the doubter, the desirer [sic] of physical comforts, the weaker [sic] of one’s fighting spirit. Focusing on the external enemy is a kind of distraction.”

The military censorship imposed on mass media also encouraged magazines like Kōkū Shōnen to devote more coverage to American aircraft than Japanese planes. In November 1944, a reader from Chiba asked in a letter why there were so many photos of foreign planes in every issue and

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67 Kōkū Shōnen (April 1943): 104. 68 High, The Imperial Screen, 393.
hardly any images of Japanese planes: “I ask that you provide more details and explanations about Japanese planes to bolster my faith in their superiority. I don’t know much about them. Could you also tone down coverage of foreign planes, just a little?” The magazine editor replied that they published materials only in accord with the regulations by state censors. “Because of the dangers of espionage,” they wrote, “we currently cannot print detailed features [of Japanese planes]. But rest assured that the military gains of our army and navy air force clearly speak to the abilities of our planes.”

Figure 5.4 Aviation badges and model “enemy planes.” Kökū Shōnen (November 1943).

69 Kökū Shōnen (November 1944): 40.
The visual consumption of American aircraft by fans was paired with material consumption as well, primarily through the making of model airplanes (and, of course, the aforementioned badges for 45 sen each). In February 1943, *Mokei* magazine editors published a five-page photographic spread describing step-by-step to readers on how to “make enemy planes.” The introductory paragraph explained that “we are making every kind of airplane starting with the Boeing B17 in order to understand the structure of enemy planes. They are solid models of the real thing reduced in size, but the exterior is basically unchanged from the original. Many are being made under strict design and supervision.” According to the guide, readers are to first carefully select the machine parts for the airplane exterior and then whittle away the parts to approximate the body of the plane according to the design plan (see figure 5.5).

The connection between model-making and aviation received strong official endorsement from the Ministry of Education during the first observance of Aviation Day in September 1940. The ministry proclaimed aircraft production as the key to building a Japanese-dominated empire in East Asia and an autarchic regional sphere fully independent from the West. Education officials envisioned a two-tiered system of aviation education to “develop a national aviation culture.” At the compulsory elementary school level, the curriculum called for teachers to incorporate model plane making in traditional arts and crafts classes to teach students about the basic principles of flight. Students would use art paper to make rudimentary gliders and then, as they got older, make more sophisticated airplanes out of bamboo, wood, paper, and rubber. For those who continued on to middle school, the proposed curriculum recommended that students continue learning more advanced flight principles through model-making and build actual gliders in group work. It was hoped that after years of exposure to model-making and glider flying, elementary and middle school graduates would go on to work at airplane factories. The Education Ministry also recognized that a small but growing number of universities and post-elementary technical schools were now offering courses on pilot training and engine mechanics. The graduates of this more specialized level of aviation education were encouraged to “immediately enter the frontlines of the aviation industry.” At the elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels, education bureaucrats saw the

Figure 5.5 Cover of *Mokei* (March 1943).
national school system as “playing a crucial role in building an aviation culture.”

This aviation culture promoted in both schools and magazines served as another site where Japanese boys interacted with aviation as both consumer-fan and imperial subject. But rather than trumpeting the youth aviator as the ideal end goal in this long journey of aviation education, the Ministry of Education blurred the identities of two carnival kings – the aviator and the worker – by allowing aviation fans to see their obsession over airplanes be legitimized as part of another path toward serving the empire in the factories. As if to emphasize this point, the back cover of the September 1944 issue of Shōnen Kurabu featured a full-sized illustration of the munitions worker – dressed in factory uniform and cap – and youth aviator – outfitted in pilot straps and uniform, with goggles resting on his forehead. Both figures stand tall together, looking straight ahead with determination. The worker has one hand gripping a hammer and the other hand over the shoulder of the aviator. The caption above read in bold, dramatic font: “This is decisive war. Mr. Soldier waits for the airplane. So make it. Send out the Rising Sun airplane. Send the Rising Sun airplane to the decisive battlefield of the enemy’s annihilation.”

But the aviation world circulating in Kōkū Shōnen focused more on cultivating individualistic creativity in aircraft design far away from the factory setting. Kōkū Shōnen also sponsored its own model-making contest of a sort in which readers would submit drawings of planes based on Japanese and American aircraft. According to a December 1943 contest profile, one boy won third place for creating the “Airacobra Fighter” (eara kobura sentōki) while another third-place winner submitted a model of the North American 51. A Korean boy won first place for his “High Speed Automatic Rescue Boat.” One reader sent a letter to the magazine, asking for instructions on how to make a model of the Martin four-engine China Clipper flying boat. Another reader asked for the specifications and design instructions for a model Northrop A-17 Attack Plane. In May 1943, Nakamura Yūzō from Niigata wanted to know the specifications for the Curtiss P-40. In December 1943, Kōkū Shōnen cheerfully announced, “This month, let’s make a real model of a midsize Martin B-26 bomber.” The instructions to make a Martin B-26 bomber went on for five pages and included two photographs and a minutely detailed illustrated blueprint.

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73 See back cover of Shōnen Kurabu (September 1944).
Readers used the magazine as a place to publicly announce the results of their attempts to fly model planes. A reader known only as “Big Skies” (ōzora) wrote in October 1943:

I made the “Otōri-gō” from the August issue and it flew quite well. Here are the times I got:

First Attempt – 1 minute, 4 seconds
Second Attempt – 1 minute, 32 seconds
Third Attempt – 3 minutes, 4 seconds
Please put out more articles on how to make gliders.  

In the Questions and Answers column from July 1943, one reader from Nagoya asked the magazine simply to name “all the airplanes exported from America to England.” The magazine editor replied with a long list of 23 fighters and bombers, divided by aircraft type. Katō Masao from Pusan asked Kōkū Shōnen for blueprints of the North American O-47 reconnaissance plane. One reader known only as “Flight Engineer Raised in Korea” (Chōsen ni sodatta hikō gishi) complained that there were too many blueprints in the magazine for “solid model enemy planes.” “Japan has far superior planes,” he wrote, “so please put out more articles on how to make the latest Japanese planes.”

Kōkū Shōnen provided another arena where readers could send in illustrations and explanations of fictitious planes they created out of their own imagination or perhaps inspired by American or Japanese aircraft. In July 1943, a regular column called “Dreams of Young Engineers” (shōnen gishi no yume) featured such whimsical aircraft as the Silver Cloud G-1 fighter, sent in by a reader identified only by the nickname “Silver Cloud Crewman” (gin’un jōin). “This plane is a high-speed two-seater fighter,” explained “Silver Cloud.” The fighter reaches a maximum altitude of 10,000 meters and excels in aerial dogfights. The anonymous reader went on, “It swoops down from the cloud rift at high speed and pulverizes an enemy plane in one blow with its ferocious firepower.” “Silver Cloud Crewman” then listed the specifications for the Silver Cloud G-1 fighter:

Engine – Liquid Coolant Type-H. 1,200 Horsepower
Wingspan – 16 meters
Wing Load – 245 kilograms
Maximum Speed – 790 km/hour
Cruising Range – 4,500 kilometers
Weaponry – On the nose, two 37-mm machine guns and four 20-mm cannons. On the rear, one 37-mm cannon.

75 “Kōshō no tonarigumi,” Kōkū Shōnen (October 1943): 70.
76 “Shitsumon to kotae,” Kōkū Shōnen (July 1943): 68.
Watanabe Toshihisa of Tokyo sent in the blueprints for his Kingfisher (Kawase) Type-5 heavy bomber, which could serve as both bomber escort and attack plane, equipped with 700 kilograms of bombs, and a 1,500-horsepower liquid coolant engine. The bomber was 13 meters long, 16.5 meters wide, maximum speed was 767 km/hour, cruising range was 5,500 kilometers; it had room for three crewmen, armed with two 30 mm machine guns, and four 15-mm cannons (see figure 5.6). 77

The entries for “Dreams of Young Engineers” followed a fixed format. Each entry included an illustration of the plane and specifications on engine type and horsepower, number of crewmen, maximum speed, cruising altitude, and weaponry. In August 1943, one reader from Ōita sent in his idea for a Jupiter Type-123 heavy bomber. “This plane is used to bomb the homeland of the American enemy,” Ōno Toshio explained. “The gun turret on the rear wing is operated by remote control. Ten crewmen, engine is liquid coolant 2,500-horsepower. Maximum speed is 560 kilometers per hour. Cruising altitude is 20,000 kilometers. Holds 5,000 tons of bombs.” A reader from Tokyo known only as “divine sky

soldier” (*sora no shinpei*) submitted his idea for the Hurricane Type-1 Hydro spy plane.  

*Kōkū Shōnen* and other aviation magazines also became a site where readers could engage with like-minded aviation fans while roleplaying under whimsical pseudonyms. The pseudonyms chosen by readers to sign off with usually indicated intense fascination with airplanes or dreams of becoming a pilot. Among the nicknames used by readers of *Mokei* in their letters were “Model Fanatic” (*mokei kyōjin*, June 1942), “Aviation Maniac” (*kōkū kyōjin*, July 1942), “Flying Ace Maniac” (*chōjin kyōjin*, July 1942), “Indoor Young Eagle” (*shitsunai no wakawashi*, December 1942), and “Wild Eagle of Karafuto” (*Karafuto no arawashi*, February 1943).  

Readers of *Kōku Shōnen* also sent in letters under pseudonyms. Aside from the ones cited earlier, in July 1943, “Young Eagle of the Sky” (*ōzora no wakawashi*) from Saitama wrote, “I’m quite happy with the photographs from the art page in the May issue.” In August 1943, editors invited readers to “send in postcards about your thoughts (*kansō*) and hopes (*kibo*).” Oily Tadao (*Abura Tadao*) from Osaka liked the regular features of airplanes from all over the world. “Future Baby Eagle” (*mirai no hinawashi*) thanked the magazine in January 1944 for the “excellent entries” in the “Dreams of Young Engineers” column, which is helping him gain entry into the “stronghold (*gajō*) of the youth aviator, the flower of this current decisive war.”  

Originally, the letters to the editor section of *Kōkū Shōnen* was called “Reader’s Lounge” (*dokusha no danawashitsu*). But some readers pushed the magazine to revamp the section. In March 1943, Özawa Ikutarō from Tokyo wrote, “The Reader’s Lounge’ seems always to be about what I want. Let’s make a ‘Neighborhood Association’ (*tonarigumi*) where things are taught and we teach each other.” The next month, another Tokyo reader, Okazawa Yoshimasa, sent a letter asking that “The Lounge” be turned into a “Kōkū Shōnen Neighborhood Association” (*kōshō tonarigumi*). “How about it?” he asked. In the May 1943 issue, the magazine editors announced that “from this month forward, ‘The Lounge’ will be renamed ‘The Kōkū Shōnen Neighborhood Association’ (*kōshō no tonarigumi*), as suggested by Okazawa Yoshimasa and Özawa Ikutarō.” Whether the editors really chose to rename the reader’s letters section

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80 *Kōkū Shōnen* (July 1943): 70.  
81 *Kōkū Shōnen* (August 1943): 70.  
83 Starting at least from April 1942 to April 1943.  
84 *Kōkū Shōnen* (March 1943): 104.  
because of readership demand is unclear. What is clear is that the editors wanted to reinforce a sense of community among its readers by demonstrating their responsiveness to fan demands and encouraging fans to continue to write into the magazines with suggestions and ideas for future content.

The renaming of the letters to the editor section from “Lounge” to “Neighborhood Association” also reflected the rapidly changing social organization on the home front. In September 1940, the Home Ministry ordered all cities and villages to form community councils (chōnaikai) and neighborhood associations (tonarigumi). This radical restructuring of local communities was designed to circulate war mobilization decrees and facilitate mutual surveillance down to the lowest grassroots level. The community councils were usually made up of a few hundred families. Below the councils, every ten or fifteen households formed a neighborhood association. By July 1942, there were over 1.3 million neighborhood associations recorded in Japan. 87

The average Japanese boy in 1943 would have been very familiar with neighborhood associations in his daily life as the distributor of wartime rations and conduit for the latest government instructions. The neighborhood associations have customarily been regarded as the ultimate manifestation of the state’s intrusive, even repressive control over its subjects in wartime Japan. At least through the eyes of these boys and young men, however, the term seems to have been perceived in a far more positive light. In asking for a “neighborhood association” among aviation fans, Ōzawa Ikutarō wanted the sense of intimacy and connection he probably saw through a child’s eyes around his own neighborhood. He hoped the magazine’s neighborhood association would become a site where “things are taught and we teach each other.” Furthermore, by elevating the letters to the editor section from a “Lounge” for idle chitchat to “Neighborhood Association,” the magazine publisher bestowed the fan community with a stronger, elevated sense of national purpose. Like real neighborhood associations scattered throughout the empire, this imagined neighborhood association, too, mobilized people for war by imparting important information crucial to the war effort such as foreign aircraft specifications or flight school admittance information or by providing a space for readers to inspire each other with patriotic fervor.

The reconceptualization of the readers’ letters section could be seen as an extension of wartime social controls to even the imagined community...

for children’s aspirations and consumption. But on the other hand, the Kōkū Shōnen Neighborhood Association was quite different from an actual neighborhood association. The magazine was promoting the interests of the mobilization state by encouraging boys to apply to flight schools while simultaneously bolstering the formation of a wider consumer fan base. Readers and editors were creating a mutual interest and avocation group of boys to “meet” as equals and share ideas about airplanes. This was a very different set of purposes ascribed to real neighborhood associations, as the lowest levels of a far-reaching state apparatus designed to regiment, mobilize, and repress.

The Kōkū Shōnen Neighborhood Association allowed readers to become true fans by asserting their opinions, demands, or questions openly about certain model airplane types or the quantity and quality of the airplane art page. The letters to the editor section, in other words, allowed readers throughout the Japanese empire to become members of their own unique “neighborhood association,” imbued with national purpose and importance, just like adult neighborhood associations. But unlike adult neighborhood associations, this was a gathering that did not regiment or rigidify identities or roles. Rather, it allowed readers to write in as opinionated aviation fanatics.

For some readers, part of creating a “neighborhood association” in Kōkū Shōnen meant real names and not nicknames should be used in letters. In October 1943, Sakaki Takeo from Hyōgo prefecture wrote, “Won’t you please get rid of these pseudonyms such as ‘Blue Fighter’ that appear in Kōkū Shōnen Neighborhood Association and Questions and Answers?” Sakaki believed that once everyone started using real names, a more genuine “sense of friendship and intimacy will emerge among ourselves.” The magazine editor agreed, urging readers “from now on, let’s all try not to use pseudonyms … let’s make announcements that are clear, correct, and useful.”

However, anonymity was popular for other readers, for it gave them a feisty attitude in rebuking editors on things they found wrong in the magazine. In September 1943, “Secret Sky Detective” (sora no himitsu tantei) from Kyushu called out the magazine for publishing a reader’s airplane drawing submission that had apparently been copied from another periodical: “Dear Mr. Reporter, number 26 of ‘Dreams of Young Engineers,’ Kondō Setsuo’s stratosphere high-speed bomber, is the same one in the November 1940 issue of [rival aviation magazine] Kōkū Asahi, on page 143. Is it right to put out the same thing?” He also called out the plagiarist: “To my fellow Kondō, if you just copied that and

88 “Kōshō no tonarigumi,” Kōkū Shōnen (October 1943): 70.
sent it in, you need to apologize.” “Morning Clouds Student” (*akatsuki kumo sei*) also complained about another possibly fraudulent illustration: “Image number 33 of ‘Dreams of Young Engineers’ is exactly the same as the Yamato High Speed Fighter found in the March 1943 issue of *Sora [Sky]* magazine.”

The declining paper supply due to dwindling resources started to sharpen reader criticism against the magazine. In October 1943, one reader, Konjō Isamu, did not hesitate to state his name and dissatisfaction with the magazine: “A criticism – until recently, I thought the content of *Kōkū Shōnen* was fine, but it has decreased in page numbers and it doesn’t look so great. Please do better!” The magazine editors cheerily responded: “The reduction in pages is completely due to us winning the war. We are instead focused on quality, working to put out great stuff.”

The editor’s response omitted any mention of paper rationing in Japan, but Konjō’s observation was correct. The October 1942 issue of *Kōkū Shōnen* had 124 pages. Just one year later, the October 1943 issue contained only 70 pages. The escalating military demand for airplanes after a series of defeats in the Pacific theater at the hands of the Allies was slowly destroying the supply of paper needed for publishing airplane magazines. In May 1944, the army and navy ordered Ōji Paper, Japan’s largest paper company, to convert eight of its pulp factories to airplane manufacturing. Ōji executives futilely protested the move as “insane” (*topyōshi mo nai*). The paper company’s subsequent output for 1944 dropped by 33 percent. Accordingly, by October 1944, *Kōkū Shōnen* had dwindled to 48 pages.

### The Youth Aviator Becomes the Kamikaze Pilot

The material shortages resulting from repeated military defeats and destruction of Japan’s commercial fleet by the Allies, as well as military requisitioning of paper factories throughout 1943 and especially 1944, started to affect the very content of *Kōkū Shōnen*. In a September 1944 article on “How to Make a New Army Headquarters Spy Plane,” the magazine provided precise details on the technical specifications of the aircraft and visual schematics, but then turned ruthlessly practical and indifferent to the project: “the materials [to make the model plane] are not particularly important and it should be fine with whatever you have on

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89 “Kōshō no tonarigumi,” *Kōkū Shōnen* (September 1943): 70.
90 *Kōkū Shōnen* (October 1943): 70.
hand. So we will not go into assembly instructions again.” Later, the author of the piece conceded that “things like lacquer as paint materials are hard to come by.” He recommended readers use a watercolor paint and then “cover it with a liquid made from celluloid dissolved with acetone (it’s like clear lacquer or varnish).”

In the readers’ letters section of the November 1944 issue, the editors of Kōkū Shōnen announced, “Magazine publication has unfortunately been delayed because of transportation issues. But we will handle your correspondence with special care so please don’t hesitate to continue sending in your research.” In a more ominous note, the editors added, “We can no longer guarantee direct subscriptions. For those who have unknowingly paid in advance, we will provide a refund minus a return charge handling fee. Thank you for understanding.”

However, Kōkū Shōnen readers never lost interest in American planes. In August 1944, the magazine printed out a four-page spread on the Douglas P-70 Night Fighter and the “American enemy’s carrier-based fighter Vought Sikorsky F4U-2 ‘Corair,’” complete with photos of the planes from different angles and a full-page blueprint. One reader wrote to the editor in September 1944, asking what the P-47 sandaboruto and P-51 musutangu meant. The editor explained that “sandaboruto means ‘thunderbolt’ (raiden) and musutangu means ‘wild horse’ (nouma).” Another reader requested and received a blueprint of “the American enemy’s Bell P-39 ‘Airacobra’ fighter.” In October 1944, a reader from Tokyo asked the magazine “where is the radiator and atmospheric intake located in the Bell P-39?” Another reader from Niigata wanted the schematics and features of the Grumman F6F, while someone known only as “Liquid Coolant Fighter” (ekireisen) requested the same information for the Martin PBM-3 Mariner. One senses that these requests may have been more than just the passions of the intelligent fan. Accurate information about the war, and air power in particular, must have been very hard to come by, leaving this pursuit of detail as a way to manage psychologically their helplessness when it came to the real truth.

Right around this time, during the Battle of Leyte Gulf in late October 1944, the Japanese Navy first unleashed the “Divine Wind Special Attack Force (shinpū tokubetsu kōgekitai)” or “kamikaze pilots” against American forces out of a sense of military desperation.


“Kamikaze” is an alternate reading of the characters for “Divine Wind” (shinpū) – 神風.
civilian leaders began with the July 1944 fall of Saipan to the Allied forces. The loss of Saipan was such a devastating testimony to Japan’s dire straits that political opponents of Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki forced his resignation. Having seized Saipan, the United States was able to freely launch air raids over the home islands. The Imperial General Headquarters (IGHQ) estimated that remaining Japanese planes had enough fuel to operate only until January 1945. By that time, all aircraft would become immobilized on the ground. Army strategists predicted that American forces would land in the Philippines by late October 1944, as a prelude to a full-scale invasion of the Japanese home islands. Faced with these conditions, the IGHQ ordered forces to gather in the Philippines and make one final stand against the Allies. Such desperation, both in terms of military tactics and public eulogies, coalesced in the waning months of 1944 around the Special Attack Force. On October 20, 1944, three days after American forces landed at Leyte Gulf, the Imperial Japanese Navy launched Operation First Victory (shō ichi gō) with the so-called “Special Attack Forces” (tokkōtai). The Special Attack Forces were planes that intentionally crashed into American vessels on suicide missions. These attacks accelerated in the final battles of the Pacific War, including the Battle of Okinawa from March to April 1945. In the end, over 4,600 pilots perished in suicidal ramming attacks.

The very name of the Divine Wind Special Attack Force mirrored the duality of aviation culture in wartime. The phrase “Divine Wind” (shinpū or kamikaze in alternate character reading) harkened back to the thirteenth century Mongol invasion of Japan, when prayers for salvation were followed by a series of typhoons annihilating the Mongol landing forces. It was hoped, now, by the military high command that the Special Attack Forces would also emerge as decisive disruptors of American operations. However, the name “Kamikaze” also reminded the Japanese public of the more recent and celebrated 1937 airplane which flew from Tokyo to London on a goodwill tour amid a national media spectacle. The very name, in other words, carried faint echoes of a different imagining of aviation, when Japanese air power and aviation technology integrated with celebrations of modern science, connections with the world, and consumer desires.

The conflicted feelings the home front held toward the kamikaze pilot were brought to the surface in the military’s own official proclamations. On October 29, 1944, the navy’s Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet issued a press release announcing the launch of the new “Divine

99 Kudō, Tokkō e no rekuiemu: 19.
100 Mori Shirō, Tokkō to wa namika (Tokyo: Bungei Shunju, 2006): 216.
Wind Special Attack Force,” during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. “The unswerving loyalty of divine eagles will shine for eternity,” the statement began solemnly. “They have seized the enemy fleet by body-ramming with certain death.” After announcing further details of the engagement, the statement recited the names of the pilots who had died in these attacks before concluding, “By seizing the enemy fleet and launching a body-ramming suicidal assault, they were able to sink an aircraft carrier, burn up another one, and instantly sink a cruiser. Such shining loyalty sacrificed all for the great, eternal cause.”

Newspapers reinforced this heroic image of the kamikaze pilot demonstrating extraordinary sacrifice and effective tactical assaults on the enemy in the wake of Leyte Gulf. On October 29, the Yomiuri-Hōchi reprinted military announcements alongside reporters’ own sensationalized stories about the kamikaze. The newspaper provided dramatic reports of the moments before the pilots flew out on their final mission:

Finally, the day arrived when the first Special Attack Force “Shikishima Unit” would make its final sortie. At the base on the morning of the twenty-fifth, the crewmen had spent the night preparing the Divine Eagle Special Attack Plane. The planes gave out a fearsome roar. The deputy commander unfolded a map at the command post, turned to the brave Attack Force heroes, and said with care: “The attack target is the enemy carrier. Aim to ram into the carrier’s weak spot.” The commander of the First Attack Force Shikishima Unit, Captain Seki, exhorted to his men, “We’re not bombers. We’re bombs. Got it? Follow me.” (see figure 5.7)

The public excitement over the Special Attack Force promoted by both the military and the mass media drew upon imagery at the center of earlier media frenzies over spectacular acts of heroic soldierly sacrifice such as the Three Human Bullets in 1932 during the Manchurian Incident and other battle feats during the Russo-Japanese War. However, the public promotion of the kamikaze pilot by state propaganda organs took cognizance of the conflicting feelings these new heroes would surely evoke. In November 1944, the Navy Press Department, writing in Shōhō magazine, explained in detail the significance of the new “Divine Wind Special Attack Force.” The article at first straightforwardly defined the kamikaze as “a special, Japanese death-defying special attack force that perfectly fuses together science and the body. It is when a plane armed with explosives explodes onto an enemy ship along with the pilot.” The crude mechanistic, almost inhuman design of the kamikaze

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101 Asahi Shinbun, October 29, 1944, quoted in Mori, Tokkō to wa nanika: 214–215.
103 Ibid.
Figure 5.7 Captain Seki, leader of one of the first kamikaze units, is decked out in full aviator regalia complete with chronograph watch, fur-lined cap, and goggles resting on forehead. He appeared on the cover of Shashin Shūhō (Photographic Weekly) 347, November 15, 1944.
units was balanced by heavily romanticized names that hearkened back to a mythical Japanese past—poetic names such as Shikishima, Yamato, Asahi, and Yamazakura. Other units were named after character traits such as Loyal Bravery Unit (chūyū tai) or Sincerity Unit (shisei tai), which, the Navy Press Department claimed, “makes one think about the spirit of the Imperial Japanese Navy sailor.”

The article quoted the words of one anonymous flight cadet from the navy’s Tsuchiura air corps, who spoke of his motivations. The cadet explained that many of his comrades at first focused simply on performing their “military duties” (gunmu) and did not concern themselves with death. As they began learning about the suicide attacks of older classmates, however, the cadets “began to think about questions of ‘life and death’” and then shifted to the realization that “duty” (ninmu) took precedence over such questions: “Now, we think about what the most effective way is to die. There’s not a single one of us in the air cadet corps who fears death.” The navy press officials commented, “In this way, our young eagles have already transcended life and death and are becoming great soldiers of the empire.”

In one fell swoop, the kamikaze pilot was characterized by navy officials as simultaneously childlike adolescent, a patriotic student, the model soldier, a military god, and cheery boy-next-door. This could also be understood as the military’s attempt to bridge the gap between the youth aviator and the kamikaze pilot. The navy’s multifaceted

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understanding of the kamikaze pilot as cultural figure perhaps may have been shaped by the aviation subculture already circulating in magazines like Kōkū Shōnen for several years at that point. Behind the fanatical, nihilistic kamikaze pilot, the nazy suggested, was still echoes of the soaring, life-affirming, and hopeful youth aviator.

The navy further anticipated that people’s initial reaction to kamikaze pilots would be “how sad” (hisō) or “how sublime” (sōzetsu), but, it claimed, “this is not what the brave kamikaze warriors themselves think at all.” Instead, the pilots think only of “how to defend the 2,600 years of imperial tradition, the brilliant and glorious national polity, and this homeland.” While the navy juxtaposed the pragmatic approach of the pilots with the inevitable emotional response to their deaths, its pronouncement reflected what certainly must have been the mixed feelings of those who had created the Special Attack Force. It concluded with these cold and stark remarks: “When we think about it, it is tremendously sad and regrettable to lose such promising youth in this way. But we must also recognize objectively the current situation in the Philippines. We are literally facing a life-and-death situation where we must use even this special attack force tactic.”

In the letters to the editor section of the October 1944 issue of Kōkū Shōnen, the increasingly desperate war situation could be discerned alongside sentiments of readers who refused to let go of the consumer-fan dimension of aviation. Yet, gradually, the tone of Kōkū Shōnen mirrored the fatalistic attitude of the navy toward the necessity of the nihilistic kamikaze pilot to save the empire. Five letters were from readers boasting of their recent acceptance into the navy’s pilot cadet program or the army flight school or lamenting their failure to gain admittance to the programs. The urgency of the war was detected in the frequent references in the letters to taking part in a “decisive war” (kessen). Another reader could not hide his disappointment at being drafted as an ordinary sailor despite his long-held desire to become a youth aviator. “I’m still aiming to join the decisive war up in the sky. Mr. Reporter (kisha sensei) and fellow readers of the Kōkū Shōnen Neighborhood Association, please remember me, Hosono, when I die for the imperial country at the decisive battlefield of the skies.”

Three other letters from the October 1944 issue expressed sentiments of a consumer-fan in tension with that of imperial subject. A reader from Sapporo wondered if his ideas for a “mobile airbase and super aircraft carrier equipped with windshield and floating devices” were worthwhile entries to the “Dreams of Young Engineers” column. The editor tried to

redirect the reader’s enthusiasm to the current war effort: “Nishida’s idea is good. Please make a great invention and send it here in order to destroy America and Britain.” A finicky reader from Tokyo began his letter by mocking the magazine’s bold claim that its photo collection of foreign planes “has extremely vivid, clear, and rare photographs not seen anywhere else.” The reader pointed out that “the photograph of the ME109 G6 on the bottom of page 7 is mixed up with the ME 210 on the top of page 7.” As for Kōkū Shōnen’s claim of having authoritative coverage of foreign planes, the consumer-fan noted, “all the models you’ve put out every month only adds up to the model planes my friends and I have already made. Next time, can you please have the B-29?” A sheepish editor admitted the mistake in the photograph and added, “We always hear of readers enthusiastically reading the articles and how hard you work on the models and schematics of the latest planes.” A distressed Mizunoe Hiroshi explained in his letter that he had submitted his entry for the monthly “Dreams of Young Engineers” prototype design contest after the deadline passed: “I thought and thought about many things and then quickly put something together. I finished on September 18 at 11 p.m. I sent it out by express delivery. Please excuse my entry if it doesn’t arrive on time.”

Then in December 1944, Kōkū Shōnen editors made an announcement to readers:

The actions of our Special Attack Force have been launched for the first time in the battle of the Philippines. They have electrified the spirit of one hundred million subjects. In the face of the nation’s emergency times, Japanese people have absolutely no fear of death. From the very beginning, they have continued fierce training aiming to crash and sink enemy vessels with their bodies as bombs . . . Readers of Kōkū Shōnen! Certain victory production (hisshō seisan) demands industrial warriors; we must all, every one of us, enlist as youth aviators (shōnen hikōhei) . . . The divine eagles of the Special Attack Forces have shown us how we can kill one ship with one plane if we turn our bodies into bombs . . . If all readers of Kōkū Shōnen work just like the Special Attack Force Divine Eagles, then even if there are thirty thousand or fifty thousand enemy vessels, we will sink them to the bottom of the seas . . . Becoming a youth aviator is the only way to defend the divine land. There is no need to think about other ways. So go. To the skies! To the skies!!

The reader letters from the same December 1944 issue echoed this sentiment of national crisis and the need to place duty before desire. A recent graduate of the army flight school wrote that “It is you guys, the next wild eagles, who in the end will protect the divine land. Aerial

power will determine tactical success or failure. So get out there and enlist to become a youth aviator. Get that crown of glory.” Another army flight school cadet wrote in explaining how much he was looking forward to glider training and the upcoming day when he would finally be assigned to a specific aviation track. In perhaps a subtle rejection of the self-annihilating kamikaze pilot then dominating the news headlines, the cadet added, “my humble self is hoping for the mechanics branch.” A Korean reader from Seoul said he had been a loyal reader of the magazine since the first issue and credited it for providing “aviation knowledge.” “Although I am Korean (hantō shusshin), I am applying to the army youth aviator school . . . in five days.” A boy from Yokohama wrote in saying his ill health prevented him from applying to flight school although he hoped to apply next year.110

The final letter to the editors in the last surviving issue of Kōkū Shōnen in December 1944 signaled the moment when the kamikaze pilot partially decrowned the earnest and ambitious youth aviator as avatar for wartime aviation culture. The letter called on all readers of Kōkū Shōnen to join the ranks of suicidal pilots sacrificing their lives in staving off the Americans. But like other rabid aviation fans of the past, the letter-writer wrote under the pseudonym, “A Japanese Man from Ina, Shinano” (Shinshū Ina no Nippon danji). And like the typically feisty aviation fan, he begins with a rebuke to the editors:

In the July issue of “Ôzawa’s Six Battles of K.,” you wrote, “In the Japanese military, no commander orders his subordinates to die.” Who told you this? Look at the brilliant feats of the Divine Wind Attack Force that appeared in the newspapers of late October. When they were about to launch their attack, what did the commander say? He said, “This commander would like to have your warrior lives for His Majesty, the supreme commander, and for the state.” The subordinates wrapped pure white silk cloth around their necks, boarded fully-armed planes without wearing a parachute, and rammed themselves [into enemy ships], resulting in certain death and certain hit . . . At this time, when the nation is faced with a life-and-death crisis, at this late hour, wondering about the inhumanity of things has been swept aside before the great moral cause. So boys and young men of all Japan, become the second, third, no – the tenth, the hundredth Kamikaze Pilot and give rise to a divine wind that will force the enemy to surrender.111

111 Kōkū Shōnen (December 1944): 40. Emphasis in original text.
Some of the youth aviators who became kamikaze pilots saw through the mass media’s calculated, almost transparent attempts to ideologically manipulate their image into single-minded machines of total war (see figure 5.8). In one poem left behind by four kamikaze pilots, awaiting their final suicide mission to Okinawa in March 1945, cynicism toward reporters crept in:

Reporters shower us with flourish, calling us gods, gods
And praise our terrible final poems
To die at twenty-five, a youth much regretted

The Kamikaze Pilot Listened to Jazz Before Killing Americans

Figure 5.8 The kamikaze pilot on the cover of Asahi Gurafu (June 25, 1945).

Indeed, the pilots had other things on their minds than sacrificing themselves for the national polity as they prepared for death:

On the verge of death, I have but one wish  
I tell the clouds that I love my parents and my girlfriend  
In the special attack plane, I fall into a deep quiet  
The commander goes first, and then I follow...113

Still another poem written by the pilots suggests that imaginings of the youth aviator was only partially decrowned and that memories of late wartime mass culture survived within the kamikaze pilot:

The guy who will fight America  
Listens to jazz and misses jazz  
It’d be best if peace comes real quick  
So said this Thirteenth Class graduate who could not escape desire.114

This poem is often cited by scholars either to highlight the tragedy of Western-educated young men manipulated by the state into sacrificing their lives for a doomed cause, or to note the ironic juxtaposition between the kamikaze and American popular culture.115 While there is some truth in both interpretations, the four pilots were also hinting at something much more profound about aviation culture and the cultural politics of late wartime Japan. By calling out the shallowness of the reporters, proclaiming their love of jazz, and hoping for an early peace on the eve of certain death in battle, the pilots were articulating a frame of mind that existed outside the state-imposed ideological framework of sacrifice for nation and xenophobic hatred of the enemy – ideologies which scholars have frequently presumed were all-encompassing and largely unchallenged in the last year of the war.116

reikū, tokkōtai kami yo kami yo to odaterare, tokkō no mazui jisei wo kisha wa home, njūjō de shinde wakasa wo oshigarare.”

113 Kumo nagaruru hate ni: 142. Original lines, “Shinu magiwa onaji negai wo hitotsu mochi, fubo koishi kanojo koishi to kumo ni tsuge, mokusō no naka wo shizuka ni tokkōki, shitawareru taichō ichiban saki e yuki.”

114 Kumo nagaruru hate ni: 139–140. The original lines read, “Amerika to tatakau yatsu ga jazu wo kiki/jazu koishi hayaku heiwa ga kureba yoi/saigo made shabake no nukenu jusan ki.”


116 See, for example, Havens, Valley of Darkness; Dower, War Without Mercy; Gregory J. Kasza, The State and Mass Media in Japan, 1918–1945 (Berkeley, CA: University of
The jazz-loving kamikaze pilots, like other iconic avatars we have studied so far, were shaped by life in the multifaceted world of carnival war bursting with consumer desire and fluid identities amid state demands for ideological rigidity and self-sacrifice. Here, the pilots demonstrated through poetry that they had not cast off the consumerist desires that defined Japanese cultural life for much of the late 1930s and early 1940s but had conjoined desire with sacrifice. They could not, as Miriam Silverberg wrote about Japanese movie fans, housewives, and other consumer-subjects of the late 1930s, “let go of [their] Hollywood fantasies,” the West, or “the modern” entirely. But while Silverberg sees sites of the modern vanishing after 1941 with the onset of the Pacific War, for “the modern could not exist with the official version of Japanese everyday experience,” the kamikaze pilot as cultural icon suggests a different picture. Even during the twilight of the Pacific War, the kamikaze pilot listened to jazz before killing Americans because he was part of a larger cultural intertwining between duty and desire. The jazz-loving kamikaze pilot can only be understood within the earlier history of a cosmopolitan aviation fan culture which infused the iconic aviator with transnational consumerist desires and militaristic violence. As such, the idea of the youth aviator ultimately resisted being caricaturized by official and unofficial ideologies. He defined himself in contradictory terms of duty, sacrifice, and desire, and jazz as schizophrenically trumpeted by state and mass media. The modern did exist alongside the state-constructed version of daily life in wartime for it was only displaced to other sites of mass culture.

It is true that the youth aviator as cultural construct was quite different from the kamikaze pilot. The former symbolized the yearning for technological modernity and consumer fandom while the latter inverted these values to become, in part, an atavistic and seemingly nihilistic creature. However, the image of the kamikaze pilot, one of the most famous symbols of the fanaticism and rigid ultranationalism associated with wartime Japan, emerged out of a culture of wartime aviation that highlighted the cultural play inherent in carnival war even during the final, traumatic months of the Asia-Pacific War. His cultural resonance in wartime—though not in postwar—Japan rested on his ability to embrace being both imperial subject and mass consumer within the total war system.

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This chapter began by declaring that the youth aviator was the most powerful, but final, king of carnival war. He was final in the sense that his decrowning by the kamikaze pilot on the battlefield and in mass culture heralded the beginning of the end of carnival war. Kamikaze pilots as a military tactic failed in their primary objective of preventing Allied aerial attacks on Japan. Beginning in late 1944 and throughout 1945, American planes began firebombing Japan, unleashing horrific killing and destruction on the home front. It was during the devastating American air raids when Japan’s mobilization system finally gave way, carnival war itself staggered to a halt and, finally, collapsed.
In his famous April 1946 essay “Discourse on Decadence” (Daraku ron), the writer Sakaguchi Ango sarcastically observed that former kamikaze pilots who, less than a year earlier, vowed to “shield our Sovereign Lord” by sacrificing their lives in battle were now slick, fast-talking black marketeers. The decrowned kamikaze pilot was already recrowned in a new era of “carnival peace.”

The formal end of the Asia-Pacific War in August 1945 marked the beginning of the Allied Occupation of Japan. But while formal warfare ended, militarized, repressive conditions remained in Japan until at least 1949 when overt Occupation censorship rules were relaxed. New cultural practices took shape under the American mission of imposing “democratization and demilitarization” through highly antidemocratic and militarized means. The American-dominated Supreme Command of the Allied Powers imposed a strict censorship and guidance regime on cultural production banning the depiction of any symbol or image associated with imperial Japan, militarism, or “feudalism.” Although in the process many leading wartime military and political figures were purged from public life, the vast majority of artists and writers who promoted and celebrated the war continued their artistic careers undisturbed. The sudden profusion of risqué works of “erotic grotesque” literature after years of harsh wartime censorship certainly came from a postwar sense of liberation. However, it may also be understood as the postwar echo of wartime carnival – military repression stimulating proliferation of joyful attitudes and practices in mass culture.

New cultural icons during the early Occupation years following the shattering of the total war system were characterized by liberated social mores, the inversion of now-defunct wartime ideals, and “sexual anarchy” as eloquently described by John Dower and others. However, they could also be understood as part of a longer transwar history of carnival.  

The prostitute skirted the line between respectability and deviance in providing sexual services to American officers for the good of the Japanese nation. However, by doing so and flaunting newfound consumer goods and clothing acquired from American paramours, she both protected Japanese womanhood and exacerbated an already-anxious Japanese masculinity in the aftermath of national defeat. Similar ambivalence arising from the intensive social environment of militarized mass culture can be seen in how wartime black market brokers smoothly transitioned into postwar gangsters who ruled distinct market sites with near-virtual impunity from police interference. Publishers and writers helped create a flourishing ephemeral _kasutori_ culture, characterized by sexually explicit magazines and pulp-fiction stories. These texts self-consciously promoted nihilistic decadence as a form of escapism for a nation exhausted by war and defeat. On the other hand, _kasutori_ culture may not only have been a burst of escapist fare after years of desolate wartime repression but also a reformulation of wartime cultural sensibilities.

This book has argued that Japanese wartime mass culture may best be understood through the lens of “carnival war” in which cultural constructs oscillated between irreverent media celebrations of the grotesque and nonsensical on the one hand and a state-regimented, highly disciplined mode of daily life on the other. The five discrete yet intersecting media constructs explored here serve as heuristic devices to illustrate the many ways carnival war brought together total war violence, consumption, and modernity into a multifaceted and fluctuating mode of cultural practice.

Carnival war challenges two commonly held beliefs about Japanese wartime history. First, it disputes the view that wartime state ideological controls over Japanese society effectively severed the overflowing modernity and social effervescence brewing since the 1920s. Second, the idea of carnival war subverts the much more entrenched notion that the Japanese state has always been strong enough to define the ways the public could approach, understand, and digest the basic orientation towards issues of

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5 See chapter on “Cultures of Defeat” in Dower, _Embracing Defeat_: 421–467.
life and death. Carnival war demonstrates that total war simultaneously inspired both repressive and joyful activities and attitudes toward modern life among Japanese people as state actors, imperial subjects, and mass consumers.

**Gendering Carnival War**

What unites the carnival kings of wartime Japan is their ability to conceal and reveal shifting ideas about gender in an era typically seen as a time of gender rigidity. Japan’s carnival kings question the common assumption that “the exigencies of war brought a hiatus over what it meant to be a man.” As Sabine Frühstück has shown, scholars have only just begun to explore how the extraordinary violence of the Second World War was closely tied to gender and sexuality. And fervent social debates and reimaginings of gender roles happen during moments of crisis which war most certainly evoked in the minds of most Japanese people.

Carnival war further directs our attention to the fact that the experience of total war on the Japanese home front was ultimately a gendered experience for soldiers and civilians. And that ideas about gender circulated on the home front as a dialogic conversation. Wartime masculinities and femininities coexisted in dialogue with each other and took their shape from external and internal perceptions. In other words, the gendered power of carnival kings operated principally in relation to each other. They represented iconic modes of masculinity and femininity which at varying points in time veered toward hegemonic status. Studying the kings of carnival war allows one to rethink the presumed purity of hegemonic forms of gender roles such as soldiers, workers, and women.

The reporter was the first king of carnival war. His cultural aura arose from the intersection between the massive scale of violence during the 1937 invasion of China and the advanced state of Japanese mass media. This phenomenon was the culmination of years of escalating, capitalist-

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driven efforts by the mass media and the state to seek out ever more sensational stories and images for mass consumption in imperial warfare, going back to the 1920s era of “erotic grotesque nonsense.”\textsuperscript{11} The wartime cultural explorations of gender in mass media through figures such as the reporter legitimized and, ultimately, demanded further sexual violence on the warfront. In the wake of Japan’s invasion of China and the pressures of military censorship, the intellectual reporter turned into a swashbuckling war correspondent who claimed the same battlefield glory and honor normally reserved by society for soldiers. As the reporter became an increasingly aggressive, soldier-like figure on the warfront, the military censor devolved into a passive figure of ersatz soldierly masculinity, ridiculed by his army colleagues for his incompetence and even irrelevance as the rapidly shifting events of the war, his distance from actual battle, and the ferocious impatience of reporters overwhelmed censorship rules. Directing their rhetorical power towards another direction, reporters, through reportage and evocative wordplay, emasculated and sexualized Chinese soldiers for home front consumption while objectifying Chinese women and China as nation into feminine objects especially vulnerable to Japanese domination. Beyond the obvious examples of sexual assault committed by Japanese soldiers throughout Asia, a discursive form of gendered violence was committed by the reporter in Japanese mass cultural artifacts. This activity helped the home front reimagine total war as lived experience.

The munitions worker continued the project initiated by the reporter: inverting social norms, recklessly injecting irreverence and defiance into areas officially stamped by the state with sobriety and submission. While criticized in the press for an outlandish decadent lifestyle, delinquent behavior, and excessive pay, and occasionally brought to heel by government labor controls, the munitions worker, like the reporter, repeatedly borrowed from traditional soldierly honors to ennoble his own place on the home front. The advocates for the New Labor Order consecrated the worker as an industrial warrior, deserving of the same “comforts” and medals routinely given to soldiers, in order to promote greater industrial productivity. The fantasy, or rather nightmare, of the munitions worker, however, was fueled by the construction of a hybrid worker masculinity. He was valued for his labor, equal to soldiers fighting on the frontlines, but also practitioner of perceived feminine-like practices of mass

\textsuperscript{11} As Mark Driscoll writes, “in order for advanced capitalism to continue to capture and feed off attentive human curiosity, it must constantly up the ante in terms of the content of image commodities to be consumed.” See Mark Driscoll, \textit{Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japan’s Imperialism, 1895–1945} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010): 208.
consumption and transgressive masquerade.\textsuperscript{12} The arresting cultural aura of the munitions worker thus rested on his pastiche-like masculinity—part-spendthrift, part-soldier, master of costume play, and embodiment of national service and individual desire.

The conflicting ebb and flow of the persona of the soldier as heroic superman, “humanistic” everyman, and parasitic veteran was constantly being contextualized and explained by other new sources of masculine identity from the reporter. The precarious place of the soldier on the home front’s pantheon of heroic masculinity was partly due to the reporter’s ruthless deterritorializing and deconstruction of Chinese bodies. Reporters derisively dubbed Chinese soldiers captured in battle or fleeing from a mop-up campaign as “defeated soldiers” (haizanhei), ready to be summarily executed for sport or reduced to numerical abstractions via risqué wordplay. The later repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Japanese “returned soldiers,” many of whom suffered from mental and/or physical injuries and all of whom were returning in ambiguous circumstances, perhaps uncomfortably evoked public association with Chinese “defeated soldiers.” Returned soldiers were also starkly contrasted with the heroic, gallant soldiers crowned and glorified by the reporter during the speedy, exciting Shanghai–Nanjing campaign. Thus, the heroic masculinity and emasculated image of the soldier were highly dependent on the cultural force wielded by the reporter.

The movie star extended and expanded into wartime the prewar cultural practices of defying gender norms, embracing a nonnational, fluid identity, and promoting consumer desire through the prism of movie stardom. The efforts by state advocates of film reform to harness and control the aura of the movie star inadvertently revealed the hollowness of wartime orthodox ideologies and the deep divisions within the government over which areas of national mobilization to prioritize. The movie star distilled competing ideas about femininity embodied by the prewar Modern Girl and the wartime Military Mother. The at-times-frenetic efforts by the government to create a new kind of movie star appropriate to the wartime nationalist climate could only have been imagined in

relation and in reaction to the glamorous prewar movie star modeled on a Hollywood-like star system. An alternative wartime movie star embodied by established actresses exempt from the new license examination system absorbed competing ideas about femininity for the home front. At once professional working woman, educated and skilled in her acting craft, demurely “Japanese,” and an eroticized figure with glamorous clothing, hair, and lifestyle echoing the Hollywood world of the American enemy, the movie star as celebrated in fan culture performed a form of femininity that offered something for everyone.

The youth aviator’s masculinity was both an echo and repudiation of the soldier. Like the soldier, he was in the military, dedicating his life on the frontlines for the nation. Unlike the soldier, the aviator’s unique aura derived from his technological sophistication and mastery of the airplane. And like the movie star, he also represented the yearnings of a large fan base of mass consumers whose consumerist tastes frequently crossed national borders and into enemy territory. Another difference with the soldier was that the youth aviator was, by definition, a juvenile, younger than the typical army conscript, and a product of extremely competitive flight schools. In this respect, he shared a similar profile to the imagined, perpetually teenaged munitions worker, though with a more wholesome and scientific persona. The many aviation films produced in the Pacific War era invariably featured a prominent movie star playing the devoted mother or elder sister to a budding young pilot. The movie star helped reinforce the “youthfulness” of the youth aviator, suggesting he is forever innocent and pure, far from the fatigued and jaded image of soldiers. While the soldier became associated with military stalemate, frustrations, and social conflict, the aviator was tied to ideas about youth, hope, and the optimism that the power of aviation technology can overcome any obstacle. Following the Japanese navy’s disastrous defeat at Leyte Gulf in 1944, the youth aviator faded from mass cultural artifacts and was replaced by the kamikaze pilot. The former celebrated modernity, individualism, technology, fluid identities, and consumerist desire while the latter rejected all of those things in favor of an atavistic and nihilistic existence.

Global Echoes of Carnival War

Total war offered opportunities for the state to radically intervene, mobilize, and restructure society to maximize the fighting of industrialized warfare. But the unexpected challenges the state experiences in trying to mobilize an enormously vast and complex mass society without being itself overwhelmed by the enormity of the project created opportunities for improvisation and
accommodation. In this respect, Japan’s national mobilization experience was mirrored in other home fronts around the world in the early twentieth century. That is, mass cultural formations in modern societies provided the moral justification for total war violence. Total war violence, in turn, shaped the cultural practices on the home front into a style and attitude which I see as carnival. Together, both violence on the warfront and carnivalized desire on the home front coalesced to forge an uneasy consensus behind the waging of total war.

Although beyond the scope of this book, I would argue that other modern societies experienced their own versions of carnival war. In late Stalinist Russia, for example, when the state mobilized society for both socialism and the Cold War, young men known as the stiliagi dressed in Western suits, wore “Tarzan haircuts,” and used American slang to construct an alternative masculinity in reaction to the then-dominant soldierly masculinity of Soviet war veterans. Like the munitions worker, the stiliagi demonstrated that even in authoritarian societies, apolitical and deviant cultural practices can flourish outside of state institutional control. The Zoot Suiter in wartime American cities also mirrored the worker’s penchant to flaunt social conventions and challenge the status quo through the outlandish use of clothing.

During the Pacific War, American GIs infamously hunted for “thrills” in the form of Japanese skull and bone collecting, which was publicly celebrated in at least one major mass magazine. Attempts by the US military to suppress such practices, which quickly became fodder for Japanese anti-American propaganda, proved ineffective. A modified revolutionary version of carnival war erupted in Central Europe during the late 1980s as a breathtaking explosion of social movements took to the streets against highly mobilized, authoritarian communist regimes. The multiple and diverse actors of these movements, like the kings of Japan’s carnival war, shattered the hegemonic statist ideologies through derision and joyful irreverence in cultural practices.

Differences between carnivalized home fronts are also striking. For example, the munitions worker in wartime Britain never reached the same dizzying heights of national glory and condemnation as that enjoyed by the Japanese worker. Despite strenuous efforts by the British government to highlight his importance for the war effort through a variety of posters, films, and radio programs, the male munitions worker remained stigmatized by public and media for not being in uniform on the frontlines. The British munitions worker tended to be portrayed in the media as someone who occasionally shirked his duty, prone to strikes or even cowardice during an air raid. He was generally much older than his Japanese counterpart, often old enough to have been a veteran of the First World War, and often complained about being underpaid relative to soldiers. The British wartime labor force, unlike in Japan, was dominated by women, which shaped the popular imagination of a partially emasculated or feminized industrial workforce. This public perception made the presence of male workers all the more incongruous.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, the masculine hierarchy on the British home front with the heroic soldier towering over the aged and inept worker was reversed from the Japanese variant, where the young and high-living war worker freely appropriated the honor and dignities from the pitied figure of the soldier.

Another analogue to the youth aviator on the British home front may be found in the glamorous figure of the flyer of the Royal Air Force. While initially viewed with a mixture of fear and hostility by the public following the RAF’s retreat from the German invasion of France in 1940, the flyer was soon celebrated by the media and in literature as a dashing heroic figure who lived life to the fullest in between dangerous flying missions. The attractive and distinctive blue uniform and the myriad movies made about flying aces connected the British flyer, like the Japanese youth aviator, “to a much wider world than that of a particularized wartime military culture.” The British flyer, however, was imagined to be a slightly older figure as seen in popular stories and films about his love affairs and nights out drinking. The Japanese aviator, perpetually youthful, did not or could not participate in such adult activities. He was instead more associated with technical knowledge and mastery of aviation, which was conspicuously absent in cultural depictions of the flyer in wartime Britain.\textsuperscript{19}

While the particular forms of carnival kings and practices were contingent on very specific sets of local and national circumstances,


they were all ultimately modern responses by nation-states grappling with transnational total war contradictions and dilemmas. How exactly can a state fully mobilize every material, ideological, and human resource in society for total war without disrupting morale or inciting popular revolt? How much can the state give in and tolerate some leisurely pursuits of individualized pleasure and illicit activities (and even grotesque displays of violence) to enhance productivity and morale without undermining the overall solidarity and focus of the home front? Should the state move quickly to repress new social norms and values arising out of the extraordinary conditions of total war to prevent domestic unrest and division? Or should the state learn to accommodate and coopt new cultural practices to better integrate a changing society into the total war machinery? Despite their many differences, carnival war in Japan and other warring societies in the twentieth century revealed the impressive reach and stubborn limits of the state’s power to address these questions. And that constant state–society renegotiation over mobilization in response to demands of the people are vital parts of total war as lived experience.

The Circus Freak Next to the Policeman

Carnival war only imperfectly captures the fickle, multidimensional experience of a society mobilizing for total war. Imperfect because such an experience defies easy categorization and definition by the state or society, or the historian. And yet, despite such imperfections, carnival war brings into relief power relationships between state and society. Carnival war is the shadow of total war, stalking total war from a short distance, mimicking and distorting the image of official ideologies. It is not always clearly visible, but it is present if you look hard enough. The total war machine, which entailed the state mobilizing all resources in society for war, continued to move forward as fighting intensified, but carnival war contributed to hundreds if not thousands of little lurches and jerks that opened up new spaces for cultural creativity in mass media fantasies. These cultural practices created an alluring imagination of total war for the masses that enveloped, enriched, and distorted official ideologies. Carnival war lured into the spotlight strange, seemingly incongruent bundles of cultural practices – what Bakhtin called mésalliances – that echoed and transformed the very lived experience of life on the home front: the jazz-loving kamikaze pilot, the soldier raging at sincerely insincere civilians, the shape-shifting movie star, the mischievous munitions worker feasting on total war consumer culture, the reporter hunting for thrills on the battlefield, the circus freak next to the policeman.
To study the history of a modern society mobilizing for total war, one must look not only to state ideologies but also dig deep into society in order to understand how those ideologies lived, breathed, evolved, or even survived in the treacherous waters of mass culture. Through a carnival war lens, we can see how society itself transformed under the extraordinary conditions of total war. We can see the role mass media played in informing people’s understandings of war and how people as consumers and subjects reconfigured such understandings. This dialectical and volatile process unleashed a series of popular fantasies and nightmares, which appeared, disappeared, and reappeared as mobilization swept through society. Through these cultural icons one can see how many kinds of people understood the experience of total war, thereby acknowledging the deep and messy diversities lurking underneath a single pristine layer of national unity. Finally, carnival war gives us an insight into popular complicity in war beyond banal observations about “grassroots fascism,” “fascism,” or “ultra-nationalism.”

Acts of social disobedience assume their cultural power and intensity precisely from a complementary, and not just oppositional, relationship with wartime repression. And acts of seemingly docile collaboration can assume an unwelcome, even disruptive presence within the same cultural environment.

There was desire and sacrifice, fantasies and nightmares, and beauty and horror, on the home front. Together these conflicting cultural practices shaped the everyday experiences of Japanese people during the war. Only by acknowledging this dynamic in wartime can we understand why Japan went to war and, more broadly, why during the Second World War modern mass societies sanctioned astonishing violence and cruelties upon other peoples. And then, after all that, perhaps we can eventually begin to think about our own times when modern wars – albeit of a type quite different from total wars – continue to be waged by states with little restraint from mass society.

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