

The Modern Girl as Militarist: Female Soldiers In and Beyond Japan' Self-Defense Forces 軍国日本のモダンガール 女性自衛官 と彼女たちをとりまく言説

Sabine Frühstück

In her seminal essay “The Modern Girl as Militant,” Miriam Silverberg (1991b) described the modern girl as a glittering, decadent, middle-class consumer who, through her clothing, smoking, and drinking, flouted tradition in the urban playgrounds of the late 1920s. Silverberg found the identity of the modern girl to be based on her embracing of this cosmopolitan look. As a marker of capitalist modernity, the modern girl was a consumer culture icon, suffusing once-banal objects with an intense aura and occupying new social thought through the positions she took in advertisements. What she expressed, Silverberg wrote, was sometimes historically repressed or could be appropriated for differing ideological ends.

In a concluding commentary on a 2008 book by the Modern Girl Around the World Research Group, Silverberg (2008: 354-355) addressed anew the question of who these women were and modified her original response in light of the findings of scholars around the globe. Her answer was that the Japanese modern girl had been multivalent. On the one hand, she was a phantasm projected onto the social landscape by male critics who were made increasingly anxious by the sociocultural changes taking place all around them. On the other hand, she was also a living and breathing being who wanted to engage in the cultural and social revolution. The labor and mobility of working women in the 1920s and 1930s also helped define Japanese interwar modernity. Hence, in Silverberg’s modified understanding of the modern girl, there are those whose

commitment to change was limited to a change of clothing, those who were activists, and those whose everyday actions challenged the sociopolitical order (Silverberg 2008: 356-357).

Like the modern girls of the early twentieth century that Silverberg described, female service members of the Self-Defense Forces (Jieitai, SDF) embody some of the most pertinent sociopolitical issues of current-day Japan regarding gender, labor, and mobility.¹ I am not suggesting that modern girls simply exchanged their flapper dresses for military uniforms. Rather, the reason that I believe it is fruitful to adapt the early twentieth-century modern girl icon to the current-day context of female service members is this: many female service members made the decision to take their lives into their own hands in an attempt to liberate themselves from the gender and class restrictions of the predominantly rural communities from which they came. In doing so, they shunned some of the most persistent social conventions of contemporary Japan and overcame their families’ pronounced objections to their professional choice to join, at least temporarily, the SDF.

Becoming a service member means being mobile and willing to move to bases anywhere in Japan every two or three years. This geographic mobility is often accompanied by class mobility: some women see the SDF as their only shot at moving up socially. Once in the SDF, they find themselves in a military establishment that heavily invests in the gender management of its public image in ways that reflect its ambiguous constitutional status.

(Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution prohibits Japan from going to war and from having a standing army altogether.) Female service members pursue their careers in a media and popular culture environment that mirrors, even exacerbates, the hostile attitudes they encounter within the military itself.²

I begin this chapter by describing the ways female service members narrate their experiences in and around the military. I then address the question of how the military employs female figures in its visual self-presentations, including recruitment and materials for public relations purposes directed beyond the recruiting pool. In the final section, I examine a number of representations of female service members that circulate in popular media beyond the formal control of the public relations apparatus of the SDF.

Rather than solidifying any neat separation of “living, breathing” service members from their representations, I propose that it is analytically more useful to view the three spheres as being engaged in the co-production of these modern girls as militarists. As we shall see, their agency is always already compromised, and the authenticity of their selves remains in play and ambiguous. Their militarism is distinctly molded by the legal framework that guides the SDF and the collective experience and vision of the missions in which they engage.



A female service member on a disaster relief mission in Northeastern Japan after the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami. She is depicted with a child she assists in front of a makeshift bath provided by the SDF. (TakarajimaBessatsu 1780-go: Jieitai vs. Higashi Nihon daishinsai, special issue, no. 1780, *The Self-Defense Forces versus the Great East Japan Earthquake, 2011*, pp. 8-9)

Most important for the purposes of this chapter, their ambiguous existence leaves them—like the early twentieth-century modern girls—with a pronounced understanding of themselves as women (and as service members). Elsewhere I have argued that their military experience molds them into anthropologist Hugh Gusterson’s (1999) “feminist militarists,” for whom the experience of exclusionary practices raises their consciousness and makes them determined to struggle against discrimination and for a more complete incorporation into the military (see Frühstück 2007b: 86-114). Here I explore how female service members, the public relations apparatus of the SDF, and the popular media manipulate the gap between the military’s promise of a meritocracy and its practice as (also) being governed by gender. I suggest that the gradual and limited integration of female service members is permeated by rhetoric about the SDF’s greater modernity than other institutions in Japan, which are cast as lagging behind modern trends.

At the same time, many female service members pursue and experience their careers as the result of their social and professional mobility. In other words, laboring for a very specific arm of the state, female service members have been on the go in a number of ways: they have been pursuing upward social mobility and economic independence by virtue of their choice of profession and workplace; they have been challenging the gendered order

of mainstream society that marks the military male and masculine; and they have been at the forefront of modern womanhood by pursuing careers.

As in most military establishments in the postindustrial world, the integration of women into the SDF has been a strictly regulated process, unilaterally driven by the needs of the military rather than by attempts to create equal career opportunities for women (Enloe 2000; Laura L. Miller 1998). In Japan, the first women who became eligible to enlist in the new national military after World War II were nurses. They were admitted to clerical positions in the Ground Self-Defense Force (Rokujo Jieitai) in 1967 and in both the Maritime Self-Defense Force (Kaijo Jieitai) and the Air Self-Defense Force (Kujo Jieitai) in 1974. A first breakthrough beyond the nursing profession was prompted in 1974 by the recruitment shortage of men. Subsequently, in 1978 women were granted access to training as medical doctors and dentists.

In addition to the recruitment shortage of men, which has become increasingly dire, the Equal Employment Opportunity Law of 1986 served as the next significant integrative impulse. As an arm of the Japanese government, the SDF were to comply with laws that concerned equal opportunities for women in all areas of employment. Subsequently, between 1986 (when the Ground Self-Defense Force began admitting women) and 1993 (when the Maritime Self-Defense Force and Air Self-Defense Force did so), almost all branches of the SDF opened their doors to female recruits. In 1992 the National Defense Academy (Boei Daigaku) admitted the first thirty-nine female cadets. When the SDF began to participate in a long-term peacekeeping operation in the Golan Heights in January 1996, the first female service members from the Ground Self-Defense Force became members of the forty-five-person transport contingent.

By the year 2000, all restrictions for women had been lifted. In 2002, several female service members participated in the peacekeeping mission to East Timor and in the 2003 humanitarian aid mission to Iraq, the SDF's first deployment to a combat zone since their establishment in 1954. They were also part of the largest SDF mission to date: the disaster relief operation in north-eastern Japan after the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011.³ This gradual shift has allowed the SDF to present themselves as in step with, if not ahead of, other governmental institutions that established anti-discrimination policies.

Subsequently, the SDF have employed a combined strategy of adaptation and mutation, as an apparent flaw (the erosion of an overwhelmingly male military culture) has been parlayed into a further modernization of the SDF as an institution that provides greater gender equality than some segments of corporate Japan. The relentless overrepresentation of female service members in public relations materials, ranging from recruitment posters to white papers, by contrast, has served two public relations goals: to "deepen the understanding and appreciation of the SDF" within the Japanese population and to "mainstream the SDF" (Jieitai no futsuka) as a workplace like any other (Frühstück 2007b). To the women who make up the roughly 5 percent of female service members, the SDF's desire to appear modern in the public eye meshes seamlessly with their own desires to embody mobility and modernity, of both social class and gender.

"Choosing My Path Myself":

Female service Members' Perspectives

What draws young women with high-school degrees into the military while their peers take up low-skill jobs? Many of the young women who describe their socioeconomic backgrounds as poor or say that they would not be able to afford a college education, give a broad range

of initial motivations for joining the SDF. Generally speaking, female service members articulate their motivations in feminist terms, pitching their expectation of a meritocratic military against a sexist corporate world, and a life of challenges and hope of upward mobility in the military against an uneventful, predictable professional life outside. In other words, their motivations are about class mobility and crossing gender boundaries, not about the defense of the nation.

Female privates and sergeants, in particular, want to be challenged in the same ways that men are, a desire they do not expect to see fulfilled in civilian jobs. Like male privates who cringe at the thought of living a salaryman's life (Frühstück 2007b), female privates perceive the SDF as a workplace where women with a blue-collar family background and a high-school education can avoid doing tedious clerical work in a corporate office and achieve some measure of social mobility. For many, the dismaying prospect of a subordinated life as an "office lady," who "never gets to do anything but make copies and tea for male coworkers and superiors . . . and is pressured to quit once married and/or pregnant," is a strong trigger for joining the SDF. Similar to their male peers, young women do not list a strong sense of patriotism in their reasons for joining the SDF.

Officers' perspectives differ somewhat but are also centered on professional and social mobility rather than contributing to the national defense. Mobility is a defining theme of their professional lives, as it is for enlisted women. For example, Lieutenant Colonel Kuroyanagi Hiroko, close to the end of her career, remembered how difficult it was in the 1970s for a female university graduate to find a good job. When she joined the SDF in 1977, the tenuous job security of the public sector also attracted her to the military (Mineo 1998: 232). Likewise, a college graduate from Kanagawa prefecture who worked for a trading company for two years before she decided that she

"wanted to do something different" imagined that by entering the closed world of the SDF she "would find [her] own strength" (Bando 1990: 284).

Female officers hope that the officer's career path will allow them to rise in the military hierarchy to a level they would be unlikely to achieve in a civilian environment. Major Matsubara Yukue, for instance, had wanted to become a diplomat but failed the exam for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Discouraged, she consulted one of her college teachers and eventually decided to join the SDF, in the hope that her career as an officer would someday resemble that of a diplomat. Similarly, when Sekizaki Yoko considered taking the entrance exam at the National Defense Academy, she also had been attracted by the idea of becoming "a kind of diplomat" and had thought she had found her ideal university:

Before I graduated from high school . . . I surprised my teacher by entering "National Defense Academy" in the survey about my future plans. He asked me how I wanted to realize my dream of becoming a diplomat. I said that I would join the SDF, become an officer, and then go into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hoping that I would be posted abroad. I knew then that I would not be able to become an ambassador by taking that route, but I could get pretty close to something like that. (Sekizaki 1995)

Some female service members see their profession as a step toward pursuing other careers, most often in medicine, which would otherwise demand a substantial financial investment, or in sports, which requires much training and competition time. As female Private First Class Teruoka Itsuko pointed out,

being a service member worked well with her amateur soccer career, which involved a lot of practice and frequent games on weekends. As Elise Edwards explains in this volume, such practical ideas about career choices are similar to those of young women in other jobs. Even female privates without long-term career aspirations believed that a couple of years in the SDF would provide an opportunity to think about what they really wanted to do with their lives while not wasting time on odd jobs. A twenty-seven-year-old woman from Tokyo, for instance, remembered that her mother had imagined that she would acquire all kinds of qualifications and take the public service exam (kokka shiken) while working in and receiving a salary from the SDF.

In addition to the challenge young women expect from and seek in a military career, the expectation of gender equality in the workplace also contributes a great deal to the attractiveness of the SDF. SDF recruitment posters aggressively feed expectations of gender equality and beliefs that women can have a “real career” involving skilled labor and a merit-based promotion system. Women who enlist in the SDF imagine that the military hierarchy will override the gender hierarchy they would undoubtedly encounter in the corporate world. Young and low-ranking female service members imagine this to be true because the SDF are governed by stricter rules than those in other workplaces. They believe that gender will matter less than in a civilian job because rank is ostensibly objectively rewarded and notions of superiority and subordination are integral to military discipline. In short, they see opportunities for advancement based on merit that might not be available elsewhere.

While enlisted service members tend to view their time in the military pragmatically, pursuing an officer’s career requires considerable independence and gives female officers the sense that they are pioneers in a

potentially hostile, masculinist world. Once in the military, the mobility of female service members is subject to more traditional gendered expectations through a combination of assigned tasks and the dynamics of power relations. They cope with these pressures by negotiating the contradiction between soldierhood and womanhood in various ways: by making it known to their peers that they are committed to performing the same tasks as men; by accepting or fighting the trivialization of gender discrimination and sexual harassment; and by selectively rejecting or embracing the rules of conventional femininity.

Female service members like to insist that, in their everyday lives, they first consider themselves to be service members of a certain rank in a specific regiment and unit. When asked about gender differences and instances of discriminatory treatment, Captain Okura, for instance, held tightly to her conviction that the SDF were not ordered in gender terms. Okura saw herself caught in a quandary that is common to female soldiers who trivialize gender discrimination and sexual harassment: if she were to act hurt or annoyed by how she is treated, she would confirm the very discourse that defines her as weak and vulnerable.

Trivializing such incidents, then, is a strategy for preventing the aggressively marginalizing effect of gender discrimination and sexual harassment from fully unfolding. Moreover, if female service members like Okura had a clear understanding of themselves as victims of sexual aggression, they would position themselves within a discourse of victimization. In their eyes, victims are defenseless and vulnerable and have no place in the armed forces, who are the defenders of the weak. Upon further reflection, Okura conceded that if one defined as a feminist a woman who pursues her career “just like a man would,” then perhaps she might be one. It is important to note here, however, that Okura and her female peers believed that women who act victimized

would not be accepted as equals in the armed forces.

Thus there is an intrinsic contradiction between discourses of women as victims and their participation in the armed forces as full members. The trivialization of gender discrimination and sexual harassment serves as a mechanism for silencing its victims (Sasson-Levy 2003: 93). But that mechanism has recently become more porous, leading to forced retirement or the firing of male perpetrators.

Sexual harassment, however, is only the most visible barrier to female service members' pursuit of mobility via and within the SDF. Female service members also describe how their daily routines are frequently disrupted by the solidly institutionalized belief that women are physically weaker than men and hurt the overall performance of a unit. Arguing against this widespread belief, Tamura Satomi emphasizes the decreasing importance of physical prowess for many military specialties. From her perspective as a Marine Self-Defense Force underwater maintenance specialist, an enormous achievement in the branch of service most notorious for its informal exclusion of women, she said:

Men think it's a big deal if a woman joins an all-men group, but it isn't really. Once you are in the water, there is no difference between men and women. Once you dive, it gets dark and you cannot see much. That can be scary and you have to get used to it. (Nogan 2002: 37-39)

Initially, Tamura had been frustrated by her lack of physical strength, and she realized that she would have to work much harder than her male peers. Yet at some point, she recalled, she made the decision to succeed. Her line of work, she said, required mental in addition to

physical strength.

Some female service members felt that they were treated equally or even better than men. They believed that their commanders were sometimes nicer to them because they considered them to be "just girls" and thus somewhat less than full service members. Thus, while the pay scale is the same for men and women, these hurdles tied to convention slow down female service members' professional mobility within the SDF. Discriminatory treatment typically was perceived in positive terms among women who did not plan to have long-term careers within the SDF. Private Kawasaki Mizue, who had been training in the artillery corps, by contrast, had mixed feelings about getting a break because she was a woman:

Even though I tried to do my work as best as I could, my commanders never reprimanded me or pushed me to work harder. It was obvious that they thought whatever I am capable of doing would be fine because I am just a girl, after all. (uno! 1997: 163)

In addition to being marginalized within the military, female service members feel that their professional and social mobility is impeded by and their careers measured against social conventions that promote women's main goals as being wives and mothers. This is evident in remarks parents have made about their daughters joining the SDF. By and large, female officers' families are rarely supportive of their daughters' decision to pursue long-term careers in the military. Two concerns dominate their perspectives. Some parents fear their daughters would be "totally taken away by the SDF and become entirely different people." Others worry primarily about the dangers of military training and handling heavy weaponry and machinery. Mothers of female

officer candidates and officers, in particular, worry that their daughters' professions will harm their chances to start a family, render them less marriageable, or contribute in other ways to their not having children.

Off base, workingwomen are expected to be attentive mothers and efficient housekeepers, mostly without much help from their male partners. Even though the national average age for first marriages is increasing in Japan and more men and women remain childless, parents of many female officers still imagine the bourgeois nuclear family to be the center of a woman's life, as Major Matsubara Eri's experience indicates:

On top of the really tough basic training and the officer's training thereafter, in addition to all the uncomfortable situations that came about because of my being always the only female officer in the cafeteria, among the troops, in the classroom, and in the field—along with all this, I had to deal with my mother's negative attitude. My mother was against my military career and did not get tired of pushing me to take a year off and try the exam for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs again. I know that, even now that she sees my success, she still is against my officer's career, even though she has stopped saying so. I guess she has resigned herself to the fact that this is my work now. Recently, however, she asked me to at least marry a civilian.

Female service members had differing opinions about whether it is better to marry military or civilian men, but they all agreed that, once inside the SDF, they no longer have many opportunities to meet, let alone date, men on

the outside. Some had never had a civilian boyfriend. Most female privates left no doubt that they planned to marry at some point, and those plans also were informed by pragmatic considerations about the kinds of lives they wanted to lead. They imagined that, in addition to a sense of stability and security, marriage would offer an escape from dormitory life on base and provide some individual freedom. They preferred the privacy of an apartment to group life on base, where they share a room with up to five other women.

One female service member said that she wanted to continue working after marriage and that she would remain single until she found a man who accepted her professional aspirations. Others saw their future husbands as enabling them to become stay-at-home mothers and wives. The fact that female service members, especially officers, tend to be in relationships with male service members often causes them to sever their social ties to civilian friends and communities more readily than they think their male peers do.

Major Kajimoto Masako, for instance, recalled that her parents relentlessly pushed her to marry and have children. Even though at that time, she said she had no desire to start a family, she eventually resigned, married a fellow officer, and had two children. Her assessment of that decision was—rather typically for female service members—pragmatic rather than romantically determined: “He is a good enough man, but I would not have married him if my parents had not insisted that they might die soon and that they wanted to see a grandchild before they did so. They are still alive and well. I feel that they robbed me of my career.” In Kajimoto's mind, her parents had acted selfishly. Her parents' preoccupation with grandchildren and perhaps Kajimoto's proper social place as a married woman and mother had, in her estimation, put an end to her shot at a real career and the social and class mobility that she had imagined

would come with it.

In these ways, pressures from the ranks of SDF superiors and peers match the concerns of parents and the community about the conflict between women's pursuit of a military career and the social expectation that mature womanhood should lead to motherhood. For officers, there is an additional kind of mobility that has a tendency to run counter to achieving mainstream womanhood and motherhood. Every two or three years, officers are transferred all over Japan and occasionally abroad, wherever Japan maintains embassies. As I explain in the next section, the SDF's public relations and recruitment apparatus fully exploits the very paradox made up of individual female service members' modern mobility and the uniformed conformity of the institution for which they labor.

“Please Bring a Big Dream Along”: SDF Recruitment and Public Relations Materials

The public relations and recruitment apparatus of the SDF taps into the desire for professional and social mobility voiced by female soldiers by dramatically over-representing women in their materials. I have described this feature elsewhere as being designed to deemphasize the masculine and potentially violent character of the SDF (Frühstück 2007b: 86-114). Here, I want to make a different point: other contributions to this volume emphasize that flight attendants, tour bus guides, and elevator girls help make new, modern technologies such as planes, tour buses, and department store elevators less frightening to users, both by virtue of their female and ultra-feminine appearance and by taking on the machinelike character of the vehicles on which they work. The women portrayed in SDF materials, by contrast, rarely appear with (war) technologies. Instead, their bodies stand for what cannot be shown: weaponry. The SDF refrains from establishing or exploiting the combined erotic

potential of women and guns.

On SDF posters, leaflets, and other advertisements, cute little dogs say, “As for me, I love peace!” (Boku datte, heiwa ga daisuki!). Models call out in English, “Peace[ful] People [of] Japan, Come On!” Uniformed office workers suggest, “Please bring a big dream along” (Okina yume o hitotsu motte kite kudasai). Uniformed mechanics proceed “Step by Step” (in English) in order to become “Shining people at a workplace of which one can be proud” (hokoreru shokuba de, kagayaku hito). Next to a picture of a member of the Air Self-Defense Force, which covers half of the poster, is the slogan “Believe. Turn toward a steady dream” (Kawaranu yume ni mukatte). The erotic potential of a female body in uniform is evoked in a twofold manner: by using uniformed women who are not soldiers and by stripping female service members of their uniforms.



Service members depicted in an Air Self-Defense Force brochure of 2007.

Almost all of the women depicted are professional models or celebrities (tarento). For example, the woman proclaiming “Peace[ful] People [of] Japan, Come On!” is the extremely proper and cheerful-seeming Kamon Yoko (the phrase “come on” of the slogan is a word play on her last name), who is known for her anime theme songs. Dressed in a white T-shirt and wearing a ponytail, Kamon is most likely a nod to a younger, hipper crowd who might enlist but is much more likely to just embrace SDF figurines and paraphernalia, as they would other popular cultural icons. Toying with the uniform—sometimes the model is wearing a uniform, sometimes not—turns the female body into a malleable surface onto which the SDF can inscribe its desire for attracting “normal/ordinary people.” Once she is a female

service member, then again just a girl in uniform.

Female service members’ not quite secured grown-up status within the SDF is further conveyed in recruitment and public relations materials, including a video clip produced for the Maritime Self-Defense Force. The video opens with a group of men in sailor uniforms onboard a ship, dancing in formation to the tune of “Y.M.C.A.” The lyrics are as follows:

We have seamanship, seamanship,
seamanship for love!

We have seamanship, seamanship,
seamanship for peace! [in English]
Japan is beautiful.

Peace is beautiful.

The Maritime Self-Defense Force.
[in Japanese]

—Maritime Self-Defense Force 2005

When they sing “Japan is beautiful” (“Nihon ga kirei”), the camera moves away from the uniformed dancing men and zooms in on the face of a girl, perhaps around age thirteen, who, like many female high-school students, is also clad in a sailor uniform. She smiles and salutes (a combination that violates the rules of proper conduct in the SDF) while Japan’s national flag fills the entire background. Similar to the frequent depiction of Japan as female and feminine, a phenomenon that Yano’s chapter in this volume addresses, Japan is depicted here as a woman, too. Yet in this Maritime Self-Defense Force video clip, Japan is both feminized and infantilized. While the SDF’s public relations apparatus extensively and frequently shows female soldiers to promote the image of the armed forces as supporting women, popular media appear distinctly more conflicted regarding women’s

representation in the military.

“Cannon Ball Beauties”: Female service Members in the Popular Media

Female service members have not been widely reported on by magazines and other popular media in part because of the SDF’s precarious constitutional status. Only rarely have representations of female soldiers appeared since the attempts in the 1970s to enlist women other than nurses in the military. These representations almost always take aesthetic and narrative clues from the casually sexist tabloid depictions of female bodies that are conspicuous in Japan’s mass media. Articles on female service members, police women, and women in similar traditionally male-dominated professions emphasize their exceptional choice of workplace. At the same time, however, they quite literally strip them of their exceptionality by visually representing them in sexually provocative poses, thus reintroducing a measure of conventionality into the narrative and containing the transgressive character of these women’s career choices.

Seamanship for Love, Seamanship for Peace

For instance, an article entitled “Eight female service members of the SDF” (Jieitai josei taiin hachi-nin) (Shukan gendai 1990) includes photographs of enlisted service members clad in swimsuits and crawling provocatively on leopard print scarves. Private Sato Terumi, for example, looks longingly up at the reader. Her profile specifies that she is twenty years old, 153 centimeters tall, and has a waist of fifty-seven centimeters. The author acknowledges, as if relieved, that she is an “ordinary” girl who likes to go to Shibuya and Tokyo Disneyland with her boyfriend. In the SDF, she felt she had found the right atmosphere “to test her limits” but was bothered by “the lack of private time.” To the question of what she likes to do most, she replied, “doing nothing and going to a spa.”

One does not learn anything about Sato’s unusual work, the supposed reason for this illustrated article (Shukan gendai 1990). The article also includes smaller photographs of women in uniform to illustrate that “nobody would believe that these bodies in swimsuits belong to the same women as those in combat uniforms” (Shukan gendai 1990). Reminiscent of the interwar modern girls, the trivializing and sexualizing of military women are accomplished through clothing—conventional fashion in the first case, a military uniform in the latter.

Other popular weekly and monthly sports and scandal magazines marketed to men also reduce female soldiers to their physical features—height, weight, waist measurement, and age—and their social status. Such media emphasize sexual availability rather than professional qualities. Titles include “95 women to watch: The beauty with real strength—Kawaue Hitomi” (95-nen kakukai chumoku no josei: Jitsuryoku no bijo, Kawaue Hitomi, Shukan hoseki 1995); “I want to meet the heroines of the sky” (Sora no hiroin ni aitai, Flash 2003a); “‘Top gun’ . . . This is how beautiful Japan’s first female instructor is” (‘Toppu gan’ . . . Nihon hatsu josei kyokan wa konna ni bijin, Flash 2003b); “War and peace of nine beautiful female service members: My case study” (Bijin Jieikan 9-nin no arasoï to heiwa, watashi no baai, Sapio 1996); and “Take a ‘cannon ball beauty’ as a wife” (Nyobo ni suru nara ‘tetsuwan bijo’! Scholar 2002).

In “A former female SDF member reveals it all through hair nudes: Sex in the SDF” (Moto fujin Jieikan ga hea nudo de kataru: Jieitai no sei), published in a 1999 issue of Shukan gendai, Private Sato Yuka is shown in two photographs. In one, she is poker-faced and saluting in uniform, and in the other she smiles flirtatiously and is dressed in kimono with her hair artfully done (Shukan gendai 1999). According to her profile, Sato, who belonged to the Ground SelfDefense Force and worked on a

base in Kumamoto, is 159 centimeters tall, and weighs fifty-two kilograms. She counts music, flower arrangement, kendo, and calligraphy among her hobbies. Her boyfriend is also a service member.

She says she joined the SDF because she “wanted to challenge herself under difficult conditions” instead of becoming just another clerical worker. When asked whether she was proud of representing a profession whose purpose is “to contribute to Japan’s security,” she responded that she was not quite sure what that meant. She did, however, appreciate the gratitude that SDF troops encountered during and after disaster relief missions, clearly her only experience and, perhaps, vision of the SDF on a mission (Shukan gendai 1999). When asked by Shukan gendai which weapon she would like to try, Sato responded that she was most interested in driving a tank. However, she could not think of a military role model. All of the other twelve short portraits show female service members between the ages of nineteen and thirty-four.

All of the women are featured in two photographs. Smaller photographs show them dressed in camouflage fatigues and saluting or pointing machine guns at the reader. In larger ones, they pose in bikinis, gym clothes, or mainstream casual clothes.

Female soldiers have been depicted similarly in other print media. The small publishing company Ikarosu has launched efforts to appeal to fans of anime and manga. In 2011, Ikarosu published the first-ever Female Service Members 2012 Calendar (Josei Jieikan 2012 karenda), a medium otherwise reserved for tarento and other women in entertainment, as well as photo books with more aggressively sexualized messages about female service members. Ikarosu publishes the monthly magazine *Hyper Beautiful Girl-Type Military Magazine* (Haipa bishojokei miritari magajin), along with the book series *Moe yo!* (Longing!).

These are aggressive attempts to employ the language of anime and the digital world in order to attract a younger audience that can no longer be reached with the kinds of magazine articles I described above.

By the same token, this foray into new markets might be an indicator of the further mainstreaming of female soldiers due to their increased media exposure in connection with recent disaster relief efforts. Volume titles include *Army School* (Rikuji gakko), *Tank School* (Sensha gakko), *Tank School, II* (Sensha gakko II), *Surprise! A Introduction to an Imperial Army Full of Girls* (Dokki! Shojo darake no Teikoku Rikugun nyumon), *First Love Combined Fleet* (Hatsukoi rengo kantai), and *Poisonous War* (Dokusosen). Each is by a different author and illustrator. The book series combines considerably detailed descriptions of military matters with black-and-white illustrations and glossy color images of girls with guns, tanks, and other military equipment in suggestive poses.

The depicted female service members are cute and scary, big-bosomed, and scantily dressed; they purse their lips and look daringly at the reader; and some invite a peek up their skirts at their underpants. The sexualization and “pornification” of female bodies is ubiquitous in Japanese popular culture (Napier 2005; Allison 2000). Manifestations of what Dick Hebdige (2008: 40) has termed “sado-cute” include the “sub-teen craze for time-travel (especially time reversal), soft-porn, sci-fi, and sorcery animanga [anime and manga] narratives and video games; pedophilic loli-com (Lolita complex) fashions, model kits, and signage [. . .].” It is important to highlight that this sexualization and pornification has only now begin to embrace the bodies of female service members.

The term “moe” in the series title is often used to indicate the affectionate longing for two-dimensional characters, or, more accurately, to

refer to an internalized emotional response to something, generally with no hope of reciprocation. In discussions about the cultural significance of anime in Japan, the idea of moe is also associated with larger questions about the ways fans relate to virtual characters and worlds, and in turn about the power of media producers over consumers (Condry 2011). Whose longing is it and for what? Women longing for the power of a gun? Male readers longing for the depicted girls? The SDF longing for more recruits? All of the above? Or, perhaps the “normalization” of the SDF via the mainstreaming of their female service members?

Beyond the question of who might be the object of longing, it is important to note that Moe yo! and similar publications for male and female readers mark a departure from the previously rather cold reception by the producers of popular culture of the SDF and its members. With very few exceptions, the most prominent of which was the Godzilla film series, and in stark contrast to their response in wartime Japan (Frühstück 2007a), the producers of postwar popular culture have rarely depicted the Self-Defense Forces, and when they did, it was hardly ever in a positive light. Hence, Moe yo! represents a recent interest of the Japanese popular cultural industry in the SDF. It is as if the makers of popular media have suddenly discovered the power of the mix of Japanese popular culture and Japanese military figures, at least as long as those come in the shape of what Anne Allison (2006) has referred to as “millennial monsters.” It remains to be seen whether this new aesthetic will result in more young female recruits or just feed the old impulse to trivialize women who aspire to pursue social and class mobility, transgress gender boundaries, and explore new segments of the labor market.



Female service member on the cover of Tamura Naoya and Nogami Takeshi Moe yo! Rikuji gakko (It’s Moe! The SDF school), 2008, Ikarosu shuppan.

The SDF on the Go

Female service members, especially officers, embody a challenge to conventional notions of womanhood similar to that articulated by some young women during the early twentieth century. They self-consciously experience the social obstacles to the pursuit of their careers, ranging from the pressure to marry and devote themselves to household and family to the underestimation of their ability to pursue professional careers. Quite in contrast to Silverberg’s modern girl militants, however, female service members do not just embody the challenge to conventional notions of womanhood. They do so within one of Japan’s most conservative institutions, the armed

forces. Their militancy is encased in the military uniforms they wear, which signal alignment with state objectives.

Who are those young women who shunned some of the most persistent social conventions of contemporary Japan and overcame their families' pronounced objection to their choice to pursue class and professional mobility, individuality, and gender equality by laboring for an arm of the state that has traditionally suppressed and negated such aspirations? Young female service members "on the go" appear determined and conscious of their choice to transgress social norms. They continuously negotiate the tension between their subjectivities as daughters, women, and (potential or actual) mothers and their integration into the armed forces. This tension continuously reconstitutes itself in how they engage the utterances of their parents who fear their "defeminization," their male peers in the SDF who worry about the armed forces' "feminization," the publicly circulating images of the SDF that typically portray them as young women still being formed, and the casually sexualizing and infantilizing representations of themselves in the popular media.

While the militancy that permeates these women's careers and personal lives in many ways mirrors that of some of the more determined modern girls of the early twentieth century, their militarization sets them apart dramatically. After all, the SDF are employed to "defend Japan," be it on domestic or international missions concerned with community building, disaster relief, or peacekeeping. Hence, female soldiers' "uniformization" not only molds them into service members but also provides them with a multifaceted geographic and class mobility.

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Sabine Frühstück, Professor of Modern Japanese Cultural Studies Department of East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies University of California, Santa Barbara, is interested in the historical and sociological study of modern and contemporary Japanese culture and society, including problems of power/knowledge, gender/sexuality, and military/society. She is the author of [Uneasy Warriors: Gender, Memory and Popular Culture in the Japanese Army](#); [Colonizing Sex: Sexology and Social Control in Modern Japan](#). She is an Asia-Pacific Journal associate. e-mail: fruhstuck@eastasian.ucsb.edu

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Notes

¹ For a complementary perspective, see Sato Fumika, "[A camouflaged military: Japan's Self-Defense Forces and globalized gender mainstreaming.](#)" *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*.

² On the recent turn in the debate about Article 9, see Craig Martin, "[The case against 'revising interpretations' of the Japanese constitution.](#)" *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*.

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