

No More Heroes: Militarized Masculinity in Twentieth-Century Japan

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Abstract

In 1876 the Japanese government installed an Army Medical Inspector General as the central authority for the physical examination of conscripts, all twenty-year-old men. This move by the Japanese state and, by extension, the imperial armed forces established the notion that membership in the body politic hinged upon true manhood, which then manifested itself only in men who could and were willing to fight. Today's military is no longer tied in with the body politic in the manner of the imperialist state. Members of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces labor in the name of a state that is prohibited from waging war. Thus, manhood and masculinity are no longer intertwined with those military values. Today the military trains for battle so that it would not use those skills, prepares for war so that it would not happen, and ultimately proves its ability if it remains unnecessary. Despite this state of affairs that has characterized more than sixty years of Japan's recent history, the notion remains powerful in international (as well as some domestic) debates about Japan's potential military roles, that full membership in the community of "real men" and full membership in the international community of "normal states" remain contingent upon a military with not only violent capabilities but also the willingness to use them for war-making. In this presentation, I will examine the immediate repercussions of the concern with the normalcy of the Japanese state and its military for individual soldiers, for their sense of what constitutes "normal soldiers" and "real men."



Sabine Frühstück is Professor of Modern Japanese Cultural Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her most recent work includes *Colonizing Sex: Sexology and Social Control in Modern Japan* (2003), *Uneasy Warriors: Gender, Memory and Popular Culture in the Japanese Army* (2007; Japanese transl., *Fuan na heishitachi*, 2008). Frühstück is currently completing a co-edited volume on *Recreating Japanese Men* (with Anne Walthall). She is working on a new book-length project entitled, *Playing War: Childhood and Militarism in the Twentieth Century*.

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