

**Making the Military:
The Hidden Curriculum at Japan's
National Defense Academy**

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Abstract

Recent administrations in Tokyo have significantly elevated the status, budget, and capabilities of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF), leaving behind self-imposed restraints which had come to define the country's postwar defence posture. Government efforts to gather support for this policy departure and to frame the SDF as a trustworthy organisation rooted in the democratic postwar state, however, have been hampered by a subsequent flurry of scandals revolving around allegations of sexual harassment, power abuse, corruption, fraud, and historical revisionism. This dissertation seeks to answer the following research question: If the establishment of the SDF in postwar Japan has been marked by a sharp break from its imperial predecessor and a rigorous system of civilian control, why have recent scandals laid bare an organisational culture that appears to be sharply at odds with the rest of society? To answer this question, this dissertation relies on ethnographic data from 13 months of fieldwork at Japan's National Defense Academy (NDA), a four-year joint military academy under civilian leadership whose graduates constitute roughly a quarter of the SDF's officer corps but dominate its senior leadership. Following students throughout their daily life on campus, this dissertation shows how virtually all of their formative experiences occur outside of the formal classes and training provided by academy employees. Based on the theoretical framework of communities of practice, it shows how the bounded nature of student life at the academy amounts to a powerful socialising force, characterised chiefly by hierarchical and highly ritualised relationships between students. This dissertation argues that this 'hidden curriculum' fosters values that often directly contradict the objectives of the academy's civilian leadership, exposing NDA students to a socialisation which has for decades evaded civilian oversight and influenced precisely those elements of the SDF's organisational culture which recent scandals have problematised.

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Introduction:

Studying the National Defense Academy

At first glance, contemporary Japan may seem like an unlikely candidate for a study on the formation of military culture. In the roughly eight decades since the end of the Asia-Pacific War, Japan has garnered the reputation of an export-oriented economic powerhouse that prizes political stability and prefers to leave armed conflict to others. Its postwar military, the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), has had little exposure to international conflicts and has never participated in combat operations. Critics both at home and abroad have argued that the unusual extent of legal restrictions governing the organisation impedes its effectiveness as a military organisation. Indeed, whether the SDF can or should even be called a military organisation remains a contentious debate in Japan to this day.

When American occupation officials drafted a constitution for a democratic postwar Japan, they famously included an article prohibiting the maintenance of armed forces and the use of force to settle international disputes. Although successive Japanese administrations since the 1950s gradually dismantled the power of this prohibition through exceedingly creative reinterpretation, the article continues to inspire debates about the legitimacy of the SDF and its character and function as a military organisation.

If the de-facto rehabilitation of Japan's military in the Cold War era was characterised above all by its cautious and gradual nature, the changes to national defence policy proposed by administrations in the new millennium have been decidedly more brazen. Most recently, the Kishida administration in 2022 announced a doubling of the country's defence spending, coupled with the acquisition of new long-range missile capabilities. In contrast to the piecemeal approach preferred by previous administrations, both of these propositions blew past self-imposed restraints that had come to define the character of postwar Japan's defence posture.

But while the Kishida administration's announcement captured the media's spotlight for its political boldness, the SDF had already been making headlines for breaking a list of other precedents. Perhaps most prominently, the SDF at the time was well into the process of transforming two helicopter-carrying vessels into aircraft carriers, acquiring a type of weapon system Japan had not operated since the Asia-Pacific War. At the same time, the SDF began participating in a flurry of unprecedented bilateral and

multilateral military exercises: In 2024 the SDF for the first time participated in the United States' Valiant Shield drill, a large-scale military exercise in the Pacific region, conducted fighter aircraft drills with its former ally Germany, and held joint drills with the Philippines in the South China Sea. In a further provocation to China, an SDF destroyer in 2024 for the first time even sailed through the Taiwan Strait.

Beyond the perhaps predictable disapproval that Chinese government officials have expressed over the speed at which Japan has shed the military restraints that have come to define its postwar identity, there have been notable voices of concern even among its closest allies. At the 2023 anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbour, Tulsi Gabbard, who subsequently became U.S. Director of National Intelligence in the second Trump administration, asked in a social media post:

'As we remember Japan's aggression in the Pacific, we need to ask ourselves this question: is the remilitarization of Japan, which is presently underway, truly a good idea? We need to be careful that shortsighted, self-serving leaders do not end up bringing us again face-to-face with a remilitarized Japan' (Gabbard 2023).

But the concerns over the consequences of Japan's remilitarisation were not limited to voices abroad. Domestically, too, the unprecedented increase in the SDF's budget, capabilities, and activities sparked a new intensity of media coverage, carefully documenting each new milestone. Soon, this attention also produced stories that went beyond the information deliberately shared by the SDF's public relations offices, and instead scrutinised the SDF's organisational culture. Newspapers and television broadcasts became ripe with allegations of sexual harassment, power abuse, corruption, defraudation of public funds, historical revisionism, as well as prohibited visits of SDF units to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine.

More than any other story, the case of Rina Gonoï, who was sexually harassed by multiple male colleagues while serving in the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF), gripped the public's attention in 2022. When military authorities refused to respond to her internal allegations, Gonoï successfully took her fight for accountability public, ultimately forcing even the prime minister to acknowledge an inappropriate system of dealing with sexual harassment cases in the SDF. When Gonoï was honoured at a White House ceremony in 2024 for her courage, the image broadcasted around the world was hardly a flattering one for the SDF. Here was the U.S. Secretary of State, presenting an award to a former Japanese soldier for her struggle against the SDF's organisational culture.

At a time when Japan's government decided to break with long-standing precedents to elevate the SDF's standing both domestically and abroad, it seemed that there were significant doubts about the public's ability to place their trust in this organisation. Despite the gradual rehabilitation of Japan's armed forces in the decades since the SDF's establishment, it seemed that the public knew very little about the character of this organisation, and about what was happening behind the fences and walls of its bases.

Although military organisations around the world are often little understood in their respective societies, this information gap is arguably particularly pronounced in Japan. Beyond the obvious instinct of militaries to safeguard information about their capabilities and procedures for national security reasons, scholars note a certain ideological aversion among civilian society, such as among researchers and journalists, to think and talk about military matters. In postwar Japan, such anti-militarist notions received a significant boost when American occupation officials allowed the institution of the emperor to survive, in turn shifting much of the blame for the Asia-Pacific War on the military and its leadership, rather than the head of government. As a consequence, military matters in general as well as the SDF in particular remain subjects that researchers at Japanese universities for the most part shun.

Yet, the combination of the government's momentous elevation of the SDF's status, budget and capabilities on the one side and fresh concerns over the integrity of its leadership on the other present an obvious case for more detailed scholarly inquiry into the SDF. This dissertation seeks to make a contribution by shining a spotlight on the organisational culture among the leadership of this organisation. In particular, it seeks to answer the following question: If the establishment of the SDF in postwar Japan has been marked by a sharp break from its imperial predecessor and a rigorous system of civilian control, why have recent scandals laid bare an organisational culture that appears to be sharply at odds with the rest of society?

To answer this question, this dissertation offers a detailed exploration of the National Defense Academy (NDA), Japan's joint military academy. Directly administered by the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and headed by a civilian president, the NDA is a four-year university-level institution whose graduates go on to serve as officers in all three SDF branches. Although NDA graduates only make up roughly a quarter of the SDF officer corps (the remainder consisting of civilian university graduates, graduates of the National Defense Medical College, and personnel promoted through the ranks; Bōei Handobukku Henshū linkai 2018, 206), they are estimated to make up about 90 percent of the SDF's

generals (Satō 2021, 231). Indeed, a cabinet meeting in 2023 made news when it decided that the Joint Staff's new Chief of Staff would for the first time be an officer who was *not* an NDA graduate (Narusawa 2023). In that way, the NDA's influence over the SDF's organisational culture arguably surpasses that of any other single educational institution. Indeed, the relationships that NDA students¹ form during their time at the academy often become instrumental in their career advancement. Likewise, the way that NDA graduates relate to each other in the forces remains deeply characterised by the nature of their relationship at the academy. In understanding the NDA, therefore, lies the key to understanding the organisational culture of the SDF.

Theory

This dissertation is principally concerned with the way in which NDA students are shaped by the academy. While there is a case to be made for studying how members of the academy can shape or even change the institution, there are several reasons why this study is focussed on the reverse dynamic. First, as stated above, although NDA graduates make up only half of the SDF officer corps, they dominate its leadership. Assuming that those who enrol at the NDA are not inherently more capable than their civilian-educated peers, the academy seems to provide its students with something that later makes an important difference in their career progression. Second, as the ethnographic data presented in the following chapter shows, there has been a remarkable continuity in culture and practices at the academy since its establishment over seven decades ago. At the NDA, maintaining such traditions is considered a virtue in itself, significantly impeding the ability and likelihood of students leaving their own mark on academy life. Third, the strong emphasis placed by military training institutions throughout the world on uniformity and discipline results in a socialisation that is relatively standardised. For students at the NDA, deviation from established norms is not only undesirable, but often considered a rule violation. This does not mean, however, that the outcomes of the resulting socialisation are entirely intentional or even fully under the control of the NDA's administration.

For a holistic understanding of the formative elements of the NDA's socialisation, including those which occur beyond the control of the academy leadership, this

¹ While students at military academies are generally referred to as cadets, in this dissertation they are referred to as students. This is because the Japanese term for cadet (*kanbukōhosei*) is used only for members of the Officer Candidate Schools of the three SDF branches. At the NDA, the term '*gakusei*' is used, reflecting the civilian nature of the academy.

dissertation is based on Lave and Wenger's (1991) framework of communities of practice. In their theoretical treatise on the concept of learning, they shift 'the analytic focus from the individual as learner to learning as participation in the social world' (Ibid., 43). Rather than understanding learning as the process of "receiving" a body of factual knowledge about the world', they conceptualise it as a 'situated activity' that is 'part of social practice' (Ibid., 33; 40). They argue that this reveals how a learning person, such as at an educational institution, is 'transformed into a practitioner [...], whose changing knowledge, skill, and discourse are part of a developing identity'. In that sense, situated learning is 'not itself an educational form, much less a pedagogical strategy or a teaching technique', but the socialisation which occurs among members of a community of practice, whether intended or not (Ibid., 40).

To understand the socialisation which occurs among members of the NDA's community of practice, then, it is necessary to look at campus life beyond academic classes and military training. In a study on officer education, Masland and Radway (1957, 170) succinctly pose that an academy's 'intangibles—the traditions, slogans, and unwritten customs—are of more significance than [its] formal programs'. In the same vein, Philip Jackson (1968), writing about life in school classrooms, is credited with coining the term 'hidden curriculum' to argue that the socialisation students are subjected to at an educational institution amounts to more than just the sum of its formal curriculum. He argues that it also includes a variety of implicit lessons, whether created intentionally or not, which 'collectively form a hidden curriculum which each student (and teacher) must master if he is to make his way satisfactorily through the school' (Ibid., 33).

The nature of the NDA's student body as a bounded community, whose members are restricted from leaving campus for most of their four years, makes the need for students to navigate the hidden curriculum all the more relevant. Because students not only work at the academy, but also eat, sleep, and spend almost all of their free time there, there is virtually no room for them to escape the dynamics that shape the NDA's hidden curriculum. Ethnographic fieldwork through participant observation, therefore, presents the most effective method to capture the making of a future officer at a military academy in all its complexity, including 'the intangibles' that make up its hidden curriculum.

Methodology

This dissertation relies on data collected throughout roughly 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork at the academy to explore its socialisation of future SDF officers. Given the secrecy in which military institutions are often shrouded, researchers note that such ethnographic data is generally difficult to obtain. Indeed, this marks the first time participant observation was permitted at the NDA.

Even if the NDA is officially a civilian institution and does not employ the same level of security measures as an SDF base, public access to the academy is still prohibitively restricted. The campus is surrounded by walls, fences and gates, guarded by around-the-clock security staff, and monitored by an elaborate surveillance system. Only members of the academy are able to pass its gates, and pre-registered visitors with invitation must be accompanied by members at all times. Beyond the desire to control the flow of information, these restrictions also have a safety rationale. Inside the NDA's buildings there are rifles stored for each enrolled student as well as live ammunition, which is regularly made use of on the NDA's own shooting range.

All research on site regarding the academy, including short surveys and interviews, requires prior permission from the academy administration. While permission for such research has been granted in the past, there are also instances of requests which have been denied based on national security concerns. Reflecting the elusiveness of what constitutes a national security concern, former administration members recalled that beyond the specific content of a request for permission to research, even the researcher's nationality can play a role.

In the effort to obtain permission for this particular research project, two avenues proved unsuccessful before permission was finally granted on the third try. The first two avenues, seeking permission to conduct ethnographic research through affiliation as an exchange student and as a visiting researcher respectively, were unsuccessful because the University of Oxford is not a military academy in the case of the former, and because of my status as a graduate student in the case of the latter. The category of affiliation sought on the third try, as a cooperating researcher (*kyōdō kenkyū-in*), ultimately proved successful. Despite the seemingly bureaucratic nature of the process to gain permission for this research, particularly in the case of the procedural distinctions between the categories of affiliation, the variable which ultimately proved most important in obtaining this permission was the network of support for the application within the academy.

Having gained access through affiliation as a cooperating researcher for a duration of two years, I ended up spending roughly 13 months at the academy. This allowed me to

witness an entire cycle of the NDA's annual calendar and virtually all of the elements that shape the four years that students spend there. With the exception of four weeks during the academy's summer holidays, I spent almost every single weekday at the NDA, in addition to more than a dozen days on weekends when opportunities to witness special (or not so special) occasions arose.

Making use of my network among NDA instructors, I began my fieldwork focussing on the formal curriculum, consisting of academic and military training. Throughout my time at the NDA I participated in about three dozen academic classes that spanned from international relations, public policy, history, and administrative law, to engineering, military strategy, English language, as well as content and language classes for the NDA's exchange students from foreign militaries. I also followed students during their basic military training on and around campus, ranging from shooting practice, gun maintenance, and marching training, to swimming lessons in pools and the ocean, rowing, sailing and navigation practice on sea and land. I also participated in training sessions off campus, on a proving ground and multiple military bases. After my thirteen months at the academy, I had joined students for just about all the experiences that eventually constitute the memories which graduates have of their formal training at the academy: I joined students for dissertation supervision sessions with their professors, tagged along for seminar-level excursions, climbed Mt. Fuji with a company of first-year students, camped in a tent and held night watch in a self-dug hole at an SDF proving ground, sailed around the Miura peninsula with a group of third-year students preparing to enter the Marine Self-Defence Force (MSDF), and flew on an Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) transport plane without windows to a military base on Iwo Jima, where we explored the beaches and crawled through the narrow caves in which imperial forces fought and died during the final days of the Asia-Pacific War.

Having established connections with students during formal training, I also began participating in the students' daily life and informal events at the academy, gradually learning about the importance of the hidden curriculum. Because students are not allowed to leave campus during weekdays, and often choose to spend their weekends and even holidays on campus, daily life on campus plays an extraordinarily formative role for the students. Indeed, virtually the entire lives of students play out within the confines of the campus, and the social world of the academy becomes the main lens through which students see and interpret the world around them. As conceptualised by Jackson, the academic classes and military training turned out to make up only a small fraction of this social world.

To grasp the full extent of the hidden curriculum, therefore, I started shadowing students around the clock. Although initially told by the administration that I could only enter the student barracks (*gakuseisha*) occasionally and with a student escort, the combination of connections among both students and senior uniformed staff ultimately paved the way for me to move freely in the student barracks during the second half of the year. Ultimately, I was even allowed to live and sleep there, which I did for a period of two weeks. I shadowed students during morning roll call and daily chores, joined them in the dining hall for all three meals of the day, entered the bath house with the students, sat at my own table among the students during self-study time, and slept in the dormitories, listening as quiet chatter turned into peaceful snoring after lights-out. I also joined and visited about a dozen of the students' mandatory athletic and culture clubs, as well as half a dozen voluntary interest societies, ranging from the tea making society to the English speaking society.

I also joined countless informal events which make up student life at the academy. These are established academy traditions passed down by each cohort and generally occur entirely without (or with only rudimentary) guidance, funds, and oversight by the academy administration. As part of these events, I marched 65 kilometres through the night with a squad of students from the NDA campus in Yokosuka to the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, I watched six students incur nose bleeds within two minutes during a practice run for a notoriously violent and all-male competition passed down from the days of the Imperial Navy, and locked arms in layers of circles with a hundred students dancing and singing in the rain as part of an annual initiation ceremony.

Perhaps most importantly, to observe the more mundane moments of life at the academy and to become a trusted member of the community, I spent hundreds of hours simply talking to students, uniformed and civilian instructors, as well as administrative staff. These conversations ranged from scheduled semi-formal interviews in offices, laboratories, cafeterias, study rooms in the library, and common spaces of the student barracks, to leisurely outings at cafes, restaurants, izakayas, karaoke bars, and hot spring pools. In the process, I also become acquainted with several partners, parents, siblings, and children of academy members, and watched students and staff interact with the world outside the academy gates. I saw students joking with train station staff about the similarity of their uniforms, exchange curious stares with night workers posted outside bars in red light districts, and get cheered on by a group of enthusiastic elderly women during a training run along the coastline of the Miura peninsula.

Because the number of people who in one form or another claim membership in the NDA ranges in the thousands, the extent to which the purpose of this research and the format of the resulting publications could be explained to study participants varied significantly. It would have been neither effective nor possible to distribute written information and consent forms to all students and staff who became participants in this study purely by virtue of their momentary proximity to me. I therefore decided to approach the effort to share information about my research in two tiers, concerning the administration and students respectively.

First, to ensure transparency with the academy administration, I submitted a detailed research proposal as part of my affiliation request, outlining my plans for the ethnographic fieldwork, my research agenda and approach, ethical considerations, and the format of anticipated publications. As part of the requirements of affiliation as a cooperating researcher, I agreed to share any pictures or publications resulting from my work at the academy with the administration before making them public.

Second, to provide transparency as best as possible with the students, I provided a detailed oral explanation about my research to all students with whom I interacted for extended periods of time. In particular, this included all students with whom I conducted private interviews, as well as the students who volunteered to host me in their rooms and let me accompany them during their daily life in the student barracks. Beyond these extended interactions, I introduced myself and my research at countless occasions in front of larger groups of students, such as in classrooms, during military training, in sports clubs, and during informal events in which I participated. At around the midpoint of my fieldwork, I noticed that a majority of the students had at some point or another heard my self-introduction or knew about my research from instructors or other students.

Throughout my fieldwork, the extent to which I was able to become a member of the community I was studying was both limited and aided by the various elements of my positionality. Although the NDA employs a handful of non-Japanese citizens as part-time English language instructors, most of the time I was the only non-Japanese citizen in the room. Particularly in the student barracks and in military training, I stood out not only because of my ethnicity, but also because I lacked a military uniform. Both in terms of affiliation and age, I occupied a hybrid status between the students and employees. Even if I was enrolled as a student at the University of Oxford, at the academy I was affiliated as a researcher (*kenkyū-in*, as opposed to the *kenkyū-sei* status of the NDA's graduate students). Accordingly, students generally felt obligated to salute me upon meeting me for the first time, particularly when they moved in groups. But after a few days in the student

barracks, and after repeated assurances that salutes or formal language were not necessary, many students started treating me as a fellow student. This hybrid social status proved fortuitous. On the one hand, uniformed and civilian employees of the NDA afforded me enough attention and respect as a researcher to grant me interviews and unprecedented access to the various physical and social locations under their purview. On the other hand, students let me participate in the informal world of the hidden curriculum, sharing even information which they zealously kept from employees of the academy. In short, this hybrid social status enabled a unique exploration of the NDA's hidden curriculum which subsequently became the base of this dissertation.

Findings

The ethnographic data presented in this dissertation shows that virtually all of the crucial experiences that constitute the socialisation of future SDF officers at the NDA occur outside of its formal curriculum. In other words, rather than the time spent in academic classes and military training, life on campus is characterised by the moments before the morning roll call, during lunch time, and in the bath house. The socialisation students are exposed to during these moments feeds into an organisational culture that is largely separate from, and often in direct contradiction to, the values taught and emphasised in the formal curriculum.

In this dissertation, the NDA's hidden curriculum is conceptualised as the institutionalised socialisation of students which the academy's leadership, particularly its civilian members who are not academy graduates themselves, does not directly control and is for the most part unaware of. Unlike the formal curriculum, which is designed and administered by employees, the hidden curriculum is dominated by the relationships between students themselves.

Although these inter-student relationships are conceptualised in this dissertation as an informal socialisation component, this does not mean that its formative power is not recognised as an integral part of the institution by administration officials. Quite the contrary, officials narrate the student barracks (*gakuseisha*) as one of the three pillars (*sanbonbashira*) that make up the formative elements of student life at the NDA. The other two pillars in this concept are academic education and military training (*kyōiku - kunren*), which consist of the education and training provided by uniformed and civilian instructors, and student clubs (*kōyūkai*), which consist mostly of athletic clubs. As one of the three pillars of student life at the NDA, life in the student barracks is recognised as a both

legitimate and necessary component of the academy's socialisation program, even as its particularities are largely unknown to the vast majority of employees and outside of their direct control. Indeed, the NDA leadership believes that the whole point of the student barracks as an educational component is that students assume responsibility and obtain leadership skills by governing themselves (a virtue referred to at the NDA as *jishu jiritsu*).

Regardless of the insistence among administration officials that students have the power to shape life in the student barracks themselves, however, in practice this life is highly ritualised and characterised by a remarkable degree of continuity over decades. Reminded routinely by academy officials and uniformed instructors that passing on traditions (*dentō no keishō*) is a crucial element of an effective military organisation, students quickly internalise that maintaining life in the student barracks precisely the way they inherited it from their senior students is a virtue in itself. Even if life in the student barracks is considered in this dissertation to be part of the NDA's hidden curriculum, then, the lessons students learn here constitute an officially sanctioned, relatively constant, institutionalised socialisation.

The central argument of this dissertation is that the socialisation NDA students are exposed to in the student barracks fosters a set of values that often directly contradict the lessons conveyed by uniformed and civilian employees during formal military training and academic classes. For example, the formal curriculum seeks to instil the following core ideas among students: First, fundamentally, the SDF is a workplace like any other. All members of the organisation must treat their colleagues with respect, and physical violence or other forms of coercion between members of the organisation are never tolerated. Second, a successful NDA graduate and future SDF officer is characterised above all by knowledge and skill. Students should therefore use their time at the NDA to focus on learning and reading widely to broaden their horizons, and to pick up specific skills that will be useful in their future careers. Third, the SDF does not discriminate between men and women. All members of the organisation are judged by their performance and can fulfil their occupation regardless of their gender. Fourth, the SDF is a creation of democratic postwar Japan and as such differs fundamentally in its identity and mission from the preceding imperial military. It is part of an SDF officer's responsibility to comprehend and reflect about how the undemocratic and expansionist excesses of the imperial military endangered, rather than safeguarded, the military security of Japan.

The lessons imparted by the academy's hidden curriculum, taught primarily (although not exclusively) in the student barracks, contradict the above lessons of the

formal curriculum in almost every possible way: First, as a military organisation, the SDF and its members must accept norms and behaviour that are inherently different from organisations in civilian society. Stress, mental and physical hardship, as well as unconditional subordination to given hierarchies are part of the job description of a military officer and students must prepare for these realities through their training at the NDA. Second, during their four years at the academy, students should spend virtually all of their available time and energy on adapting to the challenging rules and customs of life in the student barracks. Beyond the requirement to pass mandatory credits, performance in academic classes is largely inconsequential both for life at the academy and students' future careers as SDF officers. Likewise, once graduates join their specific branch as officer candidates, they receive the same military training as officer candidates who graduated from civilian universities, essentially rendering the NDA's military training dispensable. Third, although the NDA accepts a limited number of female students each year, there are some important ways in which women are inherently unable to fulfil the role of the ideal SDF officer, simply because of their gender. Beyond the physical attributes and abilities that correlate with gender, this relates primarily to ideas concerning the woman's social position and responsibilities in the wider society. Ultimately, the NDA student and the SDF officer are strongly gendered and associated primarily with masculinity. Fourth, even if the SDF is formally a separate organisation, it is the legitimate successor organisation of the preceding imperial military forces. Through keeping up traditions, customs and the identity of the imperial military, the SDF can benefit from the imperial military's prowess and continue its mission, which has always been to protect the people of Japan.

In this dissertation, one chapter is designated to each of these four lessons of the NDA's hidden curriculum. Each chapter will present the data to support the characterisation of these four lessons by making use of ethnographic vignette and in-depth analysis of student life at the academy.

The first chapter deals with daily life in the student barracks. Following students throughout their day from the bugle call in the morning to the bugle call at night, this chapter serves to contextualise how students perceive the various elements of life at the NDA and demonstrate the unrivalled formative power of the student barracks vis-a-vis the formal curriculum. It shows how students learn to think about themselves, the way they interact with each other, and about their future profession as officers in the Japanese military. It shows how senior students, through the use of highly ritualised daily life, teach incoming students to accept and submit to a set of norms that they know fully well are

neither accepted in contemporary civilian society, nor in many cases even in the SDF, the organisation which attending the NDA is supposed to prepare them for.

The second chapter details the NDA's formal curriculum, showcasing how the students experience academic classes and military training. In demonstrating the negligible impact which this formal curriculum has on both students' daily life at the academy, as well as on their future career, this chapter shows how students learn which elements of the NDA's socialisation program they must prioritise to successfully navigate through the institution and make their way towards graduation. By extrapolation, it shows how students are taught to think about the characteristics of the ideal military officer and the identity of the SDF's officer corps.

The third chapter focuses on how students learn to gender the concept of the NDA student and, in turn, the SDF officer. By presenting ethnographic data from the annual graduation ball, it illustrates the gender gap that shapes how students experience life at the academy. It also shows how the profession of the military officer is associated with masculinity, in a way that categorically precludes female students from successfully fulfilling the expectations of the academy's informal curriculum.

The fourth chapter details how students at the NDA learn to think about the SDF's role as the successor to the imperial military. Through presenting ethnographic data from the student body's annual visit to the Yasukuni shrine, it shows how students are taught to consider themselves in the same tradition as the men who fought for the imperial military during the Asia-Pacific War. It illustrates how in contrast to the formal curriculum, which emphasises a break from the past and a new SDF identity rooted in the democratic postwar state, the informal curriculum emphasises a revisionist history, as well as continuities between the two organisations in the form of traditions, customs and a shared mission.

Building on the frameworks of communities of practice and the hidden curriculum, this study approaches the topic of the formation of military culture by interrogating how the NDA shapes its students. By painting a picture of the socialisation that students are subjected to at the academy, this study offers an insight into why the leadership of the SDF thinks, speaks, and acts the way it does. In turn, by connecting the socialisation which students are exposed to at the NDA to the recent flurry of scandals inside the SDF, the ethnographic data presented in this dissertation shows how the SDF's organisational culture becomes its own variable in the complicated relationship between the military, civilian society, and the government's defence policy.

The remaining part of this introduction offers an overview of the academic literature on this complicated relationship both in Japan and on a conceptual level. It shows how the SDF emerged from the rubbles of the Asia-Pacific War against the backdrop of constitutional constraints and anti-militarist sentiments in civilian society. It then lays out how the pace of Japan's remilitarisation increased over the past years, and how the resulting journalistic scrutiny uncovered a flurry of scandals that once again threatened to undermine the SDF's rehabilitation in society. Finally, it showcases the theoretical literature on the relationship between the military and civilian society, and what an ethnographic study on the NDA can contribute to it.

Remaking Japan's Military after the Asia-Pacific War

In the wake of Japan's devastating defeat in the Asia Pacific War, American occupation officials and the leaders of Japan's postwar government were faced with a country left in ruins, both physically and ideologically. The military campaigns launched in the 1930s and 1940s that were supposed to expand the control of the Japanese empire, enrich its citizens, and usher in a new Asia under Japan's leadership instead ended up bringing untold violence back to the Japanese homeland. American forces invaded Okinawa, incinerated Japanese cities with devastating air raids, and ushered in a new era of nuclear warfare with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. If the objective of the imperial government had been to ensure the prosperity and security of Japan, its actions amounted to nothing less than catastrophic failure. According to Samuels (2007, 28), this failure applied in particular to the Japanese military, which saw 'its prestige extinguished along with much of Japan's national autonomy'.

Emerging from the American occupation, Japan's postwar leaders found themselves facing the difficult task of formulating a new national security strategy while grappling with heavily diminished financial and industrial capabilities, as well as constitutional restrictions on rearmament imposed by American occupation officials. Most importantly, Article 9 of the new constitution, which took effect in May of 1947, seemed to formally prohibit the Japanese government from maintaining military forces. It read:

'Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.'

In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized' (The Constitution of Japan 1946).

In what later became known as the 'Yoshida doctrine', a group of conservative leaders led by Yoshida Shigeru, who served two stints as prime minister between 1946 and 1954, embraced this wholesale rejection of Japanese military power and advocated for a new national security strategy that tied Japan entirely to the United States. At the heart of this strategy was the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty of 1951, signed in conjunction with the peace treaty that ended the American occupation and effectively guaranteed U.S. protection in the event of an armed attack on Japan. With an American security guarantee, Yoshida and his followers planned that Japan would focus virtually all of its available resources on reviving the civilian economy:

'They rejected military spending in favor of a broader plan for state-led development of the private sector. Burdened by the costs of reconstruction and cut off from promising regional markets by the emerging cold war, theirs was a near single-minded emphasis on the civilian economy. They accepted the unequal alliance with the United States and used it as a shield behind which they could regenerate prosperity. Japan would be a merchant state, not a samurai one' (Samuels 2007, 32).

Even if Yoshida from the outset conceived of the repudiation of a Japanese military force as a temporary measure until Japan regained its economic footing (Yoshida 1961, 97; 146), Japan's rearmament ended up arriving more swiftly than he had anticipated. Although American occupation officials had initially been preoccupied with the democratisation and demilitarisation of their defeated foe, rising tensions with the Soviet Union, Mao Zedong's declaration of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and the outbreak of the Korean war in 1950 prompted them to reconsider postwar Japan as a potential ally against communist forces in the region. When a substantial part of the U.S. troops stationed in Japan were rushed to the Korean peninsula in 1950, General Douglas MacArthur, who headed the American occupation as the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, wanted Japanese troops to fill the gap in Japan. Less than two weeks into the war he sent a note to Yoshida with instructions to 'establish a national police reserve [NPR; *keisatsu yobitai*] of 75,000 men' (Skabelund 2022, 28).

While historians agree that MacArthur's note to Yoshida served as a pivotal moment in Japan's postwar rearmament, there are competing interpretations about

whether the NPR was envisioned as a military force from the start. French (2014, 3) has argued that ‘far from being an American imposed, and unwanted burden, as some have argued, the NPR was enthusiastically received by a Japanese government concerned by the potential unrest’ caused by Japanese communist groups at home. Given these internal security considerations, French argues, the NPR in its early days should not be understood as a military, but rather, as the name suggests, as a police force (Ibid.). This assessment contradicts with Auer (1973) and Skabelund (2022), who argue that the establishment of the NPR was primarily directed at foreign threats from the start, and was therefore always meant to be a military.

The establishment of the NPR in 1950 added further fuel to what had already been a contentious debate among Japanese lawmakers about the specific meaning of the postwar constitution’s Article 9 and whether it recognised the right to self-defence. Based on a draft produced by American occupation officials, the Japanese government in March 1946 submitted its own draft of what later became the constitution to the House of Representatives. In preparation for a diet session in which Prime Minister Yoshida would face lawmakers’ questions about the draft, his administration circulated a document listing expected questions and answers. In this document, the question concerning the right to self-defence was answered as follows: ‘Japan cannot undertake a real war as an exercise of its right of self-defense’, because the article did not ‘recognize Japan’s right to maintain any military forces or the right of the country to engage in war’ (Koseki 1997, 192). When during the session an opposition lawmaker inquired whether it would not be more prudent to only renounce ‘aggressive war’, while still permitting ‘defensive war’, Yoshida dismissed the idea:

‘I think that the very recognition of such a thing (for a State to wage war in legitimate self-defense) is harmful. (applause) It is a notable fact that most modern wars have been waged in the name of the self-defense of States. It seems to me, therefore, that the recognition of the right of self-defense provides the cause for starting a war’ (Koseki 1997, 193).

This position, resulting in a justification of the NPR as an organisation tasked exclusively with internal security, represented the government’s official interpretation of Article 9 only until 1954. Already in 1952, the NPR was renamed to the National Safety Force (*hoantai*) and the responsibility of maintaining security within the country was dropped from its portfolio (Satō 2022, 99). When the National Safety Force was finally renamed in 1954 to

the Self-Defense Forces, the government formulated a new interpretation, arguing that Article 9 did, in fact, allow for self-defense after all (Koseki 1997, 193).

The government's adoption in 1954 of the position that Article 9 should be interpreted to allow the government to engage in self-defense after all, and therefore to maintain armed forces for this purpose, was critically bolstered by a seemingly subtle change made in the process of drafting the constitution by a lawmaker of a diet sub-committee, which subsequently became known as the 'Ashida amendment'. Before this amendment, the initial draft submitted by the government to the diet read as follows:

'War, as a sovereign right of the nation, and the threat or use of force, is forever renounced as a means of settling disputes with other nations.

The maintenance of land, sea, and air forces, as well as war potential, will not be recognized.

The belligerency of the state will not be recognized' (Koseki 1997, 193).

After the amendments made by the diet's sub-committee, however, the second paragraph read: 'In order to achieve the purpose of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces as well as other war potential, will never be maintained' (Koseki 1997, 193). In 1951, after the NPR had been established, but before the government's recognition of the right to self-defence, the lawmaker who proposed this amendment, Ashida Hitoshi, explained that in his eyes, this addition meant that 'the pledge never to maintain war potential is not absolute, but is intended to be limited to aggressive war' (Ibid., 194).

Regardless of Ashida's personal views and plans, and the government's adoption of this view in 1954, the American occupation officials who had authored the draft that became the base for the deliberations in the diet's sub-committee made perfectly clear that they indeed intended for Article 9 to present an absolute prohibition of Japanese armed forces. In a note from MacArthur dated to February 1946, he laid out three principles that he considered essential for a new constitution. The second principle detailed his intention for what became Article 9:

'War as a sovereign right of the nation is abolished. Japan renounces it as an instrumentality for settling its disputes and even for preserving its own security. It relies upon the higher ideals which are now stirring the world for its defense and its protection. No Japanese Army, Navy or Air Force will ever be authorized and no rights of belligerency will ever be conferred upon any Japanese force' (Koseki 1997, 79).

Yoshida's statement in the diet later that year, mirroring MacArthur's position, demonstrates the extent to which the government's official interpretation of Article 9 changed from the promulgation of the constitution in 1946 to the formal establishment of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces in 1954. If citizens of Japan in 1946 thought their country would never again maintain any armed forces, just eight years later the same prime minister officially recognised these forces as a legitimate part of the postwar government.

Historians have argued that the ambiguity which therefore surrounded the establishment of the NPR in 1950, both surrounding its constitutionality and its purpose, appears to have been intentional. According to Skabelund (2022, 30), calling the NPR 'a "police reserve" from the beginning allowed occupation authorities to avoid what was politically unacceptable: violating the constitution that occupation officials themselves had crafted just four years earlier'. To deflect domestic criticism, Skabelund argues, 'Yoshida continued to insist that the reserve was merely a police force and that Japan was not rearming, and when that position became obviously false, his government maintained that it was just an "army without war potential"' (ibid., 31).

Despite the government's remarkably quick reversal, or perhaps because of it, large swaths of the public retained a deep sense of distrust towards the military, or at least the postwar government's ability to control such a military. Indeed, to many political scientists this distrust marks one of the defining characteristics of postwar Japan. Some have argued that this distrust was directed at the entire concept of military organisation, and that public opinion in postwar democratic Japan was therefore characterised by pacifist ideas (Hook 1995; Katzenstein 1996). Pointing to public opinions surveys showing that a majority of the public always saw positive utility in the military for the purpose of territorial defensive, however, others have argued that it is more accurate to characterise these views as anti-militarist instead (Midford 2011).

Either way, the widespread resistance among the Japanese public during the Cold War period towards a larger military footprint, coupled with the existence of the constitution's Article 9, created the narrative of postwar Japan as a 'peaceful' state, which sought to regain its strength through trading with its neighbouring states rather than projecting military power. In 1977 this narrative was formalised in the Fukuda doctrine, enunciated by Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo. Although the government by that time already maintained a military organisation formally tasked with the defence of Japan, Fukuda boasted that Japan's status as a 'great economic power' that rejected the path

towards becoming a 'great military power' was an experiment 'without parallel in history' (Sudō 1992, 153).

The Contested Status of the SDF: Enter the NDA

Despite Fukuda's lofty rhetoric of a postwar Japan that renounced military power, and the fact that a majority of the Japanese public harboured distrust in the government's ability to wield such military power, the existence of the SDF since 1954 meant that the government maintained a de-facto military. The government's colourful interpretation according to which the SDF did not present 'war potential' and was therefore not technically a military failed to convince large swaths of the public. As a consequence, the existence of the SDF was marked from its inception by its contested status.

In interviews, SDF members who served in the organisation's early years recall being called 'tax thieves' (*zeikin dorobō*), 'a disgrace for the generation' (*sedai no chijoku*) and SDF institutions being referred to as 'killer schools' (*hitogoroshi no gakkō*; Satō 2021, 224), reflecting both anti-militarist attitudes among the public, as well as a feeling that it was the military, rather than the government, that deserved blame for the outbreak and course of the war (Skabelund 2022, 2). Even if service members in the new millennium report that such hostilities were a thing of the past, stories of such encounters with civilians throughout the early stages of rearmament still feature prominently in the self-perception of SDF personnel to this day (Frühstück 2007; Satō 2021).

A key point of tension among those who opposed the SDF revolved around the question of continuity with the imperial military forces. In the government's narrative, the gradual re-introduction of a Japanese military organisation under a new name and under civilian oversight demonstrated a clear demarkation from the imperial military of the past. Nevertheless, this new organisation was marked by several important continuities in practice. This was particularly true for Japan's naval forces, which continued its minesweeping operations throughout the entire occupation and until they were formally renamed into the Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDF) in 1954. According to Auer (1973, 5), this meant that there were 'direct linkages between the Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Imperial Navy through activities, organizational continuity, customs, symbols, personnel, and engineering techniques'. In the same vein, Sadō (2006) has noted that, although few in numbers, some former imperial generals and officers continued to serve as liaisons and advisors to the American occupation authorities and postwar Japanese administrations.

To counter the narrative of continuity and to prevent a renaissance of military influence in Japanese politics, American occupation officials and the Yoshida administration sought to minimise the number of former imperial military staff in the ranks of the SDF, especially among its leadership. Initially, therefore, American occupation officials purged all graduates from imperial officer academies, making them ineligible for service in the SDF. But persisting leadership shortages prompted a gradual reversal of such restrictions. At first only a handful of high-level positions were staffed by former imperial military officers, but by 1961 most senior officers in all three branches had previously served in the Imperial Army and Navy in some capacity (Welfield 1988, 371).

The return of former imperial military staff fed back into the worries about the influence of imperial military elements in the postwar SDF. In 1958, Morris warned that while former imperial military personnel were still relatively powerless, they had started to organise in political groups, running for elections, and advancing right-wing and militarist agendas (Morris 1958). Having anticipated this problem, and in order to reduce the postwar military's reliance on former imperial officers, Yoshida had already ordered the establishment of a new officer academy, with the express purpose of developing an officer education that broke with the imperial past (Skabelund 2022).

This new officer academy, initially named the National Safety Academy (*hoan daigakkō*), accepted its first cohort of cadets in April 1953. When the National Safety Forces were renamed into the SDF the next year, the academy, too, was renamed to National Defense Academy (*bōei daigakkō*). Unlike the imperial academies, it was decided that the NDA would have a civilian president, ensuring civilian control, and that it would educate officers for all three branches to prevent a culture of inter-branch rivalries (Kawano 2008).

For the position of the academy's president Yoshida appointed Maki Tomoo, who had previously been a political science professor at Keiō university and had spent time studying abroad at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom. Skabelund (2022, 65; 77) has argued that in his twelve-year tenure as president, Maki 'sought to infuse' the NDA with democratic ideas and practices, declaring that the NDA needed to make 'gentlemen' of the cadets, before they went on to the branch-specific Officer Candidate Schools (OCS) where they learned to be military officers. In a more critical interpretation, Auer (1973, 204) has argued that rather than representing a break from the past, Maki's vision 'sounded a little bit like the former Naval Academy Superintendent Inoue Shigeyoshi', who himself had demanded 'that the study of English be continued during

the war and stating the goal as providing a man with potential to grow as a tree rather than training as an apprentice’.

Like Skabelund, Auer argues that after graduating from the NDA, it was at the OCS where cadets were instilled with the military spirit. At the MSDF, he argues, this was the spirit of the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN), considering that postwar cadets lived in IJN buildings, surrounded by IJN mementoes, and singing IJN songs (Auer 1973). In a functionalist assessment of these continuities, Patalano (2015, 148) argues that the MSDF’s ‘dialogue with the imperial past’ was ‘essential to rebuild its professional standing, both technically and in terms of ethos’. In his narrative, it ‘needed a “soul” to inspire its personnel, and imperial naval traditions and experience were the primary tools used by the [MSDF] to achieve this aim’ (Ibid.). To Patalano, even the tradition of SDF officers visiting the controversial Yasukuni shrine, whose enshrined deities infamously include imperial war criminals, does not represent ‘a political statement about the past’, but merely a ‘part of a complex set of traditions and practices aimed at instilling “a military soul”’ (Ibid., 147). Stressing the variations between branches and educational institutions, however, Patalano sees no such continuities within the NDA. Echoing Maki’s words, he argues that in contrast to the MSDF’s OCS, which ‘transformed [cadets] into naval officers’, at the NDA they ‘were socialised with a strong “civic-oriented” outlook’ (Ibid., 77).

As the years passed, NDA graduates came to replace the retiring former imperial officers. In 1968, only 15 percent of the senior SDF leadership was still occupied by former imperial officers (Welfield 1988, 371). A year earlier, in 1967, the first ten cohorts of NDA cadets had graduated, and now comprised about 10 percent of the SDF’s officers (Skabelund 2022, 107). As their careers advanced, they gradually began to populate even the most senior leadership positions. Although the SDF officer corps also includes a significant amount of officers who were promoted through the ranks or entered the SDF after graduating from the National Defense Medical College or civilian universities, NDA graduates in the present day make up as much as 90 percent of SDF generals (Satō 2021, 231). Indeed, NDA graduates have gained such a dominant status in the SDF that some critics have complained about an over-dependence. Inoki Masamichi, president of the NDA from 1970 to 1982, warned that ‘the complete monopolizing’ of the SDF leadership by graduates of the NDA constituted a too narrow set of experiences and education, and likened this reliance to that of the imperial military on its officer academies (Eldridge 2017). For better or worse, then, Yoshida’s long-term strategy to influence the character of the SDF leadership through the NDA has proven successful. In other words,

to understand the ideological dispositions of the present-day SDF leadership, one must look at the socialisation institutionalised at the NDA.

Under the leadership of then-president Maki, the initial curriculum of the NDA emphasised science over spirit, and was characterised by broad, general and liberal education (Skabelund 2022). A particular focus, however, was placed on engineering (Kawano 2008). While a small number of social sciences and humanities classes were available to students, the emphasis on engineering dominated the NDA's curriculum until a major reform was implemented in 1974. This reform involved a significant boost of the social sciences and humanities, following a growing chorus arguing that future SDF leadership needed to understand and navigate complex political, economic, and social issues (Kawano 2008, 125). In a more cynical reading, the reform also served as a reaction to senior SDF members' complaints that NDA graduates exhibited a poor knowledge of history and of the workings of social phenomena (Ibid., 126).

Concerns about the SDF leadership's knowledge of history, of course, were a sensitive issue given the widespread worries that rearmament might result in a revival of militarism and right-wing ideology. In 1971, when the idea of a curriculum reform was first floated, some cadets who had quit the academy complained of a dominant right-wing culture. One student claimed that about half of the student body consisted of right-wing supporters and sympathisers (Matsuda 1989, 319). In a similar datapoint, a survey of NDA cadets published in 1962 by the academy's own student magazine 'Obaradai' shows that 72,3 percent of respondents felt that Article 9 of the constitution should be subject to revision, a ratio vastly out of step with civilian society at the time (Ibid., 362).

The ideological chasm between NDA students and civilian society was particularly glaring against the backdrop of large-scale anti-militarist protests in the 1960s and early 1970s. These protests came to a head in 1960 when the Japanese government pushed to quickly pass a revised version of the expiring U.S.-Japan Security Treaty in the Diet. Even if Yoshida's view of this treaty as an opportunity to outsource national defence at little cost had become a consensus among subsequent leaders of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, the treaty was deeply unpopular among large swaths of the wider public. Opponents of the treaty felt that an alliance with the U.S. carried the risk of dragging Japan into another war. Amidst the protests, the SDF became a central point of contention.

Days before the government passed the revised treaty, then-prime minister Kishi Nobusuke, who had himself served as a cabinet minister during the Asia-Pacific War, made the controversial decision to mobilise the SDF against protestors, who were feared

to threaten the feasibility of a scheduled visit by U.S. president Dwight Eisenhower (Skabelund 2022, 163). When the director of the Defense Agency protested Kishi's decision, threatening resignation, Kishi yielded and was forced to ask Eisenhower to cancel his visit. Although the treaty was extended nevertheless, protests continued to rage in the streets, leading to Kishi's resignation only days later (Ibid.).

The protests surrounding the U.S.-Japan alliance did not go unnoticed at the NDA either. When the revised treaty from 1960 was up for renewal in 1970, protesters were further energised by the 1968 student movement as well as widespread opposition to the Americans' war in Vietnam. At the NDA, this social climate severely impacted the number of student applications. After a peak of 8,320 applications to the academy in 1966, the number dropped to only 4,671 in 1970 (Kawano 2008, 125). But the academy and its graduates were also affected in more direct ways. Many major civilian universities decided to bar NDA graduates from enrolling for post-graduate education, and faculty members, both civilian and uniformed, complained that they were barred from entering some civilian academic societies (Ibid.). In one notable case, students at the University of the Ryūkyūs protesting an SDF member's admission went on hunger strike, occupied a building on campus, and physically prevented him from entering classes (Skabelund 2022, 231).

As the events in this tumultuous era highlight, anti-militarist sentiments in postwar Japanese society constituted a powerful constraint on the government and complicated the rehabilitation of the armed forces' reputation in postwar Japan. The NDA, given its crucial role in Japan's military and the government's strategy to rehabilitate it, became a major hotspot where these tensions played out. On the one hand, this shows how tensions between the military and civilian society have affected the NDA. On the other, it shows how the NDA itself has fed back into this relationship, shaping the identity and views of the SDF's officer corps through the socialisation students experienced at the academy. This influence of the NDA became all the more relevant with the steady remilitarisation that followed the turbulent era of the 1960s and early 1970s.

Accelerating Remilitarisation: From the late 1970s to the Present

While the SDF's initial establishment had been marked by a relatively cautious and gradual strengthening of its capabilities, the pace of policy change began to accelerate during the latter half of the Cold War. According to Hughes (2020), the 'anti-militaristic principles' that successive postwar administrations had established by the mid-1970s

subsequently began to make way for a long path of 'remilitarization'. In his words, 'the story since the late 1970s, through the 1980s, and then accelerating from the 1990s onward, has been the incremental erosion, and finally the effective breach, of every single one of these constraints' (Ibid., 684).

According to Hughes (2020), the 'anti-militaristic principles' that were established by the mid-1970s revolved, among others, around the following concepts: An interpretation of Article 9 that permitted only 'exclusively defense-oriented defense'. The idea that overseas SDF dispatches exceeded 'exclusively defense-oriented defense', preventing such dispatches during the Cold War. A precedent of limiting defence spending to one percent of GDP, established by Prime Minister Miki Takeo in 1976. As well as a strict interpretation of the principle of civilian control, in the shape of efforts to limit the influence of the military on policymaking (Ibid.).

First, regarding the SDF's capabilities, Hughes notes that the interpretation of Article 9 as permitting only 'exclusively defense-oriented defense' initially prevented the procurement of 'long-range or ballistic missiles, strategic bombers, inflight refuelling, and "offensive" aircraft carriers' (Hughes 2020, 683). Since the early 2000s, however, the SDF began procuring tanker aircraft and in-flight refuelling capability, as well as munitions for precision air strikes and stealth fighters to penetrate enemy air defence systems (Ibid., 687). Later, the SDF commissioned helicopter carriers that began a refitting in 2018 to accommodate fighter aircraft (Ibid.). Finally, in 2022, the Kishida administration announced the procurement of long-range cruise missiles in order to strike enemy bases from within Japan (Hughes 2024).

Second, after the Japanese government perceived pressure from the international community to contribute troops to the U.S.-led alliance during the Gulf War, rather than providing only financial aid, it sent MSDF minesweepers into the Gulf for non-combat operations in 1991, marking the first overseas dispatch of SDF troops (Hughes 2020, 692). The subsequent passing of the International Peace Cooperation Law in 1992 henceforth allowed the SDF to participate in non-combat peace-keeping operations (PKO) sanctioned by the United Nations (Ibid.). After the SDF's first participation in a PKO in Cambodia in 1992, it was dispatched to Mozambique, Rwanda, the Golan Heights and East Timor before the turn of the century (Frühstück & Ben-Ari 2002, 34). Going even beyond PKOs, a reinterpretation of Article 9 in 2014 by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, followed by new security legislation in 2015, now allowed for collective self-defence, implying the overseas dispatch of the SDF and combat engagement in the event of an attack on a close ally (Hughes 2020, 694).

Third, the principle of limiting defence spending to one percent of GDP was breached for several years in the 1980s under Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro (Hughes 2020, 689). More recently, Prime Minister Abe announced in 2017 that he had no intention of keeping defence spending below one percent, rejecting the constraint wholesale (Ibid.). In 2022, the Prime Minister Kishida Fumio announced that Japan would move to double its defence spending, dealing what amounted to the final blow to the principle of limiting defence spending at one percent (Ibid.).

Fourth, the influence of the military and the agencies involved in military affairs was considerably increased by the elevation of the Defense Agency to ministerial status with cabinet-level status in 2007, as well as the creation of the National Security Council in 2013 (Hughes 2020, 691). Additionally, in 1997 the termination of a ban on SDF officers testifying in the Diet and consulting directly with the cabinet and the office of the Prime Minister created inroads for the SDF into the top echelon of policymaking (Kōketsu 2005, 47–48). Within the SDF, the creation of a Joint Staff Office in 2006 united the three branches under the leadership of a single Chief of Staff, resulting in a consolidation of the SDF's authority (Hughes 2020, 691). Further legal changes in 2016 placed the influence of civilian and military officials in advising the defence minister on the same level, curtailing the power of civilian bureaucrats who previously 'sat as layer of control above uniformed officers and checked their decisions before passing to the minister' (Ibid.).

Beyond the changes to the SDF's legal constraints, its budget, as well as its specific capabilities, an expanded scope and accelerated frequency of training manoeuvres in recent years has also significantly elevated the organisation's visibility among the general public. Most notably, the SDF has stepped up its bi- and multilateral training activities as part of the Kishida administration's concept of a 'multilayered security policy' (Hughes 2024). Among the flurry of coverage on SDF activities, news outlets in 2024 reported the SDF's first participation in the U.S. large-scale 'Valiant Shield' drills across the Pacific (Japan Times 2024A), the first joint fighter exercise with the postwar German Bundeswehr (Lau 2024), and the Ministry of Defense announced that GSDF amphibious units would henceforth be regularly deployed for joint drills in Australia (Kyodo News 2024B). Next to reports on new military-to-military cooperations, another category of reports that increasingly appeared in the news media were SDF deployments that served as thinly-veiled demonstrations, or even provocations, to China in particular. In 2024 the SDF made headlines with drills in the South China Sea conducted with Australia and the Philippines (Kyodo News 2024A). In autumn of the same year, news

outlets reported that an SDF destroyer for the first time sailed through the Taiwan strait (Miki 2024).

But if the detailed coverage in the news media each time the SDF breached another precedent was planned and desired by the government, constituting both a part of its defence policy as well as a part of its public relations campaign to justify this defence policy, the government did not plan reports which began to emerge at the same time about a series of scandals concerning the SDF, thereby threatening to undermine its efforts to boost the organisation's status, budget and capabilities.

Scandals in the SDF

Since the Kishida administration announced its plans to double the defence budget and procure long-range missiles in 2022, the government has struggled to find a politically viable plan to pay for them. Against the backdrop of sovereign debt levels at more than 250 percent of its GDP, and a demographic outlook that further complicates financial planning, raising taxes to pay for increased defence spending has proven a prohibitively difficult political position. Even after Kishida was succeeded by Prime Minister Ishiba Shigeru in 2024, a known military aficionado whose cabinet included four former defence ministers, earning the nickname 'defence tribe cabinet' (*kokubōzoku naikaku*; Suzuki 2024), the government has shied away from taking concrete steps to finance the defence build-up. Beyond long-standing anti-militarist beliefs as well as the general unpopularity of tax hikes, the government's efforts to justify this build-up have been impeded by news headlines about a flurry of scandals concerning the SDF.

Most prominently, the story of the former GSDF soldier Rina Gonoï gripped the nation's attention in 2022. When her hometown in Miyagi prefecture was destroyed by the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and subsequent tsunami, Gonoï's impression of female officers involved in the SDF's rescue efforts sparked a dream to join the SDF herself (Iki 2022). After joining the organisation, her dream turned into a nightmare when her colleagues at a base in Fukushima prefecture began regularly commenting on her physical attributes and forcing unwanted physical contact onto her. In August 2021, when a group of senior male officers pinned her to a dormitory floor and simulated sexual intercourse, she decided to report her assailants to the SDF authorities (Ibid.). The subsequent investigations were quickly dropped, however, on the grounds of a lack of evidence. Instead of backing down, Gonoï quit the SDF and went public by taking her allegations to social media (Ibid.). Before long, her campaign gained enough traction to force the government into action.

After submitting a petition bearing more than 100.000 signatures to the MOD, officials announced that the ministry would conduct a sweeping investigation on harassment in the SDF targeting 250.000 members of the SDF (Asahi Shimbun 2022). By the following year, ministry officials announced that the investigation had identified as many as 179 alleged cases of sexual harassment in the SDF (Tajima 2023). Ultimately, Gonoï's campaign reached the top of the government, when Prime Minister Kishida saw himself pressured to concede during a House of Representatives budget committee session in October 2022 that 'both the SDF on the ground and the MOD responded to the case inappropriately' (Odanaka 2022). He went even further, noting that 'harassment has emerged as an issue in the MOD and SDF on numerous occasions, and it has been pointed out that they have tendencies to cover up such cases' (Ibid.).

In addition to sexual harassment cases, the investigation launched by the MOD also identified 1.115 cases of what it referred to as 'power harassment' (*pawā harasumento*, Tajima 2023). In one of those cases, the MOD announced in December 2023 that a GSDF Major General had repeatedly used coercive words against subordinates during training, causing five of them to develop mental health issues (Nikkei 2023). As a disciplinary measure, the Major General was demoted by two ranks to lieutenant colonel and the GSDF Chief of Staff declared that the organisation would 'provide thorough guidance to eradicate shameful acts and make efforts to prevent harassment' (Ibid.). A few months later, in March 2024, the ASDF suspended a lieutenant general for four days over a similar incident of power harassment (Mainichi Shinbun 2024). It announced that the officer had repeatedly engaged in seemingly aimless lecturing of his subordinates for up to three hours each time, and instructed them to revise and resubmit reports more than 20 times. To justify the comparatively light punishment, the ASDF argued that in this instance none of the subordinates were diagnosed with mental illness as a consequence of the lieutenant general's actions (Ibid.).

In April 2024 the GSDF caused a scandal of a different nature, when the 32nd Infantry Regiment in a post about a memorial service on its official X account referred to the Asia-Pacific War as the 'Greater East Asia War' (*dai-tōa sensō*; Yajima, Uechi, and Watanabe 2024). This was the official term for the war used by the imperial government, reflecting its objective to establish what it called a 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' (*dai-tōa kyōeiken*). Seen as a propagandistic euphemism to describe an Asian continent under Japanese control, usage of the term was subsequently banned by American occupation officials. While the Japanese government has largely avoided the term even in the decades after the occupation, its function to obscure the imperial

government's expansionist intentions has made it the preferred term for the war among Japan's revisionist right wing² (for a discussion of the terminology see Shōji 2011). The use of the term on an official GSDF media account therefore sparked intense criticism both online and in the news media, quickly forcing the unit to replace the post with a version without the controversial term. Reflecting the heated public response, the matter still ended up on the desk of Defence Minister Kihara Minoru, who in a news conference noted that the term was removed because it did not conform with the government's guidelines on how to refer to the war (Yajima, Uechi, and Watanabe 2024). Still, the minister stopped short of condemning the incident, arguing that staff members had harboured no other intention than to refer to the fighting that took place (Ibid.).

Although scandals emerged across all three branches, the MSDF received the most attention, going well beyond cases of sexual and power harassment. In July 2024 the National Tax Agency's Osaka Regional Taxation Bureau reported that Kawasaki Heavy Industries had used slush funds based on fictitious transactions with subcontractors to provide MSDF submarine crews with hospitality, goods and gift vouchers over submarine repair contracts. The practice of using slush funds for such expenses were reported to amount to over a dozen billion yen and seemed to have continued for about 20 years (Asahi Shimbun 2024A). In the same month, news outlets reported that dozens of MSDF divers were suspected of making false claims for diving allowances over multiple years, defrauding the government of more than 53 million yen and resulting in disciplinary measures for more than 60 service members (Japan Times 2024B). Although related arrests were made by SDF police in November of the previous year, it emerged that Defence Minister Kihara had only been told of these arrests in July of the following year, prompting an acknowledgement from him that this incident had been 'seriously problematic from the standpoint of civilian control of the SDF' (Asahi Shimbun 2024B). Finally, in the same month, the MOD announced that an internal probe had revealed that unqualified MSDF staff had been allowed to handle classified national security information on no less than 38 MSDF vessels (Johnson 2024). Faced with this extraordinary flurry of scandals, ranging from harassment and corruption to fraud and mishandling of classified information, the MOD announced that it had issued disciplinary measures against a total of 218 service personnel. After MSDF Chief of Staff Sakai Ryo saw himself forced to

² In this dissertation the war is referred to as the 'Asia-Pacific War'. As opposed to the term 'Pacific War', this term reflects the intention to tie together the events of the Pacific theatre with elements of the conflict that occurred on the Asian continent, particularly prior to the American entry into the war, dating back to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931.

resign, Defence Minister Kihara declared: 'I am deeply conscious of my responsibility for betraying the public's faith' (Ibid.).

Given that the amount of scandals across all three branches of the SDF left little doubt that the organisation was facing a systemic problem, it was perhaps no surprise that the NDA started facing its own allegations.

A New Spotlight on the NDA

As a consequence of the sudden burst of media coverage on the SDF, and in the pursuit of an explanation for the seemingly pervasive problems that led to the various scandals, some reporters turned to the NDA for a closer look. In March of 2023, the Yomiuri Shimbun published a whole-page opinion piece titled 'NDA struggles to maintain the quality of its students' [*bōdai 'gakusei no shitsu' iji ni fushin*] (Uchida 2023). The author argued that against the backdrop of the demographic changes, the NDA was receiving less applications, while the number of drop-outs was rising. It noted that after a peak of 17,188 applicants in 2013, the NDA received only 10,638 applicants in 2022, marking a 38 percent decline. Likewise, of the 479 students who graduated in 2022, a total of 72 decided not to enter the SDF to become officers, marking the second highest number in the academy's history after 1991 (Ibid.). To offer some form of an explanation, the author quoted an unnamed NDA instructor, who opined that 'this generation of students dislike group life (*shūdan seikatsu*) and have become unable to take a punch (*utareyowaku natta*)'. Whatever the reason, the author warned, the decrease in the competitiveness of NDA admissions would lead to a decrease in the quality of students and eventually SDF officers, threatening the functional capabilities of the organisation. The author noted that he was worried by the fact that some SDF officers had told him that in recent years, officers who graduated from regular universities tended to be more talented (*yūshū*) than those who had graduated from the NDA (Ibid.). This, of course, also raised questions about what type of education students were receiving at the NDA.

A few months later, media coverage on the NDA suddenly surged when a professor employed at the NDA submitted an explosive report detailing his frustration with the academy to an online magazine in 2023 (Shūeisha Online 2023A). Titled 'Education at the NDA in Crisis' (*kiki ni hinsuru bōeidaigakkō no kyōiku*), the resulting series of articles drew a direct line between the NDA and the scandals that were rocking the SDF. Referring to the opinion piece in the Yomiuri Shimbun a few months earlier, the professor, who had been teaching history at the NDA for more than a decade, rejected the idea that 'the

mental weakness' (*seishinteki na utareyowasa*) of today's generation of young people could be blamed (*Ibid.*). Instead, he blamed the NDA itself. In fact, the professor argued, it was the talented (*yūshū*) students that left the NDA after becoming disillusioned with the state of its education (*Ibid.*).

Above all, the professor argued that uniformed instructors tasked with teaching academic classes at the academy were threatening the quality of the NDA's education. He explained that while civilian academic staff at the academy were selected and hired based on their research and qualifications, uniformed instructors assigned to teach at the academy's school of defence sciences were automatically given associate professor status in the case of service members with the rank of Major and Lieutenant Colonel, or full professor status in the case of service members with the rank of Colonel or higher (Shūeisha Online 2023A). Some of these uniformed lecturers, the professor complained, seemed to spend little time on learning or research, and were conducting their classes with outdated materials. Even worse, he continued, sometimes they peddled conspiracy theories or used their platform to invite guest speakers from the far right fringes of society, who then gave substandard and politically biased lectures to students (*Ibid.*). Despite the importance of teaching the next generation of SDF leaders, he posed, the SDF was sending its 'sick, wounded, and criminals' (*byōnin, keganin, toganin*) to teach at the academy, using an expression that he claimed was used in the MSDF to ridicule the type of personnel who are typically sent to educational posts as a form of 'informal demotion' (*tegaruna sasensaki*; *Ibid.*).

Beyond the assignment of teaching staff at the NDA, the professor argued that student life at the academy more broadly suffered from serious structural problems. He claimed that above all, the strict inter-student hierarchies in the student barracks placed more emphasis on 'daily conduct' (*nichijō no furumai*) than 'academics' (*gakumon*; Shūeisha Online 2023A). This made for an environment, the professor argued, in which 'group logic' (*shūdan no ronri*) takes precedence over 'individual morals' (*kojin rinri*). Similarly, the professor noted, junior students were entirely at the mercy of their senior students (*Ibid.*). He posed that in the case of 'vicious' (*akushitsu*) senior students, their junior students were 'stained by evil' (*aku ni somari*) and the student barracks became a 'hotbed of evil' (*shoaku no onshō*). Junior students who were exposed to such senior students, the professor argued, became disillusioned with the organisation and either dropped out or refused to join the SDF upon graduation. In other cases, he argued, students pretended to obey but secretly resisted the orders (*menjūfukuhai*), or chose to simply obey unconditionally because they were afraid of retaliation (*Ibid.*).

Connecting his concerns about the NDA with the scandals in the SDF, the professor argued that in such a climate, brought upon by unchecked power and unconditional obedience, the NDA not only produced a culture of bullying, but also of illegal behaviour such as instances of gambling and insurance fraud. He referred to a case of insurance fraud that occurred at the NDA in 2013, where at least 13 students were expelled from the academy, and five students who had already graduated from the NDA and entered the SDF were discharged (Shūeisha Online 2023A). In 2019, he continued, a subsidy fraud case was discovered at the NDA, where an MSDF major who was teaching at the NDA as an associate professor defrauded MOD subsidies by pretending that NDA students had stayed at a pension run by his wife. Although more than 200 students were involved in this case, none were ultimately punished, with the explanation that it seemed likely that they had been deceived by the MSDF officer. Still, the professor argued, there was no doubt that many students knew about the case and remained silent, because of the hierarchical nature of the relationship and the potential of retribution by their superiors (Ibid.).

In the days and weeks after the report, the magazine published a series of reaction pieces that widely supported the allegations and complaints of the professor, and demonstrated the extent to which the public was now receptive to a critical discussion about the NDA and its role in educating SDF officers. In one reaction piece, a journalist at the Tokyo Shimbun noted that she was ‘horrificed’ (*zotto shita*) by the report and that its contents were ‘shocking’ (*shōgekitekij*; Mochizuki 2023). She opined that the arrangement that uniformed instructors at the NDA were automatically awarded the status of associate professor or professor was ‘ridiculous’ (*okashina*). She mused how ‘absurd’ (*baka*) it would be reversely, if a professor who had never carried or fired a rifle automatically received the status of an SDF Colonel. In the same way that a professor could not command an SDF unit in battle, she argued, a Colonel was not qualified to give lectures to students as a professor (Ibid.).

In another reaction piece, an anonymous NDA professor expressed his support for the report and claimed that it was a well-known fact within the NDA that talented and highly motivated students (*iyoku ni afureta yūshūna gakusei*) were leaving the academy one after another (*tsugitsugini ryūshutsu shiteiru*; Shūeisha Online 2023B). The anonymous professor lamented that uniformed staff were marginalising civilian lecturers and teaching students to prioritise sports clubs and daily life in the students barracks over their academic studies. The consequence, he argued, was the development of a personality (*jinkaku keisei*) among students that looked down on learning (*manabukoto wo*

karonjiru). Some NDA graduates who served as uniformed instructors at the academy or visit for guest lectures or inspections, he claimed, did not believe that there was a need for higher learning (*kōdo no bengaku*) at all. It was unbearable (*tamarimasen*), he lamented, when such officers told students, some with a hint of self-deprecation, others reminiscently (*kiraku ni omoidebanashi*), that they did not study at all when they were students at the academy themselves (*Ibid.*).

Reactions from several former and current anonymous NDA students, too, appeared in the magazine responding to the report. In a sign of the formative power of student life outside formal training, most of them focussed on the hierarchies among students, arguing that these often led to bullying. One former student who had dropped out of the NDA noted that once when they tripped and spilled water in the hallway, they were ordered to apologise to the students in every single room of the platoon, wasting their time on a meaningless task instead of studying (*Ibid.*). Similar dynamics, the student continued, shaped everyday tasks, such as the procedure that was required when junior students enter or leave rooms in the student barracks, involving a fixed knocking pattern, a specific way to open the door, saluting and identifying oneself. If there was even one thing that senior students did not like, the student noted, from the degree of the bow to the volume of the voice, they could order junior students to redo the entire procedure as many times as they liked. The ‘true purpose’ (*shin no mokuteki*) of such behaviour, the student posed, was not improvement, but harassment through repetition (*Ibid.*). Another example for such harassment, the student argued, were ‘reflection essays’ (*hansei-bun*), which senior students required their juniors to write after a mistake, prompting them to reflect about the cause of their behaviour, as well as possible solutions to prevent it from happening again. Although these essays had now officially been prohibited, the student explained, senior students continued to make their juniors write them by simply calling them ‘diary for an exchange of opinions’ (*iken kōkan no tame no nikki*) or ‘voluntary essays’ (*jihatsutekina bunsho*) instead (*Ibid.*). The student noted that one of their senior students made them rewrite the same essay every single night for a whole week, refusing to accept each new submission and issuing repeated scoldings about the junior student’s attitude (*Ibid.*). This case, of course, strikingly resembled the case of the suspended ASDF lieutenant general detailed above, who made his subordinates submit the same report as many as twenty times.

The conversation around the report about the NDA reached the highest levels of politics, when Ishiba Shigeru, who had previously served as Defence Minister and would go on to become prime minister only a year later, argued in his own response in the

magazine that the MOD should take the report seriously and consider it as an opportunity to conduct a review of the organisation from a structural perspective, rather than focussing on the behaviour of individuals (Ishiba 2023). Referring to his three years of experience at the top of the country's defence apparatus, he noted that he believed it to be true that addressing problems within the MOD and the SDF was a more difficult matter than in other ministries and agencies (Ibid.). He went on to make explicit the connection between the scandals raised in the report and the wider SDF: If scandals occurred frequently at the NDA, he posed, functions of the SDF would be hindered, which was why even minor problems (*sasaina kekkan*) needed to be addressed swiftly (Ibid.).

Given the sudden burst of interest for the SDF and the NDA, as well as an overwhelming consensus that these organisations were struggling with structural problems that had immediate national security consequences, it seems puzzling that there is a distinct lack of academic literature on this topic. Indeed, while a relative scarcity of such research on the relationship between civilian society and military organisations is a phenomenon observable throughout the world, it is particularly pronounced in Japan, where the legacy of the Asia-Pacific War still inspires deep animosity towards the military.

Studying the Military in Japan and Beyond

The renewed media attention on the SDF and the NDA following the Kishida administration's decision to double the country's defence spending revealed an organisation that appeared to be culturally out of touch with civilian society, troubled by a lack of compliance, and lacking effective mechanisms to deal with internal problems. But while journalists, insiders, and politicians admonished the MOD, the SDF, and the NDA for these shortcomings, it was apparent that civilian society had likewise fallen short of its oversight responsibility. If there were underlying problems across the SDF that were laid bare by the reporting on these high-profile scandals, these problems had previously been ignored for a lack of either interest or inquiry.

Beyond the news media, this lack of inquiry into the SDF has also pervaded academic research, both within and outside of Japan. Lamenting the lack of anthropological studies on the SDF, for example, Frühstück (2010, 434) claimed that while international relations specialists seemingly spoke of war on a daily basis, anthropologists had shied away from the topic for ideological reasons:

'As good intellectuals or, at least, as good anthropologists, many of us are against war and perhaps even against the armed forces, but how are we to explain that we have practically no sociocultural anthropology of the current-day armed forces in Japan or their involvement in war? How are we to justify that keeping our distance has come to double as a critical position?'
(Frühstück 2010, 434).

In the only ethnographic study of the SDF to this date, Frühstück (2007, 3) has suggested that the reasons for a lack of scholarly interest in the organisation 'range from the Self-Defense Forces' un-constitutionality to their lackluster status because of the constraints on combat'. Some worry, according to Frühstück, that the process of studying the SDF itself serves to legitimise the organisation (Ibid.). To distinguish 'between an anthropology for the military and an anthropology of the military' (Lutz 2009, 374), therefore, some researchers have called for research on military matters that is built on 'empathic immersion' with interlocutors, 'without necessarily sharing compassion or sympathy for them' (Mohr, Sørensen, and Weisdorf 2019, 600). Researchers interested in military organisations, it seems then, involuntarily become a player themselves on the field that they are seeking to study, affecting the relationship between militaries and civilian society with their own work. Indeed, this has been true for what has become known as the field of civil-military relations since its inception. Theories on the organisational culture of militaries, on how distinct these should be allowed to be from civilian society, and how civilian society can maintain control of this process, have always had direct implications for militaries and related policy. To understand the contemporary discussions around the SDF, then, it is helpful to briefly review this literature.

In what is widely credited to be the foundational study of civil-military relations, Huntington (1957) provocatively argues that due to their unique responsibilities, modern military organisations must maintain an organisational culture that is in perennial conflict with the values of democratic and liberal civilian societies. Rather than making a descriptive argument, Huntington's study offers a normative theoretical equilibrium, in which the military is able to meet its functional demands of protecting its state, while civilian institutions remain firmly in control. Underlying his equilibrium is the assumption that there is an inherent tension between the two objectives of maximising military security and protecting the core values that are characteristic of liberal democracies: 'Military institutions which reflect only social values may be incapable of performing effectively their military function', he poses. 'On the other hand, it may be impossible to contain within society military institutions shaped purely by functional imperatives' (Ibid., 2).

To maximise the functional capabilities of the military, Huntington argues, the customs, traditions, and spirit that define the officer corps that constitutes its leadership should be rooted in what he terms 'conservative realism'. Realism, because the existence of the military itself 'presupposes conflicting human interests and the use of violence to further those interests' (Huntington 1957, 62). And conservative, because organised violence 'requires cooperation, organization, discipline' and 'the subordination of the will of the individual to the will of the group (Ibid, 63). In his theory, strict hierarchical relations ensure both effective military capabilities and subordination to civilian control: 'Consequently,' he argues 'loyalty and obedience are the highest military virtues' (Ibid., 73). But Huntington also assigns special value to history and tradition in the pursuit of increasing the effectiveness of the organisation: 'Tradition, esprit, unity, community' he poses, 'rate high in the military value system' (Ibid. 1957, 63).

The assumption that the military must be characterised by a set of conservative values that are at odds with civilian society is worthy of particular scrutiny, because Huntington's framework, perhaps unsurprisingly, has since found broad appeal among military circles across the world. In seeking to explain why Huntington's theory has enjoyed such longevity, Feaver (1996, 168) argues that 'the American military, who endorse many (although not all) of its general conclusions, have made it the centerpiece of their training on civil-military relations' (Ibid., 168). This has important practical implications. In the event of civilian interventions where military traditions and practices are criticised to be at odds with more progressive values of its host society, such as in the case of controversies around the status of female soldiers or gay servicemen, as well as most recently around trans personnel, Huntington's theory provides an intellectual argument in favour of maintaining the status quo and resisting intervention from those civilian authorities that are constitutionally tasked with the military's oversight. As already demonstrated in the case of Huntington's (1996) more famous and equally, if not more, controversial concept of a 'clash of civilizations', a theoretical framework can evidently and crucially influence the very thing it seeks to explain.

Despite the fact that to this day few studies on civil-military relations are published without referencing Huntington's foundational work, most military sociologists have since rallied around what in many ways amounts to the opposite argument, identifying a convergence of military and civilian cultures, as well as an erosion of the boundaries between the two spheres, which do not come at the cost of the military's capability. Writing in 1960, Janowitz argues that the American military had developed significantly past 'stereotyped assumptions' of 'a sort of self-contained organ, as a vestigial

appendage, rather than a creation of contemporary society' (Janowitz 1960, 4). While Huntington's normative theory provides a justification for the military as precisely such a self-contained organ, Janowitz' describes how the U.S. military has evolved in recent history, arguing that this should alter our theoretical understanding of civil-military relations. Noting a shift from authoritarian domination to group consensus, he claims that the 'organizational revolution which pervades contemporary society [...] is also to be found in the military' (Janowitz 1960, 8).

At odds with Huntington's idea of conservative realism, Janowitz argues that civilian society needs to make sure that the military continuously adapts in line with the changing expectations of its host society (Ibid., 439). Although he recognises the efforts 'among officers to keep abreast of intellectual currents outside the profession', he cautions that 'it would be an error to assume that contemporary political education in the armed forces serves all the needs of a political democracy' (Ibid., 428; 430). Referencing Masland and Radway's (1957) 'intangibles', he argues that the formal education at military academies can still strongly clash with informal indoctrination practices (Janowitz 1960, 428). Janowitz therefore calls for civilian intervention to ensure the continuing transformative progress in the military: 'It is impossible to isolate the professional soldier from domestic political life, and it is undesirable to leave the tasks of political education completely to the professionals themselves [...]. The goal of political education is to develop a commitment to the democratic system and an understanding of how it works' (Janowitz 1960, 439).

Building on Janowitz's argument, Moskos et al. (2000, 2) argue that what they term the 'postmodern military', is characterised by 'increasing interpenetrability of civilian and military spheres, both structurally and culturally'. On a structural level, they argue, the proliferation of information technologies in the military has blurred the lines 'between warrior and non-warrior' (Ibid., 5). On a cultural level, they argue, the military is influenced by a postmodern society that emphasises 'pluralism, fragmentation, heterogeneity, deconstruction, permeability, ambiguity', and a more critical stance on what constitutes the public good (Ibid., 4).

While Moskos et al. (2000., 11), argue that what they call the 'permeability between military and civilian structures is a major new historical phenomenon', others have challenged this idea. Feaver (1996) problematises the theoretical distinction between civil and military worlds altogether. He argues that when Huntington introduced the distinction, he was laying out a normative theory, not an account of the real world. But 'separating the civilian and military spheres in theory', Feaver notes, 'does not rule out greater or lesser

convergence in practice' (Ibid., 168). In an example to support this point, he notes how some politicians make use of defence budgets to redistribute wealth to particular regional or corporate interests (Ibid., 157).

Outside the universe of military sociologists, who have historically been rather closely aligned with military organisations, more critical studies emerging from other disciplines have since sought to eliminate the distinction between the military and society entirely. In an anthropological study on a small town adjacent to a military base in the U.S., Lutz (2001) explores the extent to which the country's vast military apparatus has affected daily life in civilian society. She poses that 'military spending not only preserves sovereignty but waters the social landscape, growing factory jobs, preparing young people for life, shaping values for the culture at large, and providing technological benefits to the economy and to households' (Ibid., 2). Lutz poses that 'we all inhabit an army camp, mobilized to lend support to the permanent state of war readiness that has been with us since World War II' (Ibid., 3). She argues that the 'distinction between things civil and things military [...] has been for decades an illusion, artificially maintained' (Ibid., 8). In addition to the distinction between civil and military, she also questions the distinction between war and peace. What has been considered peacetime in the American discourse, she argues, was actually war 'over there' in other parts of the globe, or at least 'war threatened or held at bay by the wisp of deterrence theory, or war denied or spectacularized by daily Hollywood and television fare' (Ibid., 8).

In a similar account from the discipline of political science, Enloe (2000) explores the lives of wives of service members and women working as sex workers for the military to highlight the way military organisation permeates civil society. In the process, she develops the concept of 'militarization':

'Militarization is a step-by-step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military or comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas. The more militarization transforms an individual or a society, the more that individual or society comes to imagine military needs and militaristic presumptions to be not only valuable but also normal. Militarization, that is, involves cultural as well as institutional, ideological, and economic transformations' (Enloe 2000, 3).

In this way, Enloe (2000, 3) poses, '[militarisation] creeps into ordinary daily routines; it threads its way amid memos, laundry, lovemaking, and the clinking of frosted beer glasses'. While her work is based on the extent to which the growth of the U.S. military

since World War II has increased its footprint in civil society, her concept of militarisation has since been frequently adopted by scholars of various disciplines and countries.

Based on Enloe's influential theory, others have sought to highlight the way military organisation affects civilian society by emphasising the gendered nature of militarisation. Belkin (2012) introduced the concept of 'military masculinity', defining it 'as a set of beliefs, practices and attributes that can enable individuals – men and women – to claim authority on the basis of affirmative relationships with the military or with military ideas' (Ibid., 3). He highlights that appropriating military masculinity has been a long-standing feature in American presidential campaigns, where candidates 'often appear to believe that they cannot win elections or govern effectively unless they can show that they are masculine by waging war successfully' (Ibid.).

The literature outlined above demonstrates that despite Huntington's influential argument that a military's organisational culture that is out of touch with civilian society is not only beneficial for its functional capabilities but also conducive to civilian control, an overwhelming consensus among research since then emphasises that the boundaries between military and civilian worlds are permeable, and that they mutually affect each other. In times where the SDF's status, budget and capabilities are boosted, accordingly, taking a closer look at the organisation itself also offers important insights into how these developments might affect the broader society. Indeed, in the cases where the SDF has been the subject of academic scrutiny, a major focus has been placed on the complicated relationship between the organisation and the society that it is tasked to protect. The NDA, given its tremendous influence on the leadership of the SDF, offers a unique opportunity to scrutinise how this relationship unfolds in practice.

Studying the NDA to Understand the SDF

Against the backdrop of the disastrous Asia-Pacific War, a constitutional clause designed to restrict rearmament, and strong anti-militarist sentiments among large swaths of society, the history of the SDF and its evolution throughout postwar Japan into the formidable military organisation it is today has been shaped by the organisation's contentious relationship with civilian society. Yet, among the literature that has sought to tackle this issue, there has been significant disagreement about the question whether this relationship should best be characterised as a story of amicability and rapprochement or conflict and deceit.

One strain of researchers has argued that the nature of the SDF as a newly founded organisation deeply rooted in the democratic postwar state resulted in generally amicable relations with civilian society. Writing notably in the era of protests against the U.S.-Japan security treaty, Buck (1967, 605) argued that the SDF already then reflected 'the core values of postwar Japanese society'. In his narrative, the SDF not only mirrored the wider society's values, it even reinforced them, with SDF leaders 'conscientiously and genuinely' committing to democracy, individual dignity, human values, and an emphasis on public service (Ibid., 602). In a similar account, Sasaki (2015, 11) argues that a cooperative relationship between the SDF and wider society had been gradually established in the early postwar era, as the SDF 'nurtured close ties with civil society by becoming an army for the people'. This successful progression of both militarisation and democracy, he argues, 'must be explained in large part by voluntary and spontaneous support from below' (Ibid., 15). Similarly, Skabelund (2022, 115) argues that the SDF found 'new ways to build grassroots support and make positive visible impressions'. He introduces the term 'military society integration' to describe the resulting rapprochement between the SDF and civil society. According to Skabelund (Ibid., 6), 'to say that Japanese society as a whole became militarized or militaristic during the Cold War decades is not only an exaggeration but is almost an entirely backward way of looking at what happened'.

In contrast, a separate strain of conflict-based narratives has placed an emphasis on the tensions between civilian society and the SDF. Hook (1995, 8) has argued that the mass attitudes reflected in the protests during the 1960s were 'of crucial significance in constraining the normalization of the military'. According to Hook (Ibid., 3), civilian society and the SDF had competing concepts of postwar Japanese 'identity' and 'normality', born from the contradictions of 'the demilitarization of the state and society, on the one hand, and the remilitarization of the state within a bilateral alliance relationship, on the other'. Frühstück (2007, 184) argues that as memories of Japan's imperialist past fade, younger Japanese merely see the often contradictory nature of the postwar state's military policy as an abnormality. Based on her ethnographic fieldwork at the GSDF, she argues that the dominance of this perception has fostered an environment where 'the lives of Japanese soldiers are permeated by an uneasiness, ambivalence, and discomfort, a nostalgia for times imagined to have been simpler, as well as a subdued pride in their work' (Ibid., 183). Not least to resolve these tensions, she argues, the MOD's predecessor established a public relations department in 1993, which in similarly contradictory fashion sought to both camouflage the SDF's role of organised violence and show off its military

prowess (Ibid., 119). Contrasting Skabelund, who interpreted the resulting public relations campaigns as ‘new ways to build grassroots support’, Frühstück and Ben-Ari (2002) narrate these campaigns as efforts to distort and conceal the unpopular reality of Japanese rearmament. They argue that the SDF more broadly has used a diverse repertoire of such strategies, including an absence of military uniforms worn in public, a public relations department suppressing compromising information about the SDF, omitting traditional military symbols in recruitment material, and adopting non-violent roles such as disaster response operations. Thus, Frühstück (2007, 208) has posed, the organisation’s ‘potential for inflicting mass violence is either thoroughly hidden or neatly estheticized’ as service members are ‘infantilized, feminized, and sexualized’ in public relations material. She argues that the SDF has employed these ‘technologies in order to validate, moralize, humanize, and naturalize war’ (Ibid., 210).

A particular emphasis among these conflict-based studies has been placed on the outsize role that gender occupies in the SDF’s public relations strategy (Frühstück 2007; 2017). Satō (2022) argues that the SDF has made use of female service members to distance itself from the imperial military, strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance, soften negative attitudes towards the SDF, appear modern and democratic on the international stage, and to conceal its expansion of military capabilities and operations. She argues that although the number and scope of women’s roles in the SDF has gradually expanded throughout the years, this was done primarily to camouflage the military nature of the SDF, rather than in response to the movement for gender equality (Ibid., 116). Dalton (2022), describes how SDF public relations strategies have even strategically employed marriages of SDF personnel to civilians in their efforts to normalise the SDF, in turn contributing to the process of militarisation in civilian society.

As with the competing interpretations of the SDF’s public relations efforts described above, there have also been disagreements among studies on a potential ideological gap between SDF personnel and civilian society. Satō (2021, 225) has written about SDF members across several generations who tended to discredit anti-SDF protestors and opponents of rearmament as ‘the left’ (*hidari*), ‘communists’ (*kyōsanshugisha*), as different from ‘normal people’ (*futsū no hitobito*), or even claimed that some were paid to protest. In contrast, in a study comparing ideological dispositions among SDF officers and civilian elites Kawano and Hikotani (2006) argue that views between these groups did not markedly differ on international politics and the SDF’s status in society. If anything, they note, SDF officers appeared to place more emphasis on civilian control than their civilian counterparts (Ibid.).

Beyond concrete political views, Nogami (2021, 176) notes that in order to understand the role that SDF personnel play in the relationship between society and the military, researchers should turn their focus on the beliefs, customs, and tradition that constitute the conscious and unconscious ‘behavioural principles’ (*kōdō genri*) that make up the organisation’s military culture. To study the formation of this military culture, he posits, researchers should turn their attention to the NDA, where the personalities of future SDF officers of all three services are shaped by spending their daily lives together for four long years (Ibid., 187). Building on Caforio (2018), he argues that service academies not only teach the contents of various subjects, but also the culture that determines the persons identity as a member of the organisation. This, Nogami (2021, 179) suggests, presumably makes the ‘hidden curriculum’ constituted by the traditions and culture of an educational institution an important point to consider.

Having made his case for the importance of studying the NDA, however, Nogami (2021, 187) notes that future studies like this face severe access limitations. ‘Although participant observation is impossible’ (translation by the author), he claims, researchers should attempt to conduct surveys and interviews with members of the NDA. If that, too, proves difficult, he suggests, researchers might try to target academy graduates or those who have retired from the SDF in order to gain information about the socialisation that occurs within the walls of the academy (Ibid.).

With the first ethnographic study ever permitted at the NDA, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the above literature on the SDF and its relationship with civilian society by offering unprecedented data which was previously thought to be unattainable. At this pivotal moment in postwar Japan’s history, marked by the combination of the government’s momentous elevation of the SDF’s status, budget, and capabilities on the one side and fresh concerns over the integrity of its leadership on the other, it shows how future SDF officers are taught at the academy to think about themselves and the military’s role in society.

In the process, this dissertation also contributes to the conceptual literature outlined above. Drawing a direct line from the content of the NDA’s formal and hidden curriculum to the recent flurry of scandals inside the SDF, this dissertation shows how the SDF’s organisational culture becomes its own variable in the complicated relationship between the military, civilian society, and the government’s defence policy. At a time when military budgets, capabilities, and activities are rapidly rising in Japan and throughout the world, this dissertation highlights the importance of educational institutions in the military,

not just for the militaries themselves, but also for the societies which they are charged to protect.

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Chapter 1

Life in the Student Barracks

Morning

On a cold Tuesday morning in January at 05:45 a.m. most students in the four large student barracks that line the long street at the back of the NDA's campus are still soundly sleeping. The sun won't rise for another hour and the campus is cloaked in darkness. Most employees of the academy won't arrive before another two hours have come to pass. Life in the student barracks, however, is about to begin.

On the first floor of the building belonging to the fourth battalion, two first-year students of the student corps' 421st platoon³ are already awake. In his head, Student Ogawa⁴ is going through the tasks that are waiting for him this morning. After staring at the ceiling for a while, he sits up in his upper bunk bed and begins silently folding his blankets. In the bed next to him, Student Katō, the other first-year in the room of eight, nimbly rotates his body out of the bed without a sound and tip-toes to the bathroom. Upon his return, he begins making his bed, too.

Although the bugle call that formally starts the students' day sounds at 06:00 a.m. and breakfast won't be served until almost an hour later, Students Ogawa and Katō will only have little time to go to the bathroom or brush their teeth during this time. Used to this daily routine, many first-year students regularly wake up before the trumpet signal to get a head start. Particularly female first-year students, who are subject to the same time constraints as their male peers, often wake up earlier to wash their faces and tie their hair into the required bun. As per the formal rules, it is prohibited to get up before the designated wake-up time (*kishō*), but most fourth-year students in leadership positions tolerate the practice tacitly, acknowledging that first-year students are otherwise unable to adhere to their demanding schedule.

³ At the NDA, the student body is referred to as the student corps, which is organised in four battalions. Each battalion consists of four companies, which, in turn, consists of three platoons. The first platoon of the second company of the fourth battalion, for example, is accordingly referred to as the student corps' 421st platoon. The number identifying the battalion, company, and platoon described in this chapter has been changed to protect the anonymity of the students.

⁴ At the NDA, students are addressed as “*last name* *gakusei*”. All students mentioned by name in this dissertation appear with a different name to protect their anonymity.

A few minutes before 06:00 a.m. Student Ogawa has finished folding the blankets on his bed. With his head resting on the three neatly stacked woollen blankets, and his legs crossed, he returns his gaze to the ceiling and patiently waits for the trumpet signal. Student Katō, too, has now finished making his bed. He sits up straight, legs crossed, and looks out the large windows. In the bunkbed next to him, a fourth-year student peacefully snores, his arms wrapped around a large stuffed animal and a blue plush blanket. The first-year students have no such private items on their beds, since they are formally prohibited in the student barracks. Only senior students, making use of their authority in the student barracks, can afford to ignore the rules so blatantly.

Having counted down the seconds on his wrist watch, Student Ogawa jumps out of his bed to the sound of the mechanical signal blaring from the speakers. He rushes to one of the two doors of the sleeping room, turns on the light switch, and pokes his head into the hallway outside. On the other side of the room, Student Katō pokes his head out the second door. Simultaneously, they shout a full-throated 'good morning' into the hallway, before rushing back to their beds, where they apply the finishing touch of a meticulous bed-making routine. For the third time this morning, Student Ogawa runs his index finger along the folded and stacked blankets, making sure they align neatly with the mattress.

By the time the two fourth-year students in the room get out of their beds, Student Ogawa has already reached his locker, where he quickly changes into his olive-green uniform (*sagyōfuku*), which students generally wear during their time in the student barracks. Once all the required items of the uniform are in the right place, he advances to the mirror, where he makes sure that his shirt is tucked and folded into the belt of his pants in the right way and without the slightest hint of an unwanted crease. Wearing one's uniform the correct way, referred to at the academy as *kikonashi*, is one of the central elements of a first-year NDA student's daily life, and Student Ogawa makes sure to check the entire uniform twice in the mirror.

Having judged that his uniform satisfies the required standards, Student Ogawa slips into his shoes and dashes out into the hallway. Although his sleeping and study rooms are located on the first floor, he is part of the battalion's second company, which assembles on the building's second floor. Having rushed up the stairs, he lines up in the first row for roll call, patiently waiting for the senior students of his room to arrive behind him.

After a quick headcount and a well-rehearsed set of rapid back-and-forth communications by the senior students who are in charge of the battalion's

administration, the roll call is declared completed and the company is dismissed. The first-year students have no time to lose. Student Ogawa rushes back down the stairs. From a closet next to his study room he picks up a broom and dustpan, a bucket, a piece of cloth, a sponge and some steel wool. Juggling all the items in his hands, he runs back up the stairs to the second floor's drying room, which he has been allocated to as part of the daily cleaning of communal spaces (*seisō*) for the duration of this week. A few seconds later, a second-year student appears, who is charged with supervising (*kantoku*) Student Ogawa's cleaning activities. Student Ogawa, standing in front of the wall next to the drying room's door, straightens up, turns on the spot towards his supervisor and claps his heels together. The two students salute each other and the first-year student is ordered to begin cleaning.

Student Ogawa quickly begins sweeping the large room with his broom, before wiping the surface area of the cross bars and hangers. The supervising second-year student observes his every move with a stern face and his arms folded behind his back. By the time Student Ogawa drops down on his knees to begin wiping the floor with the cloth, his supervisor intervenes for the first scolding. Pointing at a small clump of dust in the corner that Student Ogawa failed to remove, the second-year student shouts at him, addressing him in a deliberately derogatory way: 'You (*omae*), what do you think this is? Sweep the room again!' Student Ogawa immediately drops his cloth. 'Yes, Sir (*hai*)', he shouts loudly and gets back on his feet to pick up the broom again.

After a second round of sweeping the floor, Student Ogawa gets back on his knees to return to the cloth. In order not to give his supervisor any excuses, he carefully slides across the entire room on his knees, making sure not to miss a single spot this time. Every meter or so he stops to scrub for a few seconds, before moving on. The supervising second-year student, who has noticed Student Ogawa's new attention to detail, intervenes again: 'You, clean faster', he shouts from the corner of the room. 'Yes, Sir', Student Ogawa shouts back, with his eyes slightly lowered to avoid the senior student's angry gaze. Briefly glancing across the room, Student Ogawa considers his options. At this point he has only made it across half the room with his cloth. If he picks up the pace, he may not be able to avoid missing another spot. But if he fails to make it through all his tasks by the end of cleaning time, he equally risks the ire of his supervisor.

Having attempted to find the right balance between speed and detail with the cloth, Student Ogawa returns to his bucket to pick up the small sponge. He gets back on his knees and starts scrubbing the scuff marks that have accumulated on the floor since yesterday, left by the black shoes that are part of the students' uniform. After erasing the

first few marks, it dawns on him that he will not be able to remove all of the marks in the remaining minutes. With an increasingly desperate look in his eyes and sweat dripping down his temples, he stops for a second, sitting on his knees in the middle of the room, to survey the sheer amount of marks around him.

The second-year student, apparently unimpressed with Student Ogawa's unscheduled break, charges to the middle of the room. 'You', he barks while standing above the first-year student, 'what do you think you are doing'? Unsure what to answer and afraid to meet the eyes of his supervisor, Student Ogawa stares at his supervisor's feet in silence. 'Stand up', the supervisor shouts, watching Student Ogawa get up from his knees. 'What do you think you are doing', he demands again, shouting directly in Student Ogawa's face. Student Ogawa thinks for a second, before answering with a steady voice and in polite form: 'I am scrubbing the floor, Sir'. 'Do it faster', the supervisor returns. 'Yes, Sir', shouts Student Ogawa and drops back on his knees.

Having lost precious time to several educational interventions, Student Ogawa fails to make it even halfway across the room with his sponge before the cleaning session is wrapped up by another second-year student shouting from the central hall: 'Second company, withdraw'! Student Ogawa immediately stops scrubbing, gets back on his feet, and carries his cleaning items out into the hallway, where his supervisor waits with some concluding remarks. Having placed his items on the floor, the first-year student once again stands up straight with his fists balled, heels together, and eyes staring blankly ahead. 'Today you left some dust pieces and your cleaning was too slow', the supervisor informs him in a matter-of-fact way. 'Also, tomorrow you need to clean up those boxes in the corner of the room. They can't stay there like that'.

Once dismissed, Student Ogawa quickly runs down the stairs to return the cleaning items. He empties the dustpan into the bin, stows away the broom in the closet, and washes out the cloth and bucket at a sink outside the building. All the while, he formally salutes each senior student he passes, whether they are second-year cleaning supervisors, third-year students who just returned from a morning run to prepare for an upcoming cross country running competition, or sleepy-eyed fourth-year students who are just getting out of bed for the second time. Each time he salutes he stops in his tracks to clap his heels together, loudly shouting 'Good morning, Sir' (*otsukaresama desu*). The senior students, for their part, either salute back casually while walking, briefly acknowledge him with a slight nod, or simply ignore him entirely.

At 06:35 a.m. Student Ogawa is able to take a minute to go to the bathroom for the first time this morning. Quickly turning the corner into the bathroom, he almost bumps

into Student Katō. They share a brief and silent smile and both take a sip from the water fountain. After relieving themselves and washing their hands, they head towards the dining hall together. Because the fourth battalion building is at the end of the long street and farthest away from the centre of the campus, Students Ogawa and Katō lose another few precious minutes of their morning to getting to the dining hall. Other than the senior students, who face no such time pressure and are making their way there at a leisurely pace, the first-year students are running the entire way. Each time they pass a senior student from behind, they shout a loud: 'Excuse me' (*shitsurei shimasu*)!

The dining hall is located on the second floor of a large building at the back of the campus and boasts a stunning view over the mouth of Tokyo bay. On the side facing the student barracks, there are two staircases leading up to its entrance. The first staircase, spacious and exposed to the open sky, leads straight up to the dining hall. To reach the second staircase, which is more narrow and requires students to change direction at the halfway point of the staircase, students must walk a few steps further and turn a corner. Since using the first staircase is a privilege reserved for senior students, Students Ogawa and Katō rush around the corner to climb the more narrow staircase together with the other first-year students.

Inside the dining hall, the male first-year students of the 42nd company have all gathered at the same table. The female first-year students of the company, considerably fewer in number, are sitting at the table behind them. While senior students at the surrounding tables can be heard loudly conversing and laughing, the first-years are making use of their few minutes outside of the watchful eyes of senior students by enjoying their meal in silence. As they methodically shovel the food on their plates into their mouths, the sweat on their faces reflects the bright light emanating from the ceiling.

This morning is comparatively calm for the first-year students, leaving them a little more than five minutes to finish their breakfast. On busier days, particularly in the beginning of the academic year, it is not unusual for first-year students to be seen stuffing pieces of bread in their pockets for consumption at a later time, or emptying almost full plates of trays into the bins at the return counter next to the kitchen.

As soon as Student Ogawa is finished eating, he stands up silently, and picks up his tray to return it to the kitchen. There is no need to announce his departure. The first-year students are among themselves and everyone knows that every minute counts. By the time he steps foot outside the dining hall, he has started to run again.

Back at the fourth battalion building, Student Ogawa prepares for the second cleaning session of the morning, where first-year students are tasked with cleaning the

sleeping and study rooms. Unlike the cleaning of communal spaces before breakfast, however, this second session does not involve immediate supervision from senior students, and first-years are able to conduct this second session at their own pace.

On this morning, Student Ogawa is tasked with cleaning the study room, while Student Katō is in charge of the sleeping room. To his delight, Student Ogawa finds himself alone for a few minutes in the study room, as the senior students in his room have yet to return from the dining hall. He makes use of the opportunity to pull out his smartphone from his pocket and briefly scans the notifications that have accumulated since last night, checks a few student group chats for important announcements, and then slides the phone back into his pocket. Then he opens the windows of the study room and commences his second round of cleaning this morning by carefully running a piece of cloth along the inside of the window frames.

As the senior students slowly trickle back into the room, Student Ogawa closes the windows and turns his attention to the floor. He plugs in the vacuum cleaner, a technological aid that is not permitted during the supervised cleaning of the common spaces, and starts cleaning around his senior students. Seemingly unbothered by the cleaning in process, the senior students remain seated on their chairs, scrolling disinterestedly on their smartphones, as Student Ogawa carefully cleans around them, making sure not to touch their demonstratively stretched-out legs.

In the sleeping room, Student Katō, too, faces the challenge of cleaning without disturbing his senior students. Because a fourth-year student and a third-year student have decided to get back into bed after roll call for another hour of sleep and some relaxing smartphone time respectively, he tends to his tasks as quietly as possible. To not wake up the sleeping fourth-year student, Student Katō opts to use a dry mop stick instead of a vacuum cleaner. But there is another matter significantly complicating his effort to clean the floor of the sleeping room. While the first-years are expected to keep not only their beds immaculately tidy, but also the surroundings of their beds and lockers, this rule does not apply to senior students. Particularly the area around the sleeping fourth-year student is covered in an avalanche of used clothes, spilling over his laundry bag and out of the opened locker. Careful not to make a sound and wake up his seniors, Student Katō cleans around each item on the floor.

Finally, Student Katō heads to the entrance of the room, where he gets on his knees and picks up the small sponge to scrub away some of the new scuff marks around the area where students leave their shoes. The small entrance area is almost entirely obstructed by an expensive bicycle frame, standing upside down on the handlebar and

saddle, which one of the fourth-year students has placed there a few weeks ago. Careful not to push over the expensive object, Student Katō squeezes his lean body between a row of lockers and the frame to get to the other side of the entrance area, where he gets down on his knees again.

After finishing his second cleaning session this morning, Student Kato returns to the study room, where the fourth-year student in charge of the room (*heya-chō*) has decided to put on classic Japanese military songs (*gunka*). From the large speakers on his desk, a privilege reserved only for the fourth-year student in each room, the *battōtai* fills the room. A marching song from the Meiji era, honouring the imperial soldiers who fought in the Satsuma Rebellion, the *battōtai* is familiar to all students because it is played each morning on campus during the march to the classrooms (*kagyō kōshin*). Next, the head of the room chooses a piece commissioned by the Army Ministry of the Japanese Empire to boost morale and inspire support for the Asia-Pacific War. Student Katō sits down at his desk and begins polishing his shoes.

Student Ogawa, meanwhile, has moved to the sleeping room, where he has changed out of his olive green uniform and into the light blue uniform used for academic classes (*kōnai fukusō*). ‘This one’, he explains, ‘is the most difficult to wear’. Unlike the navy blue uniform (*jōsō*), which students wear for formal events and outside of the academy’s campus, wearing the academic uniform involves folding and tucking the shirt into one’s pants in a way that is both perfectly symmetric and sufficiently tight. On top of that, the academic uniform is the only one that includes a necktie, adding another point of difficulty.

This morning, the first-years must attend an inspection (*yōgi tenken*), where each first-year student is paired with one senior student who rigorously examines whether the first-years are properly dressed and carry no more and no less than the required items in their pockets. Student Ogawa, who has been standing in front of the mirror for 15 minutes now, nervously pulls up his pants and adjusts the lines in which his shirt is folded. For the ninth time, he turns around and looks over his shoulder to see whether the shirt is properly tucked in the back. At 07:30 a.m., he leaves the room and makes his way to the inspection on the second floor.

Before the inspection can begin, however, one last obstacle remains for Student Ogawa. Having spent a good part of the morning making sure that his shirt is folded and tucked correctly and in a sufficiently tight way, climbing the stairs without undoing the fruits of this labour presents a formidable challenge. Luckily for Student Ogawa, he can rely on established procedures for this occasion, passed down through generations of

students. With both hands on his back, tightly clasping both his belt and the tucked shirt, he carefully approaches the first step. He lifts his right leg to the side, making sure his knee does not bend, as this would pull down the belt. Once his right foot is securely placed on the first step, he shifts his bodyweight to the right, before lifting his left leg, keeping it equally stiff. Then he places his left foot on the same stair as the right foot, roughly two shoulder lengths apart. One step at a time, with both hands holding onto his belt and his elbows poked out to the side, he waddles up the stairs in a movement that perhaps best resembles that of a penguin. The laboured expression on his face demonstrates both the seriousness that he affords this task, as well as his worries over whether his seniors will deem his efforts sufficient at the looming inspection.

After the last few first-years waddle up the stairs in similar fashion, the 42nd company begins the inspection. With the same attention to detail in which they made their way up the stairs, the first-years now adjust their posture in a way that best maintains the uniform's composition. To make sure that the backside of their shirts are perfectly straight, the students push their shoulders forward and pull down their balled fists as far as they can. Then the senior students fan out into the formation, facing one first-year each.

The inspection begins with the senior students checking if the first-years carry all of the required items. In addition to all the components of the uniform, they must carry a small notebook, to record advice from their senior students, as well as a handkerchief and a bag of paper tissues. For the inspection, of course, the handkerchief has to be washed and neatly folded. Likewise, the tissue bag must be new and unopened. To avoid having to replace the latter two items before each inspection, students throughout the decades have developed the best practice of simply never using the handkerchief and only opening their bags of tissues in extraordinary circumstances. In the case of most students, they carry these items around entirely for the purpose of the inspection.

The senior students have now moved on to inspecting the state of the uniforms. The senior student assigned to Student Katō quickly identifies a host of reasons to scold him. His collar is not folded cleanly enough, the knot of his necktie is too large, and the bottom of the tie is neither properly centred nor at the correct distance to the belt. 'Inadequate' (*fubi*), she barks into the first-year's face.

A few meters to the right, Student Ogawa is not faring any better. After a thorough inspection from all four sides, the senior student declares that Student Ogawa's shirt is not tucked in his pants cleanly enough. 'Inadequate', he says in a matter of fact way and

without any notable expression on his face. Student Ogawa, having anticipated this outcome, volunteers no reaction either.

As the senior students leave the formation, the first-years who failed the inspection, now addressed as inadequates (*fubisha*), are ordered to raise their hands. About one third of the students respond to the order by raising their balled fists towards the ceiling. The number of inadequates is reported to the fourth-year in charge of the inspection while one of his aides neatly records the information in a notebook. Before the inspection is wrapped up, the students are informed that the same inspection will be carried out on the following day, as well.

Generally, the first-years only have such an inspection once per week, but it is pre-cutter (*pure katta-*) week. During this period, first-years are submitted to a particularly rough handling by their seniors in preparation for the inter-battalion cutter boat race. An important fixture on the academy's calendar, the cutter boat race is an annual event where newly advanced second-year students at the beginning of the academic year race against each other in large rowing boats in the Tokyo bay. Part sports competition and part initiation ceremony, participants in this event are subjected by senior students to an intense physical and spiritual preparation program. Although the race will not take place for another four months, and the formal preparation period begins only a month in advance once the participating students become second-years, it is an established tradition for senior students to dedicate a week well in advance of that period to subject first-year students to a preview for what is to come.

As part of the pre-cutter program, inspections are carried out more often than just weekly. Even if even one first-year of the company fails the inspection, the entire platoon must submit to a re-inspection (*sai-tenken*) the next day. Since senior students make a point of always finding something to scold first-year students for, in practice this means that there are inspections every single day.

Once the inspection is finished and the students are dismissed, Students Ogawa and Katō head back down the stairs and to their study room. They once more fix their uniforms, paying special attention to the elements which they were just scolded for. Then they brush their teeth. Other than the third- and fourth-year students, who mostly brush their teeth in the study rooms, first-year students have not earned this privilege yet, and must head to the bathrooms to do so.

Back in the study room, Student Ogawa runs his fingers across the backs of the books on his book shelf, before plucking out a few books. Retrieving all the books he needs for his classes takes some time, as students are not allowed to arrange the books

by subject. As in every other room across the four battalions, students are required to arrange the books on the bookshelves by size, with the largest books on the end facing the window, and the smallest books on the end facing the door.

Because the daily raising of the flag and the march to the classrooms do not begin for another ten minutes, the students in the study room, including the first-years, are now fortunate enough to be able to kill some time. Opera music can be heard from the speakers of one of the fourth-year students. Student Ogawa flicks through his messaging app, answering some of his unopened messages. Student Katō, meanwhile, goes through some of the documents for his upcoming history class. But while the senior students are sitting comfortably in their chairs, the two first-year students notably remain standing at their desks, awkwardly leaving the chairs behind them unused.

Throughout daily life in the student barracks, privileges and duties of students are almost entirely a matter decided by senior students. At each of the leadership levels, such as the head of the battalion (*daitai gakusei-chō*), head of the company (*chūtai gakusei-chō*), head of the platoon (*shōtai gakusei-chō*), or the head of the room, fourth-year students have extraordinary power to shape the lives of their junior students. In this room, the head of the room has decided that sitting down in one's chair before classes begin is a privilege first-year students have yet to earn. The first-year students, for their part, have internalised the formal reason provided to them when they first moved in. 'When I sit down', Student Ogawa explains dutifully, 'my uniform gets sloppy'.

To be able to supervise (*kantoku*) the behaviour of first-year students better, the head of the room had at the start of the term decided to arrange the desks in a more effective way. Rather than lining up the desks along the two walls, as is common practice in most rooms of the student barracks, he has ordered the desks to be lined up in four rows of two. This way, the two fourth-year students, who sit closest to the windows and facing the door, can oversee the entire room. In front of them are the two third-year students, followed by the two second-year students, and finally the two first-year students. As with the Panopticom, first-year students are therefore unable to see their seniors, but must always assume they are being watched.

A few minutes later, the students make their way outside with their briefcases, where they assemble in front of an elevated podium painted in orange, the designated colour of the battalion. From the podium, the fourth-year student in charge of the morning assembly (*chōrei*) oversees the students sorting into their academic units (*kyōmu-han*), in which they are about to attend their classes.

Once lined up, at the command of the fourth-year student on the podium, the students drop their briefcases, lock their hands behind their backs, and turn towards the flag pole mounted on top of the academy's main building at the centre of the campus. It is now 08:08 a.m. and except for some muted conversations between a few fourth-year students in the back the students are completely silent. Two minutes later, the student on the podium shouts another order to the students, who promptly straighten up, ball their fists next to their hips, and clap their heels together. Right on time, the speakers on campus sound a trumpet signal, before playing the national anthem, while the national flag is slowly raised on the flag pole.

With the end of the anthem the trumpet signal sounds again, and the students begin marching towards their classrooms. As every day on campus, this march is accompanied by the *battōtai* sounding from the speakers. In front of the academic buildings, each academic unit stops briefly for a final salute to mark the formal end of the march. This is the moment that signifies the boundary between the world of the student barracks and the academic world, where the authority is handed over to the civilian instructors.

Noon

As the fourth academic period comes to a close, students throughout campus begin heading to the cafeteria for lunch. Back in the study room, however, the two fourth-year students are still relaxing in their chairs, as on this day they have no classes until the late afternoon. Noting how tired both of them are, they decide that once they return from lunch they will go to sleep for about an hour. Yesterday, they made use of their privilege as senior students to stay up beyond lights-out, and ended up talking and scrolling on their phones until around 01:00 a.m. 'I hardly sleep more than six hours a night', one of them declares proudly. 'I heard that regularly sleeping less than six hours makes humans lose about 50 percent of their productivity', he adds with a smile on his face, 'but my 50 percent is the same as everyone else's 200 percent, so that's not a problem'. The speakers are now playing Soviet military songs.

Slowly bobbing his head to the music, the fourth-year student in charge of the room is going through a document on his desk listing the names of students in the platoon who are applying for special permission to leave campus (*tokubetsu gaishutsu*) over the weekend. Although all students are generally permitted to leave campus on Saturday and Sunday, they require written permission to stay out overnight and skip the

morning roll call. This permission, granted through a rubber stamp procedure by uniformed instructors, is a privilege only available to students from the second year on. On the list on the head of the room's desk today, every single eligible student in the platoon has applied.

In reality, the student explains, only half of the students on the list will actually sleep somewhere outside of the campus. They sign up for the permission to leave anyway, he adds, so that they can sleep through the early-morning roll call. Students call this practice *irutoku*, an abbreviated combination of the words 'to be present' (*iru*) and 'special permission to leave campus' (*tokubetsu gaishutsu*). As a consequence, roll call on weekends usually involves only the first-year students, as well as the unlucky senior students who are in rotating positions that require them to conduct the roll call.

Marking a special day, the student corps' leadership has decided that today's lunch will take the form of a simultaneous lunch (*issei kishoku*). Before the Covid-19 pandemic every lunch was a simultaneous lunch, but significant resistance among large parts of the student corps have made the reintroduction a halting affair. These days, simultaneous lunches are held only on a few days each month, while lunch on other days functions similar to the individualised breakfast and dinner.

Among the students, simultaneous lunch is unpopular because it requires a considerably larger amount of time. All students must arrive by noon, where they are seated according to a one-off seating plan distributed in advance. Students sit within their companies, but are deliberately seated mixed with students from other years. The first-year students arrive first, followed by senior students. Just a few seconds before noon, the last few fourth-year students trickle in, taking their places.

At noon, the head of the student corps and a handful of other students in leadership roles give quick speeches and make a few announcements behind a microphone at the centre of the hall. After a joint 'enjoy your meal' (*itadakimasu*), led by a student selected from the crowd, all students begin eating at the same time. As the students eat, more speeches are given by various students, on topics ranging from upcoming events to changes in the student corps leadership and club activities. Officially, the purpose of simultaneous lunches is that students communicate across the four years, rather than just sitting amongst themselves. In practice, however, there is precious little communication going on, as students are expected to listen to the speeches while they eat.

After roughly ten minutes, the final speaker thanks the students for their attention and hands over the microphone to one of the student leaders, who announces that the

students are now released. The majority of students, who finished their meals a while ago and restlessly waited for the signal, immediately jump up from their seats and rush back to the student barracks.

Having returned to the student barracks, the first-year students of the 42nd company are required to attend a preparatory lecture as part of pre-cutter week. By 12:15 a.m., the students are all assembled in the company's central hall. The lecture, titled 'Cutter Education' is run by a group of third-year students, who will be in charge of the cutter competition by the time they become fourth-years in April. With the undivided attention of the first-years, who are seated on three neat lines of folding chairs, one of the presenting third-years starts listing up some of the basic data written on the power point slide: 'The boats are 9 meters long, 2.45 meters wide, 0.83 meters deep. They weigh 1.5 tons and have a maximum capacity of 45 people, although at the NDA we only enter with around twenty'. Then he explains the procedure of leaving and returning to the docks, life jackets, as well as the key commands rowers are expected to know. While the first-year students are listening, carefully taking notes on the little notepads they keep in their breast pocket, another group of third-year students can be heard running past the window outside, as part of their preparation for their cross-country competition, shouting loudly in unison to coordinate their steps.

One of the third-year students of the 42nd company's cutter committee is standing behind the seated first-years, flicking through a MAMOR magazine, an official publication by the Ministry of Defense. Dozens more of these magazines are lined up on a dedicated stand next to him. On the cover of each issue there is a famous female model or idol, saluting with a smile into the camera in front of a piece of SDF machinery or building. The only exception is a cover showing a fictional character created by the SDF's public relations team. The cover shows an overtly sexualised drawing of an apparently female cat with exaggerated physical proportions called *mamoneko*, a wordplay on the Japanese word *mamoru* (to defend) and *neko* (cat), who is wearing only the hat, jacket and boots of a camouflage uniform. The student reaches the end of the issue he picked up, puts it back on the shelf and returns his attention to the lecture.

Once the cutter education lecture is finished and the first-years are dismissed, Students Ogawa and Katō head down the stairs and into the sleeping rooms. Earlier today they were ordered by their senior students to assemble the blankets stacked on the students' lockers in the sleeping room, tie them into stacks of five, and deliver them to the company's assembly room. Because the two fourth-year students and a third-year student have followed through on their plans to take a post-lunch siesta in their beds,

Students Ogawa and Katō attend to their tasks silently. On the hallway in front of the assembly room, dozens of first-years are rushing by, bringing the blankets from their rooms. Asked if the blankets are assembled for laundry, Student Ogawa stops to think for a moment, then raises his shoulders in a polite shrug: 'Probably. I don't know'. An explanation had not been part of his order.

Having dropped off the blankets as instructed, the two first-year students return to the sleeping room, where they begin making their beds. Whereas bed-making in the morning involves folding and arranging the pillow, blankets and sheets, in the afternoon it involves laying out these items in a way that allows students to quickly slide into their sheets at lights-out. This part of making one's bed, too, must conform to rigorous standards and the scrutiny of senior students. Tonight, just before roll call, there will be an inspection of their beds, so the two students are approaching their task with particular care. First, they attend to Student Ogawa's bed. Carefully, so as not to wake up the senior students, they pull the metal frame of the bunk bed away from the wall, for better access from both sides. Then they start putting on the sheets and blankets, executing each movement slowly and deliberately. Unlike in the morning, the two students are in no hurry now. On the contrary, they move with extreme caution, stopping several times to pick up a sheet or a blanket again to place it with even more precision. After the first bed is done, they move to the second one, located across from the first one.

Once the students have laid out all the items on the second bed to a satisfactory degree, each student attends to his own bed, for further refining. Sitting cross-legged on the floor, the students sit back to back as they each focus on their own bed. Using only the extended index finger and the little finger on his right hand, Student Ogawa measures the distance between the end of the mattress and the part where the blanket is folded back. Behind him, Student Katō uses his index finger to carefully push in the blanket that is tucked under the mattress a little further.

A well-made bed, the two students are acutely aware, is not only defined by a blanket that is cleanly tucked under the mattress, without any wrinkles, the blanket also needs to be stretched across the mattress tightly enough to make the surface of the bed perfectly straight. In the past, senior students often note, bed inspections involved a coin-drop test. If the coin bounced back up, the blanket was stretched tightly enough. If it did not, the student failed the inspection. Although this practice was discontinued, the standard remains the same. Finally, after more than twenty minutes of complete silence and meticulous adjustments, the students signal each other with a nod that it is time to move on.

As he leaves the sleeping room, Student Ogawa briefly massages his own back, which started aching from sitting on the floor for so long. Then he heads back up to the drying room of the second floor. He surveys the room and inspects the boxes in the corner, anticipating the tasks that are waiting for him next morning. Then he picks up a wet mop he forgot in the morning and returns it to the closet on the first floor. A few minutes remain before he needs to head to the class room again for the fifth period, so he picks up his boots, sits down at his desk and begins polishing them. Then he picks up his briefcase and heads towards the classroom. Once a week students have to do so marching to the *battōtai*, as they do each morning, but today they are free to leave on their own. In a matter of minutes, the area around the students barracks is deserted again, and the afternoon classes begin.

Nighttime

After 04:20 p.m., the end of the final period of academic classes, the students begin trickling back into the student barracks, from where they head to their club activities. Members of the rugby, American football or handball clubs assemble on the sports fields, those of the volleyball, basketball or Aikido clubs meet up in the academy's various gymnasiums. If students are spread out across the campus during the club activities, by the time these finish at 06:30 p.m., they all come together again at the bath house. The bath house, located right next to the dining hall, is separated into five sections, one for the male students of each battalion and a fifth one on the second floor for all female students.

Student Ogawa, carrying a basket filled with shower utensils, enters the section dedicated to the fourth battalion, takes off his shoes and slips out of his judo suit. He grabs his towel and soap from the basket, places the basket on a shelf, and slides open the door opening up to a large and steamy room. All four walls of the room are lined with mirrors, showers and small plastic stools. Student Ogawa spots a friend from his platoon in the back of the room, sits down on the plastic stool next to him, and begins rinsing his hair with hot water.

In the middle of the room there are two large, shallow pools, filled to the brim with hot water. Floating inside are a group of senior students, some with their eyes closed, others talking to each other. After Student Ogawa has thoroughly cleaned his body from head to toe, he begins to dry himself with his towel and follows his friend back in the direction of the changing room. Flinging his towel over his shoulder and holding on to the

bottle of soap in his right hand, Student Ogawa passes the pool with a quick glance to his senior students, before he disappears behind the closing sliding door. First-year students are not allowed to enter these pools. The two students quickly change into their olive green uniform and head to the dining hall for dinner.

Only a few minutes after the students have returned to the student barracks from dinner, at 07:30 p.m., mandatory self-study time (*jishū jikan*) begins. Student Ogawa sits at his desk and attends to the homework he received in class today. After finishing his homework, he prepares a set of readings for the next day. At the desk on the other side of the room, Student Katō, too, is focussed on his readings.

While the first-year students are studying, one of the third-year students is playing a video game on his computer. Video game servers, as well as internet access to a list of other websites deemed as inappropriate, are blocked by the NDA's internet network. These blocks, however, are no match for the students, and many senior students use VPNs to reliably bypass them.

To get the most out of the first-person shooter he is playing, the third-year student is wearing an expensive set of headphones. Similarly, there are senior students throughout the company wearing headphones or earphones while they are studying. First-years, however, are not allowed to wear head- or earphones in most rooms, although in some cases they are allowed to wear earphones in one ear. Senior students explain that this is to make sure that first-year students are still able to hear the commands of their senior students.

One of the fourth-year students in the study room is working his way through a set of excel sheets. As the captain of his sports club, there are many days where his various responsibilities keep him from using his study time for academic tasks. Because of the reduced course work in the fourth year, this does not pose a major problem for most students. After he finishes his task with a loud sigh, he walks over to the cupboard next to the door and picks up two yoga mats. Together with one of the third-year students, who joins him on the floor in the middle of the room, he begins an elaborate stretching routine, while sharing the latest gossip about the upcoming graduation ball.

Except for the two students working out on their yoga mats, the only empty chair in the study room is that of the head of the room, who has once again returned to his bed in the sleeping room. Although self-study time is a formal part of the schedule, and therefore not optional in theory, enforcement of the obligation to study resides entirely with the senior students. At this time of the day, there is only one uniformed instructor left in each of the battalions at this time of the day, and they rarely make appearances in the

student rooms at this hour. Fourth-year students, who are at the top of the student corps' hierarchy, are therefore virtually unchecked and free to set rules or disobey existing ones as they please.

In the ten-minute break between the two blocks of self-study time, one of the third-year students gets up from his chair, walks to the centre of the room and rings a silver bell that sits atop of a desk. The other students in the room turn around with a grin on their faces. They know the bell signals that it is time for what students call 'juice *janken*', where all students in the room participate in a game of rock paper scissors. The unlucky loser must pay a round of drinks from the vending machine, which is located on the hallway of each company. The two fourth-year students decide that today, in a little twist, they will play by the rules of *otokogi janken*. Roughly translating to 'manly' or 'chivalrous' rock paper scissors, in this version it is the winner, rather than the loser, who must pay for everyone. 'It is manly to want to win and treat everyone', the head of the room informs the first-year students knowingly.

On the whiteboard next to the door the students are keeping a tally to document the total amount of money each student in the room has spent on lost games in the current trimester. Although the third trimester has only begun last week, one student has already racked up a sum of 5.630 yen, whereas others have not had to pay at all. According to the second trimester's final tally, which the students have saved as a picture, one first-year student ended up with a total of 19.300 yen, a hefty sum for the students who do not receive a full salary yet.

A few minutes after the second half of the study time begins, a fourth-year student from another platoon comes to join one of the fourth-year students to look over some materials from one of their classes. Because there are no additional chairs left for the visitor, Student Ogawa promptly gets up and offers him his own chair. The guest nonchalantly acknowledges the gesture, sits down on the chair and dives into the study materials with his class mate. Student Ogawa, now chair-less, heads to the entrance of the room, where he rearranges the visitor's shoes so that they point towards the door for easy access once he decides to depart. Then he returns to his desk, where he kneels on the floor and begins writing down a list of English vocabulary.

A few minutes before 10 p.m., the designated end of the self-study time, the two second-year students get up from their chairs and head to the sleeping room to prepare for the inspection of the first-year students' beds. For a brief moment they stand in the middle of the room, trying to figure out which of the beds belong to the two first-year students. But the search is quickly over, since none of the beds that belong to senior

students are either made or surrounded by tidy lockers. Having located the only two beds that are fully made, the two third-year students lock their arms in front of their chests and wait for the inspection to begin.

At precisely 10:00 p.m., Students Ogawa and Katō rush into the room. Once the two first-years have assembled, one of the second-year students begins the inspection and pulls out the card holder carrying his student identity card to measure the length of each of the bed's sections. At the part where the blanket is folded back to allow room for the pillow, he stops and turns around: 'Is this part too long', he asks his classmate. The other second-year student nods silently in agreement and throws up his right hand with a balled fist, signalling the consequence of having failed the inspection. Immediately, the other second-year student grabs the blanket with his two hands and rapidly pulls it out of the mattress. He throws the blanket towards the end of the bed, before proceeding to pull out the sheets in a similarly dramatic fashion, as well. The first-years, watching the product of their hard work get torn apart in a matter of seconds, can do nothing but watch the scene unfold in silence.

Having entirely torn up the first bed, the senior students now move on to Student Katō's bed. It does not take long for them to find a flaw with his bed, too. Again, the second senior student throws up his right fist. As before, the other student grabs the blanket and sheets and tears them from under the mattress. In an unusual moment of pity, he turns to Student Katō for a brief apology: 'I'm sorry, but this is my job'. Student Katō replies by acknowledging that he has caused his senior student more work with his carelessness, and politely bows.

With the sheets on both beds successfully disassembled, the senior students conclude the inspection. All students are expected to line up in the central hall for roll call by 10:05 p.m., and the first-year students will still need to remake their beds before then. But it is only 10:02 p.m., and the two senior students decide that Students Ogawa and Katō will not be allowed to begin remaking their bed until 10:04 p.m. In what is called *oidashi* (chasing out), the idea behind this practice is to make first-years remake their beds in less than a minute and subsequently hurry to the central hall so as not to be late for roll call. Unable to begin their daunting task, becoming more difficult with each second that passes, the two first-years stand awkwardly next to their beds, looking at their senior students. The senior students, for their part, are looking down at their watches while exchanging small talk about today's dinner.

Finally, at precisely 10:04 p.m., the two senior students issue the signal, and Students Ogawa and Katō quickly pick up the sheets and blankets to begin re-making

their beds. After twenty five seconds, one of the senior students shouts 'zero, four, two, five!' 'Zero, four, two five', the two first-years shout back, confirming the time update. Having less than a minute for a task they spent almost half an hour earlier in the day, it is obvious for everyone in the room that the outcome will be worse than what it was before the inspection. Still, the two students successfully manage to complete their task in less than a minute and receive permission to move on.

Having once again finished making their beds, the two first-year students keep up the pace by quickly changing into a freshly ironed set of the olive green uniform, briefly adjusting it in front of the mirror, slipping into their shoes, and running outside and up the stairs for the roll call. The two second-year students, with a grin on their faces, nod at each other, put on their shoes, and slowly follow them up the stairs. At 10:08 p.m. the fourth-year student in charge begins the roll call.

At the end of the roll call, the first-year students line up for one final inspection today. Again, senior students spread out to cover one first-year each, demanding to see whether they brought their note pads, unused handkerchiefs, and unopened tissues. This time both Students Ogawa and Katō pass the inspection. Six other students, however, are reported as inadequate, requiring all first-years of the platoon to report for another nightly inspection tomorrow.

At 10:15 p.m. the first-years are dismissed, and Student Ogawa rushes down the stairs for a final time today. He enters the sleeping room, where he picks up the empty tanks of two humidifiers to refill them in the bathroom. On his way out, he passes Student Katō, who is moving across the floor on his knees, attending to some new scuff marks with a small patch of steel wool. After he has replaced the water tanks, Student Ogawa heads to the study room, where he picks up full trash bags to throw them into a set of containers outside.

At 10:25 p.m. a voice on the battalion's speaker system announces that it is five minutes to lights-out and Student Katō decides to store away the cleaning utensils for the night. Then he joins the other students in the bathroom to brush his teeth. He holds his toothbrush under the water, adds some tooth paste, and begins brushing. For a brief moment he looks into the mirror, staring at the tired face looking back at him. But the moment does not last long. A fourth-year student has entered the bathroom, and Student Katō dutifully joins the other first-year students at the back of the room to yield the sinks to the senior students.

Just in time for the bugle call at 10:30 p.m. the two first-year students return to the sleeping room. Student Ogawa takes off his uniform and hangs it into his locker. Then he

asks all the present senior students for permission to turn off the lights, flips the switch, and climbs into his bunk bed.

With the lights off and the room turning silent, Student Ogawa begins to feel his muscles relax and his eye lids getting heavier. But although the next trumpet signal is only seven and a half hours away, he decides not to close his eyes just yet. Finally unburdened by his busy schedule and the watchful eyes of his seniors, he pulls out his phone, connects his earphones, and begins scrolling through a variety of social media applications. Only at 11:15 p.m., feeling his need for sleep growing stronger than the desire for some coveted time on his smartphone, does he stow away his earphones and shut his eyes.

The Objective of the Student Barracks

At the NDA, students of all four years are required to live in the student barracks, sharing virtually every minute of their day with their classmates. Formally recognised as one of the three pillars of the NDA's education system (*sanbonbashira*), life in the student barracks blends the professional and private spheres to such an extent that the community formed in the process begins to encapsulate the students' entire life. In most cases, participating in this form of group living (*shūdan seikatsu*), a recurring concept in educational settings throughout Japanese society (Rohlen 1986, 321; Peak 1989, 94; Cave 2016, 45), leads to students also spending their days off with their classmates, as they gradually lose touch with their high school friends, and the NDA community starts to dominate the students' social life, as well.

Next to this more organic dynamic of the personal relationships formed in the student barracks, the academy's mandatory club activities also play an important role in keeping students within the academy's community during days off. Even though clubs meet for roughly two hours each day from Monday to Friday, students complain that the busy NDA schedule leaves members of the more demanding clubs with little additional time and energy to spend on club activities during weekdays, particularly in comparison to the way in which students at regular universities in Japan are able to prioritise club activities (*bukatsu-dō*; Cave 2004). To make up for this disadvantage, many NDA clubs routinely require members to attend long training sessions on weekends, and often take up as much as three out of the four weeks of the summer holidays with all-day practice, almost precluding the possibility to maintain any kind of social life outside of the NDA.

As a result, students are effectively obliged to participate in the virtually all-encompassing NDA community almost constantly and in a number of different ways. Membership in this bounded community requires all students to abide by the same rules, and learn how to get along with their classmates, not only professionally, but also socially. After four years of group living at the NDA, graduates have formed exceptionally strong bonds with their classmates, which often last until their retirement and beyond. Even in the final stages of their career, senior SDF officers regularly relate to their colleagues through memories from their shared time at the NDA.

Naturally, these relationships often prove to be an important asset in the professional career of academy graduates. And while a critical interpretation of the effects of such networks might focus on the possibly unfair advantage this constitutes for NDA graduates vis-a-vis other SDF officers, a more positive interpretation, as advanced by most members of the NDA, focuses on the academy's function of building lifelong relationships based on mutual trust (*shinrai kankei*), which are generally considered to be pivotal for troop cohesion and organisational efficiency in militaries around the world (Ben-Ari et al. 2010, 79). At the NDA, the foundation for these relationships is rooted primarily in daily life in the student barracks. Considering the educational value attributed to the socialisation in the student barracks as per the three-pillars framework, it is worth scrutinising exactly what kind of relationships students learn to form in the barracks.

Unlike the NDA's academic education (*kyōiku*) and formal military training (*kunren*), the student barracks are almost entirely the domain of the students. Administrative officials and academic instructors virtually never enter the student barracks and know little about what happens inside. Most uniformed instructors, a few dozen of whom are deployed in the student barracks, have graduated from the NDA themselves and are keenly aware that much of what happens in the student barracks remains unknown to the academy's employees. Yet, these uniformed instructors argue that self-governance is an important part of developing the skills and character that are necessary for future SDF officers, and therefore deliberately avoid micro-managing life in the student barracks, instead staying out of the sleeping and study rooms as much as possible, mostly engaging with the students in the hallway, during formal military training, and when students need to consult them for various administrative tasks.

Still, the NDA's senior leadership is regularly made aware of the existence of some of the more extreme facets of life in the student barracks. This happens when there are incidents among students that require the administration's intervention, when there is elevated media attention surrounding the NDA following troubling information that is

shared with the press by frustrated students or employees, and during times where there are considerable fluctuations in the number of dropouts, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic (Uchida 2023). Even when senior NDA officials do enter the student barracks themselves in order to get a better understanding of a particular situation, however, they virtually always do so with previous announcement. Students, in turn, make sure to show themselves on their best behaviour, knowing full well which elements of daily life in the student barracks they can afford to show employees, and which they can not.

At the heart of both the students' and the employees' views on the student barracks is the belief that its organisational culture should first and foremost be the responsibility of the students. One fourth-year student puts it this way: 'The [uniformed] employees rotate in and out every two or three years, so they cannot pass on the academy's traditions and identity. The ones who have to pass them on are we, the students (*wareware gakusei*)'. 'The instructors have a home outside of the campus, where they go to sleep after work', explains another, 'so they don't understand our experience'. 'They are outsiders (*soto*)', he adds.

Within the training department (*kunren-bu*), the section of the academy's administration led by uniformed officials and responsible for military training and the student barracks, there are many uniformed employees who worry that the heavily restrictive lifestyle that particularly first-year students are submitted to in the barracks is detrimental to the process of learning to think for themselves. At the same time, they voice concerns that more frequent intervention would lead to even less room for students to think for themselves. As a consequence, almost all staff members of the training department, as well as senior academy officials, believe that the students themselves should be in charge of reflecting about the ideal state of the student barracks and implementing structural changes accordingly over time.

Interestingly, however, even the fourth-year students, who the training department expects to lead such a process, frequently state that they do not believe they have the necessary authority to make significant changes to life in the student barracks. In their mind, the rules which they were taught in their first year at the academy were not the product of decisions made by senior students, but established academy traditions. To the fourth-years, there is an inherent virtue in maintaining such rules and passing them on to the next generation of students, rather than questioning how these rules might inconvenience members of new incoming cohorts. In addition to these more fundamental beliefs, fourth-years also simply have little incentive to change a system whose difficulties they have already survived, and whose benefits they are now able to enjoy as senior

students. This dynamic has been observed in club activities throughout Japan, where senior students sometimes resist attempts by supervising adults to implement changes that would level the hierarchies in favour of junior students (Cave 2004, 404). In practice, therefore, life in the academy's student barracks has historically only been subject to major reforms when the training department intervened, usually after particularly severe incidents of violence, bullying, or a rise in the number of drop-outs that threatened the continued operation of the academy.

Meanwhile, the overwhelming majority of rules that dictate life in the student barracks are not codified in any formal documents and are therefore difficult to grasp by anyone who does not live in the barracks themselves. In theory, the student handbook (*gakusei hikkei*), which is compiled by the training department and distributed to all students, serves as the academy's primary rule book on student life. In practice, however, students get virtually none of their information on student life from this book at all.

For the most part, this is because first-year students, who are expected to learn all rules from scratch within a short time, simply do not have the time to read the student handbook. Instead, they are informed about these rules on the fly by their *ue-taiban*, a second-year mentor who is assigned to each first-year student. First-years learn the ropes by shadowing their *ue-taiban* around the academy and are encouraged to ask any questions to them directly.

In addition to this verbal instruction, *ue-taiban* provide their assigned first-year students (*shita-taiban*) with an individually compiled explanatory folder, called *taiban-chō*, in which the most important rules necessary to survive life in the student barracks and on campus more broadly are spelled out. This folder contains explanations on how to make one's bed, on the various elements of cleaning the facilities of the student barracks, on how to tuck the shirt of one's uniform into one's belt to avoid creases, and on how to correctly address senior students in the hallway or when entering a room. On the rare occasion during their first few months when first-year students find themselves with a few minutes of free time at their desks, they make sure to read the *taiban-chō*. In contrast, most senior students readily concede that they have hardly ever even opened the training department's student handbook.

As a consequence, NDA students are often unaware of whether specific rules that they have internalised and learned to live by are formal, meaning that they are stipulated by the training department, or informal, meaning that they are tacit rules that are conceived and upheld solely by senior students. This is because students very quickly learn that the only rule that matters in the student barracks is to accept as a rule whatever

senior students say. In other words, the NDA's student corps is not a legalistic community, where all rules and rights are codified, so that subordinates may refer to them as a means to protect themselves from overly zealous senior students. Instead, the rule that counts is whatever the most senior student present in the room stipulates. For the first-years, in particular, obeying these senior students is not just an element of life in the student barracks, it is its whole point.

In the NDA's official narrative, the role of the student barracks is to complement the formal education provided by professional staff with a loosely defined character education surrounding a set of core virtues. This form of character education 'based on tradition rather than method' can be observed in military academies throughout the world (Jansen and Kramer 2018, 516). According to the student handbook, the objective here is 'to foster independent discipline and obedience among students, develop leadership and followership, and to nurture the character and qualities necessary for future senior SDF officers' (Training Department 2023, §3-3).

Subordination and discipline, according to the student handbook, are virtues that must not only be nurtured at the academy during formal training, but also throughout everyday life. The enforcement of these virtues in the student barracks are not incumbent on professional instructors, but senior students. 'The student barracks', the handbook explains, 'are an important place for character development and it is where students spend the majority of their time at the academy. [...] it is a place for earnest self-discipline (*shinken na shūyō*) and a place for rest in a homely atmosphere. Therefore, the student barracks require strict discipline, through self-regulation (*jiritsu*) and subordination (*taritsu*), as well as the ethos of a calm spring breeze (*harukaze taitō*)' (Training Department 2023, §3-3).

For the first-year students, the academy's socialisation of the concept of 'followership' amounts to an ideology in which students do not need to like, agree with, or even comprehend the rationale behind the orders which they are expected to abide by. In fact, according to the section detailing 'what is desired of students of each year' (*kaku gakunen no arubeki sugata*), learning to follow orders that feel wrong or seem to make little sense are precisely the point of a student's first year:

'In aiming for future independence and self-reliance (jishu jiritsu), students must first practice reasonable obedience (risei aru fukujū). The NDA is significantly different from regular universities in terms of its purpose, curriculum, and lifestyle, and it is a world completely different from high school life, so students are bound to experience a considerable culture shock and feel a sense of instinctive (honnōteki) and conscious (ishikiteki) resistance to it.'

However, at this stage it is necessary to quickly get used to the atmosphere and customs, and to try doing as you are told by imitating your seniors. As you progress through the years, you will come to understand the background and reasons for many of the things that you initially resisted or thought were absurd (fujōri), and you will be able to accept them' (Training Department 2023, §4-26; translation by the author).

Followership and Spiritual Education

While the formal domain of the academy's curriculum revolves around the teaching of specific skills and knowledge, which is done under the purview of professional instructors, the socialisation occurring in the student barracks is less concerned with *what* students are doing, than with *how* they are doing it, a phenomenon also observed in spiritual education throughout civilian institutions in Japan (Rohlen 1986, 320; Cave 2004). Accordingly, life in the student barracks during a student's first year revolves almost entirely around a seemingly endless repetition of cleaning, bed-making, and fixing one's uniform.

First-year students immediately learn that they are held to an entirely separate set of standards than their senior students, who themselves follow virtually none of the rules which they impose on their subordinates. Although senior students never tire of repeating that first-years must learn the above skills to become proper NDA students, they waste no effort to pretend that senior students need to embody this ideal themselves. The point of forcing rigorous and often unreasonable routines of cleaning, bed-making and uniform maintenance, then, is the enforcement itself.

Perhaps the most striking example among the three repetitive tasks of a first-year student is the daily cleaning (*seisō*) of the communal spaces, which even has its own time slot on the crowded formal student schedule. The concept of students participating in the cleaning of their educational facilities is a common sight throughout regular schools in Japan, where the emphasis is generally placed on the idea that students are divided into cleaning groups that 'are meant to be inclusive, leaving no-one out' (Tsuneyoshi 2001, 29). Still, pronounced hierarchies between students during extracurricular activities often result in patterns where cleaning and other menial tasks in these contexts are left entirely to first-year students (Cave 2004, 404). This is also true for the NDA's student barracks. Even if second-year students are tasked with supervising the cleaning of the communal spaces, in practice the cleaning itself is entirely the responsibility of first-year students. In some battalions, senior students emphasise this point by even making first-year students

pay for some of the cleaning utensils themselves, including the dust cloths and sponges, which both require replacement multiple times per week. And although student leaders in other battalions have decided to make senior students pitch in to reimburse the first-years and share these costs fairly, it remains a notable fact that senior students have the authority to make such decisions in the first place, directly affecting the private finances of first-years.

Even if the fact that students almost never clean the barracks again once they enter their second year is well known to all students and graduates of the academy, this is not a rule that is formally recognised or codified by the academy's administration. Much to the opposite, senior students go to great lengths to hide from senior officials that they do not actually clean themselves. In some cases, this involves directly lying to their most senior uniformed superiors.

Facing declining applicant numbers due to the country's demographic upheaval, as well as pressure to respond to journalistic coverage concerning life in the student barracks after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the academy administration has begun considering outsourcing the cleaning of communal spaces in the student barracks to professional cleaning staff. In doing so, proponents posited, students might have more time for studying, military training, or even to relax and regain some energy. To assess whether such additional expenses were necessary, the leadership of the training department held a meeting with the most senior student leaders of the student corps to confront them directly. One by one, the fourth-year battalion leaders were asked if senior students participated in the cleaning of communal spaces and whether they did so themselves. All four of them, as well as the head of the student corps, falsely stated that they participated in cleaning regularly.

By the time students reach the fourth year, as the above episode demonstrates, they are strongly incentivised to protect the status quo and their own authority. If need be, they do so even by lying directly to their most senior uniformed superiors. Even if most first-years, strained by the sheer amount of responsibilities that senior students have assigned to them, tend to have a long list of rules and customs in the student barracks which they think should be reformed or entirely eliminated, virtually all of them have lost all appetite for change by the time they reach the final year themselves.

What the discussions led by the training department about outsourcing the cleaning of communal spaces in the student barracks failed to capture is the fact that maintaining a clean living environment constitutes only a secondary objective of the cleaning of public spaces in the student barracks. This, too, has been noted in the

literature about civilian schools in Japan, where a formally stated objective is to foster 'empathetic and voluntary cooperation' (Tsuneyoshi 2001, 29). As noted above, however, this does not apply to the NDA, where a different objective rules supreme. Each morning, first-year students must clean hundreds of meters of hallways in the students barracks. Because they are not allowed to use even simple vacuum cleaners for the communal spaces, never mind rider floor scrubbers which professional cleaners would surely utilise, they must resort to old-fashioned brooms. Asked whether the available vacuum cleaners would not prove more efficient for this task, a second-year student supervising two first-year students sweeping the hallway took a moment to think before answering: 'I don't know. It is probably because there are not enough power outlets'. To verify his guess, he turned around, only to discover a set of empty power outlets right behind him. Shrugging with a wide grin on his face, he offered another explanation: 'I guess cleaning is also about spiritual education' (*seishinteki kyōiku*).

This tacit logic of daily cleaning at the NDA is also highlighted by the fact that the cleaning of the individual study and sleeping rooms, as opposed to the communal spaces, operates by drastically different standards. Other than the communal spaces, cleaning these individual rooms does not have its own item on the formal student schedule. First-year students attend to it between breakfast and classes. They do so unsupervised by senior students, allowing them to set their own pace. In these rooms, they are also allowed to use vacuum cleaners, demonstrating how this element of cleaning in the student barracks is more concerned with the outcome, rather than with spiritual education. Until recently, the two cleaning sessions were also distinguished by the fact that male students needed to clean the public spaces bare-chested, wearing only the hat, pants and shoes of their uniform. But since the training department began allowing male students to attend morning roll call with the top part of their uniforms as well, the same restriction has been lifted for the cleaning of the communal spaces.

Students also frequently lament that the shoes which they wear on campus as part of their uniforms leave a tremendous amount of scuff marks on the bright floor of the student barracks. Considering that first-years have been removing these scuff marks for many decades, moving around on their knees and requiring hundreds of small sponges each morning, it seems puzzling that the administration could not instead purchase a model of shoes that does not leave such scuff marks. But since the objective is not to make cleaning less time and labour intensive, but to conduct a ritualised spiritual education that revolves around discipline and obedience, measuring the outcome in terms of efficiency and cleanliness is besides the point.

Status and Hierarchies

Although life in militaries throughout the world is often perceived to be characterised by a strict adherence to uniform rules, in practice these rules and their enforcement are often just as irregular and arbitrary as in civilian contexts. The following account by Kirke (2010) details observations from ethnographic fieldwork in the British Army:

'[...] however firm and clear the rules may appear, their observance and enforcement by the agents involved needs to be seen as part of a culturally informed process played out in the context of everyday organizational life [...]. The evidence is that British soldiers' lives are not rigidly rule-dominated, that rules are bent or broken or managed in certain circumstances with and without the approval of authority agents [...]. In essence, rules have the appearance of the absolute but they lose their absoluteness as they are played out in the complex processes of daily life' (Kirke 2010, 373).

In the NDA's student barracks, students encounter different categories of rules. Some of these are codified by the government or by the NDA administration, while others are introduced to them in writing or orally by senior students. It only takes hours for newly-arriving first-year students, however, to learn that not all rules and expectations apply equally to all students. The key variable that determines the extent to which rules apply to each student is their level of seniority. Beyond the obvious distribution of responsibilities, as exhibited each morning during cleaning time, an NDA student's level of seniority also affects almost all other elements of their life in the student barracks.

Intra-organisational hierarchies based on age or length of affiliation are a recurring phenomenon across Japanese society (Nakane 1970), and it is not uncommon for junior students in Japanese schools to address senior students using polite language and following their directions during club activities as though they were orders (Cave 2004, 404; Rohlen 1983, 190). Indeed, the hierarchical nature of inter-student relationships has emerged as one of the key themes in the literature on student club activities and is regularly associated with high-profile incidents of suicides and bullying in media and academic literature (Ono, Tomozoe, and Yoshinaga 2015). At the NDA, the extent to which these hierarchies affect student life is almost all-encompassing.

In the academy's student barracks a student's level of seniority determines what they are allowed to do, what equipment and facilities they are allowed to use, and what clothes they are allowed to wear. In contrast to the rules and guidance codified in the student handbook and other official documents issued by the NDA administration, these rules are known among students as 'tacit rules' (*anmoku rūru*). While some of these rules

come with a formal justification, revolving around varying abilities or educational objectives among students of the four years, the majority of them amount to little more than plain exhibitions of status and hierarchy. First-year students, who are at the bottom of this hierarchy, must learn to accept that there are certain things that they are not allowed to do, for the simple reason that they are first-year students.

First-year students are repeatedly told that it is part of the soldier ethos to keep one's bed, locker, and book shelf tidy, only to watch their senior students violate virtually all of these rules themselves. Book shelves in the study rooms, for example, first-years are told, must only be used for books. Sitting next to the first-years, however, second-years can invariably be seen testing out their newly advanced status by placing soft drinks, calendars, sports trophies, and tableware on their shelves. The shelves of second-year students also often carry toothbrushes, demonstrating their newly won privilege to brush their teeth in the study room. Third- and fourth-years, ignoring the declared rules even more blatantly, use their book shelves to store bags of protein powder, cup ramen, figurines ranging from Godzilla to Disney princesses, or fan merchandise from their favourite pop stars. Just as in the study rooms, the bedrooms are marked by the obvious discrepancy between beds that are covered in stuffed animals or private blankets and pillows on the beds of senior students, and beds that are kept immaculately tidy and free of personal items in the case of junior students.

Facilities and Uniforms

Beyond personal items and behaviour, the status of a student also affects their ability to use the academy's facilities. One example is the two sets of stair cases leading up to the dining hall, the more convenient of which first-year students are prohibited from making use of. Another example occurs during shower time between club activities and dinner, where first-year students are not allowed to enter the hot water pool in the bath house. Although senior students are quick to explain that this is because first-year students do not have the time to do so, most first-year students say that they do not enter the pool even on days when they do have ample time, for fear of being reprimanded.

Still, the rules that currently govern the behaviour of first-years in the bath house are significantly less restrictive than in the past. Two senior uniformed instructors who graduated from the academy themselves claimed that in the past some cohorts of first-year students were not even allowed to sit on the plastic stools while they washed

themselves. Others claim that at some point first-years were not allowed to use the shower heads, instead having to fill up buckets of water from a tap to wash themselves.

Beyond the bath house, which is located next to the dining hall and open only during shower time, there are also shower facilities on each floor of the four battalion buildings, which are accessible throughout the day. First-year students, however, are not allowed to enter these showers, making daily life considerably more inconvenient for precisely those students who are said to have the least amount of time on their hands.

In addition to the showers in the student barracks, first-year students are also not allowed to make use of the tumble dryers. With more than a hundred students on each floor of the four battalion buildings, and students generally forced to do their laundry at the same time as everyone else due to their shared schedule, one rarely finds a machine that is not in use. Based on this simple principle of supply and demand, the tumble dryers have become an extremely coveted good and senior students have decided to reduce the number of eligible users by excluding first-years from the equation. 'Tumble dryers are high-level' (*reberu takai*), explains one first-year student, 'we are not allowed to use them at all'. Forced to hang up their clothes in the drying rooms instead, first-year students thus face a significant disadvantage, even as the disproportionate amount of inspections they are subjected to requires them to wash their uniforms more often than their senior students.

In another example of a tacit rule that makes life more difficult for those students with the least time to spare, first-years are not allowed to wear the same olive green uniforms that are preferred by senior students during their daily life in the barracks. In addition to two sets of this uniform which students receive when they enter the NDA, most students purchase a slight variation of this uniform privately in their second year. Referred to by the students as *non-pure* (an abbreviation of the English term 'non-press'), this unofficial version of the uniform does not require daily ironing to preserve the folding lines that are crucial during inspections. Unlike first-years, who must iron their uniforms daily, senior students aided by the *non-pure* uniforms can therefore reduce the frequency of this task to about once a week.

When asked why first-year students were barred from wearing the *non-pure* uniform, one fourth-year explained that it did not adhere to the same fire safety standards as the version that students received from the academy. Since the *non-pure* uniform was more flammable, he noted, it was more dangerous to wear and therefore not suitable for first-years. Prompted to explain why, in that case, these uniforms are safe to wear for senior students, the student stopped to think for a second, before adding: 'Senior

students are used to the uniform, so in the case of a fire they can take off the *non-pure* and change into a different uniform faster than first-years'.

In a more extreme example of how status affects student life in the student barracks, senior students are capable of revoking even the privilege of using one's own chair in the study room. In some cases, as detailed in the ethnographic vignette above, they do so for entire sections of the day, forcing first-year students to stand awkwardly at their desks, even when they are preparing for classes or have nothing to do at all. Where explanations are made explicit at all, they appear mostly arbitrary, ranging from a concern for creases in the student's uniform to alleged time constraints. Here, first-year students learn that what matters is not the rationale of the explanation, but the fact that senior students wield the authority to issue such rules.

Even when senior students do not explicitly command first-year students to refrain from sitting down, first-years regularly demonstrate the extent to which they have internalised that using one's own chair is a tiered privilege. As detailed in the incident above, when the amount of students in the room exceeds the number of chairs, first-year students are trained to offer their chair to senior students even without an order to do so. In a blatant contrast to the oft-repeated notion that senior students should protect and look out for (*mamottekureru*) their junior students, senior students readily accept such deference, making their junior students study while seated on the floor.

Soundscape and Silence

The soundscape in the study rooms constitutes another telling indicator for the hierarchies between NDA students. Only fourth-year students are allowed to equip their desks with speakers, which are regularly used to fill the study rooms with music, ranging from military marches to the soundtrack of animated movies by the famously anti-militarist film maker Miyazaki Hayao. Next to music played through the speakers, students in their fourth years, as well as occasionally those in their third years, are generally the only ones allowed to place and play instruments in the study room, such as guitars or violins.

Beyond music, a student's status also dictates their ability to make use of their own voice. First-year students are generally not allowed to address their senior students unless prompted, whether during formal tasks or in their few moments of free time. While this rule applies to all first-year students, it is further formalised by an additional tacit rule that applies only to female students. If a female first-year student needs to address one of

her senior students, she must begin by asking ‘*Name of senior student*, may I have some of your time’ (*name of senior student*-san, *shōshō ojikan yoroshii deshōka*)? Senior students may then grant her permission to speak.

The combination of the senior students’ control over sounds and voices in the student barracks amounts to a near total control over the soundscape. Keenly aware of this monopoly, fourth-year students often mutter to themselves or hold demonstrably inconsequential conversations with each other when junior students are in the room, sometimes seemingly as if only to fill the room with their voices and thus asserting their authority. First-year students, for their part, generally stay silent throughout much of the day. Even when they speak to other first-years, they do so in a carefully reserved and quiet manner.

For the first-year students, the silence imposed upon them symbolises the extent to which their main task consists of simply making it through the year. Seeing as complete subordination to senior students and overcoming one’s ‘instinctive’ resistance to the many ‘absurd’ restrictions constitute the declared objective for first-year students, there are few ways for them to consult with senior students or to seek help if they are not able to adjust to their new lifestyle. Even when there are no senior students around to enforce silence, there is little time or opportunity for first-year students to speak to anyone, especially outside of campus. First-year students may only leave the NDA’s premises on Saturdays and Sundays, and must return in time for the nightly roll call. In practice, these requirements result in many students hardly making it past a few local restaurants in their first year at all.

In the absence of a culture of consultation within the academy, or the ability to connect meaningfully with the world outside, the fact that dozens of students quit within the first weeks and months of the first-year is such common knowledge that students and staff regularly joke about it. Among the cohort who entered the NDA in April 2022, for instance, roughly one in five students had quit by the time the second year began (Tōmatsu 2023, 15). In more severe cases, the restrictive atmosphere on campus and the lack of opportunities to escape it can push struggling students to extreme actions. In 2020, when measures to contain the spread of the Covid-19 virus even further restricted students’ ability to escape the bubble of the academy, the administration reportedly recorded as many as five attempted suicides in the student barracks (Shūeisha Online 2022).

Socialising Status Differences

In the case of virtually all of the tacit rules that are related to a student's status in the student barracks, first-year students are expected to adhere to procedures and standards that are no longer expected of them by the time they become senior students. This seems to directly violate the stated objective behind most of these rules, which is to nurture the conduct and character of a desirable future SDF officer. If senior students have already succeeded at obtaining such conduct and character, it seems puzzling that they should choose not to demonstrate them and lead by example.

The generous interpretation of the discrepancy between the rules that govern the life of first-years and the behaviour of fourth-years is that while students are expected to use their time at the NDA to master the rules and skills necessary for their future careers as SDF officers, they are not necessarily expected to put them into practice while still at the academy. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this interpretation is generally advanced by senior students when asked to justify the above discrepancy.

In a more critical interpretation, the objective of the system of status and hierarchies in the student barracks is not to nurture skills and behaviour, but merely to socialise students into accepting and submitting to status differences. In this interpretation, students at the NDA are socialised into a community where subordinates must follow whatever orders are imposed on them, regardless of whether these seem to have a discernible rationale, or whether they are even followed by the very person who is issuing them. Rather than relating to skills and character development, this interpretation revolves around the idea that an effective military organisation requires the successful enforcement of discipline and absolute obedience.

Whatever the intended objective, and regardless of whether students are able to comprehend and articulate this objective themselves, the consequence of this socialisation of status and hierarchies in the student barracks is that by the time graduates leave the academy, they have learned to consider it perfectly normal for superiors to live by a different set of rules and standards than their subordinates, and that orders are to be followed, even if they lack a clearly discernible rationale, or even pose ethical problems. Although NDA graduates are exposed to another year of formative training in branch-specific officer candidate schools before ultimately being commissioned as SDF officers, the way in which they understand and exert leadership in these positions is no doubt shaped to a considerable extent by their experience of how senior students treat junior students in the NDA's student barracks.

Indeed, the connection between leadership and hierarchies in the student barracks and in the SDF's officer corps is even made explicit in the student handbook. 'One must not forget that the first year [at the academy] marks the first and last time in their lives where students are in the lowest-ranking position in the Self-Defense Forces, and therefore presents a unique opportunity to experience being in the lowest-ranking position' (Training Department 2023, §4-26; translation by the author). In other words, students are taught that the position of the first-year student at the NDA is similar in nature to the lowest rank-and-file members whom they will command once they join the SDF officer corps. 'Therefore', the handbook continues, the first year 'is a position in which followership must be cultivated. Students must understand what followership means and understand its importance. And they must practice and master followership during this period' (Ibid.).

If the nature of hierarchical relations at the NDA is intended to mirror those in the SDF, and the educational aspect of practicing these hierarchies revolves around experiencing the concept of 'leadership' and 'followership', then the tacit rules that define life in the student barracks are indeed primarily intended to socialise students into accepting and submitting to the orders of their superiors, rather than to nurture a certain set of skills or character. The discrepancy between the standards subordinates must adhere to on the one side and the behaviour of their superiors on the other, then, is not just a temporary anomaly, as suggested by the senior students, but it is considered to constitute the very nature of leadership and followership itself. In other words, the ability to enforce even 'absurd' rules becomes a demonstration of successful leadership.

Inter-student *shidō*

At the heart of all social relationships in the student barracks is the concept of *gakusei-kan shidō*. While the first part of this essential piece of NDA vocabulary can be translated as 'inter-student', the difficulty in translating the second part reflects the ambiguity surrounding the concept of the term itself. Generally, *shidō* can mean leadership, guidance, or instruction, but it can also refer to disciplinary action.

In his account of club activities at Japanese schools, Cave (2004, 400) defines the term 'student guidance' (*seito shidō*) as 'maintaining school discipline and control', and posits that 'it means helping students to develop a moral sense together with the character to live out what that moral sense dictates'. More broadly, LeTendre (1994, 38) writes that 'guidance [*shidō*] contains an idealized model of the teaching and learning

process that is central to Japanese secondary education and perhaps many other organizations'. In a crucial difference to the above accounts, however, where the students generally receive 'guidance' by their teachers, in the academy's student barracks it is senior students who wield most of this responsibility.

According to the academy's student handbook, the concept of inter-student *shidō* is defined as follows: '*Shidō* is the practice of enlightening (*oshiemichibiku*) another person in a desired direction. At the NDA, students must learn the basics of *shidō* and hone their *shidō* abilities, so that they can leverage them to *shidō* their subordinates in the forces in the future' (Training Department 2023, §4-20).

More practically, the handbook suggests the following steps to ensure proper *shidō*: 'Demonstrate an example of how to do something properly. Offer praise when and where things are done correctly. Divide the goal into small steps and start with easy aspects to improve step by step' (Training Department 2023, §4-20).

Together with this constructive and positive interpretation of the concept of *shidō*, however, the handbook also offers a warning to students: '*Shidō* should be provided verbally with the aim of guiding students in the right direction, rather than seeking results through quick-tempered *shidō* or resorting to coercive or violent *shidō* when outcomes are not satisfactory' (Training Department 2023, § 4-20).

As the handbook volunteers readily, the reason why words of warning were compiled and added to the student handbook in the year 2014 is because of what administration officials considered to be a culture of improper *shidō* at the NDA. 'Recently', a foreword written by the then-NDA president notes, 'the NDA has been facing many challenges (*shiren*) related to inter-student *shidō*, including an incident of insurance fraud and cases of bullying and other incidents. [...] Speaking from my many years of experience as a teacher, the moment that students can no longer be trusted, the school is at the point of crisis' (Training Department 2023, §4-8).

The introduction of this section in the student handbook provides more details on the 'crisis' the NDA is argued to have found itself in. Next to the aforementioned case of insurance fraud, it also lists 'criminal charges filed between students due to inappropriate *shidō* by students', as well as 'the holding of wrong values regarding inter-student *shidō*' as the reason why 'it has become necessary to re-educate staff and students on the correct understanding of inter-student *shidō* (Training Department 2023, §4-16)'.

A second foreword, by one of the academy's vice presidents at the time, offers a similarly critical assessment of the state of inter-student *shidō*: 'The question of identifying methods to quickly and reliably train people without experience of military or

SDF life to be competent members of SDF units have so far partly been explored through trial and error. And based on the unique characteristics of this organisation, it is true that so-called (*iwayuru*) corporal punishment and collective punishment (*rentaiseikin*) have been tolerated. However, even in the SDF, which is said to be a microcosm of the wider society, the issue of bullying has now become a major issue, and there is a demand to develop *shidō* methods for a new era. “The state of inter-student *shidō*” which is formulated here was considered against this historical background’ (Training Department 2023, §4-10).

Even as the more severe aspects of inter-student *shidō* are said to be part of the preparation for life in the SDF, the vice president notes that some of the customs that are common in the student barracks would not even be tolerated within the SDF: ‘The “Inter-student *shidō*”, that is conducted at the NDA must also be valid in SDF units, and must have practical use for the *shidō* of SDF personnel. Notions concerning *shidō* in the vein of “this is only done at the NDA” or “this is only tolerated at the NDA” amount to the conferring of misguided (*ayamatta*) values in the training of SDF officers, and are not acceptable under any circumstances” (Training Department 2023, §4-11).

Oidashi and Hell Week

Beyond the veil of definitional ambiguity, as the foreword in the 2014 issue of the student handbook cautiously alludes to, the concept of inter-student *shidō* in practice largely revolves around the demonstration of status hierarchies through the exercise of power. Some of the more extreme examples of such exercise of power for the sake of demonstrating power itself are the customs of ‘*oidashi*’ and ‘hell week’.

As detailed in the ethnographic account above, the practice of ‘*oidashi*’ involves senior students intentionally messing up the carefully made beds of first-year students, before ordering them to remake the beds, change into a new set of uniforms, and rush to roll call, all within an almost impossible time frame. On the surface, *oidashi* is narrated as an inspection, where senior students test whether the beds made by first-years meet the required standards. In practice, however, the inspection is largely performative. Senior students invariably find a flaw for the sake of issuing the punishment, and the outcome is a foregone conclusion known by all senior and first-year students involved.

Indeed, the sequence of events that constitute the *oidashi* custom is so established that it is neatly codified in most students’ *taiban-chō* as an explanation to

first-year students. One *taiban-chō* from the cohort entering the NDA in 2023 defines the custom as follows:

‘After coming back from cleaning and before the nightly roll call, students fix the bedding that was torn apart, then change into a new set of ironed uniforms, adjust their uniform (kikonashi), and literally get chased out to the central hall by their seniors. Although as a measure against power harassment, the seniors no longer grab first-years by the clothes...’ (translation by the author).

According to this definition, it is irrelevant how well the first-years have made their beds prior to the inspection. The point, rather, is the punishment that reflects the invariable adequacy inherent to a first-year student’s status.

If the concept of *oidashi* still leaves the veneer of an educational objective, the custom of hell week amounts to little more than a pure demonstration of power. Again, the logic of this custom is neatly spelled out for first-year students to understand. One *taiban-chō* explains the custom as follows:

‘Hell week: Translated, it means a week in hell (this does not mean it is limited to one week). During this week senior students use any means available to continuously slaughter (tosatsushitsuzukeru) the first-year slaves (dorei no ichigakunen) using any means available to them. This is likely to occur when someone violates discipline rules (fukumu kiritsu ihan). It is best not to say ‘hell hell’ lightly (it would be terrible, if the senior students in your company get inspired)’ (translation by the author).

In recent years, complaints about what has come to be considered as excessive behaviour during hell week have led to the introduction of a set of guardrails by the training department. Senior students note that they are no longer allowed to break personal items of first-year students and are not allowed to cause permanent damage to NDA property. In other words, senior students must make sure that whatever inconveniences they subject first-years to must be reversible, or at least leave no irreversible traces. Accordingly, the custom of hell week has since become less of a painful experience for first-years, and more of a contest between senior students to test who is the most creative in messing up the beds and personal belongings of first-years. Senior students also jokingly refer to this custom as ‘typhoon’, reflecting how the state of the room resembles the aftermath of a tropical cyclone.

As demonstrated by the examples of *oidashi* and hell week, the objective of inter-student *shidō* is in many cases not an educational one, but to demonstrate the virtually unchecked power that senior students have over their junior students, as well as to enforce total subordination. The very fact that there is no educational rationale behind these actions thus serves as a demonstration to first-year students that they have no room to complain about, challenge or reject the authority of their senior students.

While the objective of socialising unconditional subordination through inter-student *shidō* is codified by the NDA administration in the student handbook under the concept of ‘followership’, there is no mention of the tacit rules through which senior students implement this in practice. Students make use of this grey zone to create a permission structure and fill the vacuum with their own logic. This logic combines the formal vocabulary used by NDA employees with the tacit rules and customs that have been passed on for generations, encapsulated in a simple truth to describe life in the student barracks: ‘Part of the objective of the education of first-years’, explains one fourth-year student, ‘is not to think and just do as they’re told’. This lesson, taught daily through inter-student *shidō*, forms the core of how students understand the objective of the student barracks.

Purposefully Disrespectful Treatment

As the usage of the word ‘slave’ in the *taiban-chō* quoted above suggests, being on the receiving end of inter-student *shidō* is explicitly linked to the idea that junior students must accept that they will not be treated with the respect that one can generally expect in civilian society. In reflecting on the behaviour which students must tolerate in their first year at the academy, many senior students insist that the intensity of *shidō* has evolved to become considerably less severe over the past few years, as a consequence of the reforms advanced by the NDA administration. ‘When I was a first-year’, one fourth-year student recalls, ‘it was like you lost your human rights (*jinken*). We were made to do all kinds of stupid tasks (*baka na shigoto*)’.

The institutionalisation of purposefully disrespectful treatment of students based on their seniority is also reflected in the common saying that first-years at the NDA are treated like ‘trash’ (*gomi*), second-years are treated like ‘slaves’ (*dorei*), third-years like ‘humans’ (*ningen*), and fourth-years like ‘gods’ (*kami*) (Shūeisha online 2023). Calling a student ‘trash’, notably, has also been identified in the academic literature as part of the common vocabulary of bullying in Japanese schools (Yoneyama 2001, 161). Accordingly,

the reality of inter-student *shidō* at the NDA to a large extent revolves around the exercise of removing the guardrails that define respectful behaviour in civilian society, and treating a subordinate as someone who is not worthy of such respect.

While the successive hierarchy based on student seniority puts fourth-years at the undisputed top of the student barracks' food chain, often joked to occupy a position more senior even than the NDA president, it is the second-year students who are placed directly in charge of first-years, and who therefore exercise the overwhelming majority of *shidō*. Third-year students, in turn, are supposed to supervise how the second-year students are exercising *shidō* on the first-years. In this chain, second-year students note that they feel the constant pressure of being watched by their immediate seniors, whose *shidō* they were subjected to themselves in the preceding year. Many second-year students, therefore, report that they feel the need to be tougher in their *shidō* than they personally want to be.

Another reason why second-year students are often said to take a tougher stance on first-year students than third- and fourth-years is that they have only just finished the first year themselves. In this narrative, second-year students still have all the tacit rules that govern the life of a first-year internalised, and believe that they need to be enforced just as relentlessly as when they were first-year students, both to properly pass on the NDA's traditions and as a matter of fairness. At the same time, third- and fourth-year students often joke that second-years, having endured the first year and all its associated struggles, have a fresh desire to retaliate and make use of their new-found power by letting it out on the first-year students.

Given this institutionalisation of purposefully disrespectful treatment, the line between *shidō* and bullying in the daily life of the student barracks is often unclear, a grey zone whose significance is further amplified by an educational philosophy throughout extracurricular settings in Japan in which 'hard experiences are seen as potentially beneficial' (Cave 2004, 412). For instance, senior NDA students readily concede that first-year students who fail at a certain task or inspection are often singled out and purposefully submitted to humiliating scolding in front of the entire unit for a whole week as punishment.

Until recently, as reflected in the recent additions to the student handbook cited above, such bullying also frequently involved physical violence. Virtually all NDA graduates are able to recall instances of such violence, ranging from collective punishment, where whole groups of students were forced to do pushups with their bare fists on concrete floor until their hands started to bleed, to groups of senior students

pulling individual junior students into dark corners of the student barracks for a beating. In recent years, however, repeated and ongoing interventions by the training department have virtually eliminated the tolerance for such physical violence as a means of *shidō*. The number of reported incidents has rapidly fallen, as students have begun to internalise the administration's new red lines, and cohorts more immediately affected by the previous standards continue to graduate from the academy. Nevertheless, as the largely unchanged practice of inter-student *shidō* continues to revolve primarily around the exercise of power, incidents of physical violence still occur occasionally throughout the spaces that are dominated by students, such as the student barracks and sports clubs.

Even in the absence of physical violence, there are frequent incidents where students claim that inter-student *shidō* has bordered on bullying or 'power harassment'. In a recent news report about student life at the NDA by the broadcaster TBS, a first-year student who quit the academy shared a detailed description of his experience being bullied by senior students (TBS Television 2024). The report involved video footage, showing senior students banging on the door of a dark room from which the student was filming, shouting and demanding that he come out. The first-year student had been moved into this single room after reporting mental health issues to a uniformed instructor. Next to the footage, the report also displayed messages sent to the student by senior students in derogatory language, one of which read 'I'll never accept a guy like you as a man' (Ibid.; translation by the author).

To prevent such instances of bullying from occurring, successive NDA administrations have taken a variety of measures to give students the opportunity to consult with staff and report problematic behaviour. In one example, small postboxes were placed at multiple locations throughout the campus for this purpose, allowing students to submit anonymous reports. In the absence of any fundamental reform to the concept of inter-student *shidō* in the student barracks, however, first-year students themselves note that they are often unsure what kind of behaviour they are supposed to tolerate, and which acts cross the line in the eyes of the administration. With the gradual adjustments implemented over the past decade by the training department continuously encroaching upon behaviour which used to be seen as a regular part of *shidō*, the senior students are left with the difficult task of figuring out what exactly *shidō* is supposed to mean, if not simply the exercise of power.

While some fourth-year students are grateful about the chance to phase out behaviour which they consider to be harmful and ineffective, other senior students are resentful about what they perceive as the administration meddling in student life and

longstanding traditions. Many also suspect that the administration has only begun to intervene now that shifting attitudes outside the NDA have made life in the student barracks a public relations issue, rather than stemming from concerns for the welfare of the students. Some students also complain that more recent cohorts of first-year students have been shielded from behaviour which they were expected to tolerate themselves only three years ago. 'It is ironic', grumbled one fourth-year student, 'that the uniformed instructors who created the academy's customs (*shūkan*) when they were students are now telling current students that these customs are no longer adequate'.

Having experienced different eras at the NDA and evolving red lines set by the administration, fourth-year students are keenly aware that the definition of transgressive behaviour is not a simple black-and-white matter, but rather discursively constructed. This ambiguity, and the perceived unfairness concerning the varying exposure over the years, explains to some extent why some senior students have resisted the training department's reform efforts and insisted on a continuation of traditions that many employees of the NDA consider problematic.

Time in the Student Barracks

Juggling academic classes, military training, sports clubs, and study time, students at the NDA follow an extraordinarily busy schedule each day. As a consequence, students have virtually no free time to spend as they please. During the periods where the formal schedule does provide some room, such as between breakfast and the march to the class rooms, or between lunch and the beginning of classes in the afternoon, life in the student barracks adds a sheer endless array of tasks revolving around the administration of the student corps, student-led events and competitions, inspections, bed-making, cleaning, and ironing uniforms to fill almost every last minute.

Particularly first-year students, who are expected to internalise and adapt to the busy nature of academy life, are burdened with a myriad of tasks that have little or no educational value, and are primarily designed to keep them busy for the sake of being busy itself. In an extrapolation of this logic, even in the rare moments when first-year students do find themselves with a moment of free time, they are not allowed to show it. Accordingly, depending on the whims of the senior students in charge, first-year students are often prohibited from brushing their teeth or washing their face in the morning, from walking (rather than running) around campus throughout the day, or from entering the pool in the bath house in the evening, even on days where they do have the time to do so.

When first-year students are caught violating one of the above rules, senior students reliably level a variation of the phrase ‘you seem to have a lot of time’ (*jikan yoyū dane*) at them. The ostensible reason for the rules in place, accordingly, is that if first-year students were attending to all their tasks properly, they could not possibly have enough time for such behaviour.

In some cases, the objective of depriving first-year students of their time is only thinly veiled, or even made entirely explicit. This is particularly true for the pre-cutter period, during which first-year students are subjected to a particularly demanding schedule. In fact, time is at the very centre of the pre-cutter period’s logic: ‘The goal’, one fourth-year student explains, ‘is to take their time away (*jikan wo nakushitari suru*)’.

Time, Energy and Sleep Deprivation

In practice, the only time where first-year students are entirely free from the prying eyes of their senior students and allowed to fully relax or spend some coveted time on their smartphone is the time after the bugle call at 10:30 p.m. which signals the end of the day. Past this time, therefore, most first-year students can be seen on their smartphones, checking their messaging and social media applications, watching short videos, or listening to music on their earphones. Despite the fact that there are only seven and a half hours between lights-out and the wake-up signal, as well as the fact that first-year students often wake up earlier to prepare for the demanding morning routine, most students find themselves unable to resist the overwhelming incentives to further aggravate what amounts to a pattern of institutionalised sleep deprivation.

To be sure, the constraints on time, energy and sleep which students find themselves confronted with in the student barracks depend strongly on their seniority. Each year that students advance, the pressure they are subjected to decreases, and their ability to allocate time as they see fit increases. On the other hand, the responsibilities which students are tasked with increase each year, as well. By the time students reach their fourth year, they are charged with a plethora of leadership positions, most of which rotate either on a weekly or termly basis. In most cases, fourth-year students are tasked with multiple such positions at the same time.

Among the positions fourth-year students are tasked with are various leadership roles in the club activities, as well as hundreds of positions in the student barracks, ranging from head of the room to head of the entire student corps. There are also a variety of staff positions responsible for annual events, such as inter-battalion

competitions, the school festival, the graduation ball, or the march to the Yasukuni Shrine. In addition to the above roles, which are either termly or annual, there are also positions that rotate on a weekly basis, involving the responsibility for roll calls, patrols, administration of the student barracks and other facilities, and keeping attendance at academic classes. There is even a position in each of the 16 companies tasked with making sure that no senior student graduates without having served in an appropriate amount of positions. The weekly rotating positions, in particular, are used to keep those students busy who failed to volunteer for enough positions themselves.

Not unlike junior students, senior students accordingly find themselves occupied with a variety of tasks and responsibilities that invariably end up infringing upon their academic duties or keep them up past the bugle call. During the daily self-study periods, for example, fourth-year students routinely spend large chunks of their time on administrative tasks, rather than focussing on the academic work to which this period is formally dedicated to. Thus, life in the NDA's student barracks is designed to keep all students, irrespective of their grade, close to or beyond full capacity at all times. And because discipline in the student barracks is enforced with unrivalled strictness, even compared to the NDA's formal military training conducted by uniformed instructors, students find themselves incentivised to consider academic classes the only space where they can afford to relax and slack off, given the typically more liberal atmosphere created by the civilian lecturers.

The stark contrast in the enforcement of discipline between the student barracks and the classrooms is further exacerbated by the fact that NDA students face little incentive to invest their limited time and energy into academic performance. As the next chapter demonstrates, the academic evaluations students receive during their time at the NDA have only little effect on their future career as SDF officers. In contrast, a student's reputation in the student barracks is both pivotal for their standing in the community that encapsulates their entire social life for four years, as well as pivotal for their ability to leverage their NDA network during their future professional careers in the SDF.

Ultimately, NDA students find themselves confronting an institutionalised incentive structure that strongly prioritises the socialisation in the student barracks, particularly at the expense of student development in academic education. Some students expressed cynicism about what this meant for the academy, which historically prided itself on an exceptionally competitive entrance examination: 'In their first year, students are the smartest (*ichiban atama ga ii*)', one fourth-year student lamented, 'after that, they become dumber each year (*waruku natteimasu*)'. According to this student, the combination of life

in the student barracks, academic classes, military training, and sports clubs ended up proving too much for students to handle: ‘At the NDA you are forced to do everything. But in the end it means that everything is only done in a half-baked way (*chūto hanpa*)’.

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Chapter 2

Academic Training and the Desirable NDA Student

About 55 fourth-year students have taken their seats in the large lecture hall of the academy's social science building. It is a Friday morning and the third period is about to begin. Before the class begins, the *hanchō*, the weekly rotating head of the students in this class, reports to the civilian instructor that a total of 15 students are missing.

At the NDA, participation in classes that students are signed up for is compulsory. Absentees require a justification which is to be reported to the instructor by the *hanchō*. Today, however, the *hanchō* has no such excuse for the 15 absent students. The instructor turns to the *fuku-hanchō*, the deputy student leader of the class, but he does not have any information on the missing students either. The instructor, visibly disappointed by the situation, announces that he will have to report the names to the education department. Then he returns to his seat and begins the class.

About five minutes into the class three of the missing students enter the lecture hall. Seemingly in no rush, they leisurely head towards their seats. In a stark contrast to the strict discipline that can be observed elsewhere on campus, they briefly gesture an apology to the instructor, exchange a few more comments as if to demonstrate how unbothered they are by their tardiness, and sit down on their seats.

The slide projected on the wall in the front of the lecture hall reads '*gurōbaru komyunikēshon* 3', spelling out the English words 'global communication' in Japanese characters. As is common practice with longer Japanese words, as well as with domesticated English words in Japan, students on campus simply refer to the class by the abbreviation *gurokomi*.

English Language Teaching at the NDA

Generally, students at the NDA are required to take English classes only during their first two years. Adding to these classes, as part of a push by the national government to standardise English language assessment across the country, the Ministry of Defense (MoD) recently directed the NDA to implement into its curriculum the 'Test of English for International Communication' (TOEIC), a listening and reading test originally developed in the 1970s for the Japanese market (Institute for International Business Communication

n.d.). Every year all students at the academy are required to take the test and achieve a minimum score which increases each year that students advance. Students in their third and fourth year who fail to clear the minimum score, having no opportunity to improve their language skills in regular English classes, must instead take the *gurokomi* class.

The explicit purpose of the *gurokomi* class is to improve the TOEIC test scores of the participating students. In addition to the obligatory annual test, students are able to retake the TOEIC test privately at any time and as often as they want. Those who manage to clear the required score are immediately absolved of the obligation to participate in the *gurokomi* class. The students thus have an incentive to improve their test scores in order to drop the class and decrease their workload.

Beyond the burden of having to take additional credits in the form of the *gurokomi* class, however, students are not particularly worried about the negative impact which TOEIC scores can have on their careers. Because students who clear the TOEIC minimum scores never have to take the *gurokomi* class, the credits participants get by completing the class are not a technical requirement to graduate. And only credits that are a technical requirement to graduate can threaten students' ability to advance to the next year and eventually graduate. For the participants of the *gurokomi* class, therefore, TOEIC scores and other in-class assessments can at most lower the students' GPA. It is an open secret among both students and instructors, however, that students in the *gurokomi* class, having failed to clear even the required minimum TOEIC score, are generally not too particular about their GPA anyway.

From the perspective of the NDA administration, raising the average of students' TOEIC test scores functions as a means to respond to pressure from the MOD and report that English skills at the academy are not falling behind other educational institutions in the country. Instructors in charge of English education at the NDA, in turn under pressure from the administration, have made the strategic calculation that the most effective way to raise the academy's average test score is to focus on those with the lowest scores. According to this calculation, top performers are likely to improve only by a few points even with considerable additional effort, whereas low performers might already increase their score by a significant amount if they are simply taught how to approach the test in a more strategic way.

As a consequence, English language instructors at the academy have decided to concentrate their efforts and resources on what can be characterised as strategic test coaching for those students with the lowest TOEIC scores. In other words, the immediate objective of the *gurokomi* class is not necessarily for students to improve their English

skills, but to become better at taking the TOEIC test. Since the TOEIC test students are required to take at the academy exclusively tests listening and reading, the *gurokomi* class thus revolves almost entirely around helping students navigate listening and reading comprehension tasks. Additionally, in the hope that students get as much as possible out of this strategic coaching, the language of instruction is Japanese, rather than English.

As educational professionals who share a passion for the language which they teach, there are many instructors who privately express frustration with the TOEIC-oriented regime of the academy's English language teaching. 'High test scores do not mean that students can communicate in English', one instructor noted. 'We have conveyed this to the MOD, but nothing has changed'. In the face of the MOD's persistent focus on improving standardised test scores, the instructor explained, the NDA's leadership felt the pressure to demonstrate results, ultimately producing the strategy revolving around test coaching in the form of the *gurokomi* class.

Taking the *gurokomi* Class

Speaking into the microphone at his podium, the instructor methodically begins to lay out the various types of questions that tend to come up in the TOEIC test and offers constructive suggestions for students to approach each of them. Tasks in the listening comprehension section, he explains, often use voice recordings in the format of a television broadcast, business meeting, phone call, advertisement, or radio interview. To achieve the minimum score required of fourth-year students, he explains, test takers should focus on key words and phrases. This way, he continues, test scores can be raised significantly, even when much of a sentence's meaning remains elusive.

Moving on, the instructor gives the students a rundown of the first exercise of the day. First, he explains, students will hear a voice recording of a conversation. Second, they will listen to the recording again while reading the conversation's script. Third, while listening to the recording, they will read the script out loud. Fourth and finally, they will read the script out loud without the recording. The instructor returns to his computer and starts playing the recording for the first stage of the exercise. After a few replays, he hands out the script to the students, instructing them to read along quietly as he plays the recording again.

By the time the students are told to read the script out loud with the recording, about 20 students, more than a third of those in attendance, have fallen asleep. Among the sleeping students, most are resting their heads on their folded arms on the table.

Others are sleeping in mostly upright position, with only their head dangling forward. Some sleeping students have made use of empty seats next to them, stretching out to find a more comfortable position. Despite the instructor's loud and clear prompt to begin reading the script out loud, not a single student's voice can be heard in the entire lecture hall.

Having noticed the absence of student voices, and at the sight of a third of the class in a state of peaceful slumber, the instructor attempts to intervene: 'I see that a lot of students have fallen asleep. Please wake up, we are in class', he announces in a calm but determined voice, revealing both frustration and a distinct lack of surprise. After a brief moment, noting that only a handful of the sleeping students have demonstrated any effort to raise their heads, the instructor pivots instead to address the students who are awake: 'Please wake up your neighbours', he requests for a first and then a second time.

In the last row, two students who have been sleeping for the better part of the lecture seem largely unbothered by the instructor's efforts. Upon hearing the instructor's plea to wake up sleeping neighbours, one of them lifts his head briefly to survey his surroundings, only to notice that his neighbour appears to be sleeping, too. Just as the instructor makes his plea for a second time, the student demonstrably rests his head on his arms again, readjusting his posture until he manages to find a comfortable position, and continues to sleep.

The 'Dozing Phenomenon'

While perhaps surprising in the context of a military academy, the sight of large amounts of students sleeping in the classroom is not necessarily a phenomenon limited to the confines of the NDA. Indeed, even among elite civilian universities in Japan a large proportion of students has been noted to regularly doze off during lectures (Kunikata and Inoue 2012). At least to some extent, this pattern has been attributed to the fact that in terms of job-hunting and typical career progression in Japan, it has traditionally been considerably more important which university a student attended than what they did while there (Dore 1976). In many ways, this also applies to the NDA, where sleeping in class has become an integral part of student life.

Although the share of sleeping students varies strongly depending on the time of day, the format and size of the class, and to some extent the instructor, sleeping students can be found in virtually all classes on the academy's campus. Particularly in seminars and lectures with larger student numbers, the percentage of students who have dozed off

by the midpoint of a session generally ranges from ten to thirty percent, regardless of the time of day, the students' year of study, or the instructor's oratorical skills.

All NDA instructors tasked with teaching academic classes are aware of these patterns, even as they adopt very different measures to respond to them. Some instructors choose a firm approach, ceaselessly patrolling all corners of the classroom to wake up sleeping students. Some of them make a point of ordering visibly sleepy students to stand up, either at their seat or at the back of the classroom, until they have overcome their sleepiness. Most instructors, however, are more lenient, simply ignoring the students who sleep, and focussing their attention instead on those who are awake. Notably, some instructors have adapted to the students' apparently limited capacity to concentrate, utilising only half of the class for teaching, while reserving the other half for light conversation, games, or watching movies, in what some instructors refer to as 'fun time' (*otanoshimi taimu*) on the class schedule distributed to students.

When the issue of large numbers of students sleeping in class is addressed in formal contexts among members of the administration, as it regularly is, employees refer to it by the name of the 'dozing phenomenon' (*inemuri genshō*; for a discussion of the term *inemuri* see Steger 2003, 73). At these occasions, officials and instructors narrate the phenomenon as a problem, for which blame is often attributed to either the students or instructors. Instructors who generally manage to keep most of their students awake and engaged by virtue of their oratorical skills assert that students can manage to stay awake if instructors are interesting enough. Others argue that since some students manage to always stay awake in class, this means that those who sleep simply lack the proper attitude or motivation.

There are also competing theories regarding the difference in the enforcement of discipline between civilian instructors on the one side and the uniformed instructors who teach at the academy's school of defence sciences on the other. Accordingly, some uniformed instructors pride themselves in enforcing stricter discipline among their students than civilian instructors. When students who are caught sleeping are ordered to stand up in class, this is generally done by uniformed instructors. In contrast, civilian instructors, many students and uniformed staff believe, lack the willingness or ability to enforce discipline in the same way.

Indeed, compared to their uniformed peers, civilian instructors are often hesitant to enforce military-style discipline in their own classroom. Importantly, virtually all of the civilian instructors have been educated at civilian universities. Many believe that regardless of the NDA's status as a military academy, their pedagogical philosophy as

civilian instructors should not have to differ from the liberal teaching environment at civilian universities. In their view, students need to decide for themselves how they make use of the opportunities the academy provides, and instructors can not force students to take a class seriously, even if they tried to.

Reversely, some civilian instructors assert that it is the uniformed instructors who tend to be too lenient with the students. They argue that uniformed instructors, most of whom have graduated from the academy themselves, tend to look back at their time as NDA students with a sense of nostalgia and affection, and therefore too readily tolerate sleeping in class as part of the academy's tradition and culture. Indeed, in private, some uniformed instructors affectionately refer to the act of students sleeping in class as *netekureru* (literally 'sleeping for us'). In their view, students sometimes cannot help but sleep in class, since they are dedicating all of their efforts (*'ganbattekureru'*) to the various challenges of life in the student barracks, the athletic clubs, as well as the mandatory military training. Sleeping in class, in this narrative, is conceptualised not as a problem, but as evidence that students are doing their best, and that they are simply prioritising those aspects of student life which take precedence over academic development.

Many students, however, consider the matter to follow a more simple logic: 'Students sleep in class, because they are not afraid of the instructors (*kowakunai*)', one fourth-year student explains. 'In the end, what makes people move is fear (*kyōfukan*). If the instructors were more scary, then students wouldn't sleep in class'. In contrast, in the student barracks, where senior students wield almost unchecked power, students are used to leadership and instruction by way of fear and almost total subordination. Accordingly, students sometimes refer to the street separating the student barracks from the academic facilities as the 38th parallel. In this reference to the latitude splitting the Korean peninsula in two, the harsh life in the student barracks is likened to the repressive North Korean regime, whereas the academy's classrooms are likened to the freedom represented by the South Korean democracy.

Given the contrast to the strict discipline enforced in the barracks, students often jokingly refer to their academic classes as 'break time' (*kyūkei no jikan*). Particularly for the first-year students, whose entire year in the barracks revolves around adjusting to almost total subordination to senior students, the contrast to the classroom is striking. After waking up at 6 a.m. and being rushed around without rest for the first two hours of each day, it is generally in the classroom where first-years have their first opportunity of the day to spend some time on their smartphones. Hence, every morning in the ten minutes before the first period begins, virtually all first-year students sit silently on their chairs in

the classroom, scrolling through various applications on their phones until the instructor formally opens the class. Even before the class has started, then, the classroom already demarcates a more lenient space, separate from the rest of the academy. To many students, making use of this space by catching up on some sleep is the natural consequence of the structure of life on campus.

Despite the persistent narrative among academy employees that either students, instructors, or both are to blame for the dozing phenomenon, there are occasionally implicit acknowledgements that hint to a structural cause. In an effort to reduce the number of students sleeping class, the training department in 2023 launched a trial in which the ban on sleeping outside of the designated hours at night was lifted. As part of the trial, students were now officially allowed to use free time in between their classes, military training, and sports clubs to return to their beds and get some sleep. The objective (*mokuhyō*) of the trial was stated follows: ‘To improve the attitude towards work (such as sleeping in class and during other educational training), improving the effectiveness of education and training’ (translation by the author). This effectively amounted to an acknowledgement that the structure of life in the student barracks can have direct consequences for students’ ability to focus during academic classes and other formal training. If the structure of life in the barracks was reformed, the wording of the objective suggested, perhaps the number of students sleeping in class could be lowered.

Whatever the cause of the dozing phenomenon, the culture of sleeping in class at the academy has become institutionalised to the extent that, to some students, it is one of the defining characteristics of life at the NDA. In a section titled ‘final words from graduating students’ (*sotsugyōsei hitokoto*) in the 2022 issue of the *obaradai* student magazine, each graduating student was given the chance to choose one Chinese character as a final message, followed by one sentence to explain their choice. Among the graduating students, two chose the character for ‘sleep’. ‘The classrooms were pretty comfortable for sleeping (*negokochi ga yokatta*), as well’, one of them quipped. ‘I feel like I slept the entire time’, wrote another.

Academic Performance and Tax-payer Money

A few minutes before noon on a Wednesday in November, most of the students have finished their lunch and are leaving the dining hall in a rush to get back to the barracks, where they will change into sports clothes, assemble on the sports grounds, and practice

for an upcoming inter-battalion competition at the NDA's annual festival. A small group of students, however, has instead assembled in the academy's main building for a meeting of a less celebratory nature.

Dressed in their navy blue uniforms, one by one the students walk through the door, until about a dozen students have filled a small room overlooking the academy's main gate. Some students briefly exchange awkward smiles, before lining up quietly, facing the front of the room and with their heads down.

Two administrative employees of the education department are checking attendance using a sheet of names attached to a clipboard, and then rearranging the students in four neat rows. The students are briefly informed about the formal procedure of the meeting, then a senior administration official enters the room. As instructed, the students bow to the official, who quickly begins his address.

'This meeting serves as a warning notice (*keikoku tsūkoku*). Do you all know what this warning notice is about', the official asks. After a brief moment of silence, he calls up a student to answer. 'Because we failed our examinations in the first semester', the student dutifully replies. Without showing any reaction, the official continues: 'Do you all know what the purpose of the NDA is'? He calls up another student. 'To educate SDF officers', the student replies. The official briefly nods, before he continues: 'I understand that at the time of the entrance ceremony many of you may have still been unsure about whether to ultimately become an SDF officer or not. Now that you have been here for a while, are there any of you who still have doubts about whether you want to become SDF officers'? The students remain silent. 'The purpose of the NDA is to produce suitable human resources (*fusawashii jinzaī*) for the SDF', the official goes on, 'and it cannot afford to let those who are not suitable (*fusawashikunai*) graduate. If your grades are not good enough, the instructors are forced to report to the NDA president that you are not suitable'. Hoping to avoid direct eye contact with the official, the students stare blankly ahead at the wall.

'Do you know how much money is being spent on you', the official asks, now in a more reproachful tone. 'These are taxes paid for by the people of Japan (*kokumin no zeikin*). This is their money, which they have entrusted (*futaku*) you with. It is them you have to answer to. At the NDA you do not have to prepare your own meals. You do not have to get a part-time job (*baito*), because you are given money each month. The NDA provides you with an environment (*kankyō*) where you can focus on studying. So, we ask you to study properly. We ask you to properly make an effort', he appeals to the students.

‘You are civil servants (*kokka kōmuin*). If you are not doing your best, tax-payer money is being wasted’.

Having set the tone, the official moves his attention to a clipboard he has been holding in his hand, and begins to list the number of students who have failed at least one of their exams in the first term of the academic year. For each of the four cohorts at the academy he lists both the number and the percentage of failed exams⁵. Then he returns his attention to the students: ‘Don’t you think these numbers are too high? I think they are too high’.

The official ends the meeting with an emotional appeal, as his stern look changes into a caring expression. ‘As a graduate of the academy, I am your *senpai* (senior). You are my *kōhai* (juniors). If you don’t perform well, it pains me (*tsurai*). So, who wants to do better from now on?’ One by one, the visibly remorseful students, who have silently and motionlessly endured the stern lecture, raise their right fists. The official smiles and notes that he appreciates their attitude. After telling them one more time to do their best, and a synchronised bow from the students, the official leaves the room.

Demography and Academic Standards

Any university must deal with the reality that not all students are able to pass their examinations, fulfil their minimum requirements, graduate on time, or even graduate at all. But the NDA is not like any other university. Students and employees of the academy regularly repeat the mantra that unlike most other institutions of higher learning, the academy has a clear ‘sense of mission’ (*shimeikan*). This mission is to educate future officers for the SDF, a task inherently tied to national security, which serves as the reason why tuition is paid in full by the Japanese government. When students fail to clear the minimum requirements, employees stress that this failure not only presents a waste of tax payer money, a charge that has persistently been levelled at the SDF by critics of Japan’s postwar rearmament since the organisation’s inception (Satō 2021, 223), but that it also presents a problem for Japan’s national security.

With the SDF’s recruitment challenges due to the demographic changes deteriorating over the past decades, the discourse about the performance of NDA students has taken on a new sense of urgency. In a commentary article from March 2023 in the *Yomiuri shinbun*, the newspaper with the highest circulation in Japan, titled ‘NDA

⁵ The numbers and ratios of failed examinations are not presented in this dissertation as per request from the administration.

struggling to maintain quality of students (*gakusei no shitsu*)', Uchida Akinori, a member of the editorial committee, warns about the decreasing number of applicants, as well as the rising number of students who drop out of the academy or refuse to enter the SDF upon graduation. The number of applicants to the NDA, Uchida notes, has declined from a peak of 17.188 in 2013 to 10.638 in 2022, amounting to a 38 percent drop (Uchida 2023).

Next to the declining application numbers, Uchida continues, the NDA also seems to struggle convincing its students to join the SDF upon graduation. In 2022, he notes, a total of 72 of the 479 students who graduated the academy refused to formally join the SDF, marking the second highest number since the NDA's establishment, only surpassed by the year 1991, when university graduates faced unprecedented opportunities in the private sector at the height of Japan's bubble economy (Uchida 2023). Furthermore, he notes, about 20 percent of the 488 students who entered the NDA in April 2022 had already dropped out less than a year later, the highest rate recorded in three decades and twice the rate of the usual ten percent.

Uchida argues that the key driver behind the NDA and MoD's 'sense of crisis' (*kiki ishiki*) regarding recruitment is the rapidly falling number of 18 year olds, caused by the declining birthrate. He cautions that the problem will only get more severe, as demographers predict that the number of 18 year olds in Japan will decline from 1.110.000 in 2022 to 910.000 in 2038, amounting to a further drop by roughly 18 percent (Uchida 2023).

While the academy so far has had no issue accepting enough students to meet its recruitment targets, the declining number of applicants have meant that a larger share of applicants were accepted, leading to a drop in competition in the selection process and therefore a decrease in what the author of the commentary refers to as the 'quality of students' (Uchida 2023). Citing sources from within the SDF, Uchida notes that the NDA's *hensachi*, the standardised rank score commonly used by educational institutions in Japan (see Goodman and Oka 2018), around the year 1990 used to be roughly 65 for the academy's social science and humanities exam, and in the upper 50s for its science and technology exam. Referring to data from the Kawaijuku group, he notes that in the years since, these figures had decreased to between 60 and 62.5, as well as 50 and 52.5 respectively (Uchida 2023). According to the most recent data by the source mentioned in the article, they had dropped to 62.5 and 47.5 in 2025 (Kawaijuku 2024).

Although the demographic changes pose problems for the recruitment efforts across the entire SDF, Uchida cautions that the relative change in application rates at the

NDA seems to be particularly dire. Compared to the drop in applicants across the SDF by 26 percent over the past ten years, he notes, the number of applicants to the NDA dropped by a total of 38 percent in the nine years from 2013 to 2022 (Uchida 2023).

Beyond the impact of the declining birthrate on educational institutions across Japan, then, the NDA seems to have also lost ground in relative terms. According to Uchida, senior SDF officers report to have noticed a recent tendency that cadets at the SDF's officer candidate schools (OCS) recruited from civilian universities have proven to be more talented (*yūshū*) than NDA graduates (Uchida 2023). According to these officers, he notes, graduates from civilian universities seem to demonstrate a higher sense of purpose (*mokuteki ishiki ga takai*). Meanwhile, at the NDA, according to Uchida, some of the more talented (*yūshū*) students seem to drop out, because they are dissatisfied with the low level of classes (*jūgyō no reberu ga hikui*; Ibid.).

In seeking to offer an explanation for the relative decline in the NDA's popularity among high school graduates, Uchida refers to a shift in the opportunities and characteristics of the current generation of young people in Japan. On a structural level, he argues, the transformation of the labor market towards more fluidity has provided an expansion of opportunities for young workers seeking to change careers (Uchida 2023). At the same time, he refers to a cultural shift among younger generations, citing the observations of an instructor at the academy: 'Students these days dislike communal life (*shūdan seikatsu*), and they aren't able to take a hit anymore (*utareyowakunatta*)'. In an editorial choice to elevate this statement, a subtitle with the quote "'not able to take a hit (*utareyowai*)'", problematising instruction styles' is printed a second time in large characters at the centre of the page, surpassed in font size only by the title of the article (Ibid.).

On campus, NDA instructors widely agreed with the commentary piece's assessment that the quality of students at the academy has declined in recent years. Similar to the author, instructors regularly referred to the drop in the *hensachi*, but also to what some called a 'generational shift' (*sedai no henka*). One civilian instructor noted that having taught at the academy for more than two decades, he felt that the number of students who failed to submit assignments and then showed up to class without even presenting an excuse had markedly risen over the years. Rather than attributing this shift to the drop in the *hensachi*, the instructor reasoned that this change was due to younger generations' relationship to the concept of discipline (*kiritsu*).

A few hundred meters to the east of the academic facilities, at the shooting range, a uniformed instructor in charge of the first shooting exercise of the first-year students felt

that NDA students certainly had become ‘weaker’ (*yowaku natta*) over the years. ‘Every little thing is considered power harassment now’, he lamented. Only seconds ago, he had scolded two students for joking around next to the ammunition storage for not taking the situation seriously enough. While he thought that it was a good thing that abusive behaviour was no longer tolerated in the SDF, he expressed a fear that an overly sensitive approach to instructing new recruits might interfere with the appropriate training for a profession tasked with the responsibility of handling live ammunition. This fear carried particular weight considering that only two weeks prior to this training session, a teenage recruit at a GSDF base in Gifu prefecture had shot three of his colleagues, two of whom fatally, during his basic training at the shooting range (Asahi Shimbun 2023).

In contrast to the above narratives, other instructors objected to a narrative placing the blame on NDA students, instead criticising the learning environment to which they are subjected at the academy. In a whistleblower report to the news magazine Shūeisha online, Tōmatsu Haruo, a professor of history employed at the NDA directly criticises the commentary piece in the *Yomiuri shimbun*:

‘[...] as a recent article in the Yomiuri Shimbun [...] shows, there seems to be a tendency to attribute drop-outs and graduates refusing to join the SDF to the fact that “young people these days aren’t able to take a hit anymore”. However, speaking frankly from the perspective of an educator who has been working at the NDA for 14 years, I cannot agree with the argument that the increase in dropouts and those refusing to join the SDF is due to the “weakness” of young people these days. As a current instructor, I want to be clear about this. Many of the students who do not become officers absolutely do not quit because they “aren’t able to take a hit”. Rather, it is precisely the more talented (yūshū) students with a strong sense of purpose (shimeikan no tsuyoi) who quit, because they are disappointed (shitsubō) with the current state of the NDA’s education (bōdai no kyōiku no genjō)’ (Shūeisha Online 2023; translation by the author).

Although this whistle blower report proved considerably controversial at the NDA due to its firebrand style, the author received notable support even from many uniformed members of the academy. One SDF officer teaching at the school of defence studies agreed that it was often the smart students (*atama ga ii gakusei*) who dropped out, stressing that the decline in the academic quality at the NDA ‘has become a severe problem’ (*hidoi koto ni natteiru*). ‘Students come to the NDA thinking they will be able to study complicated and specialised military things, but they are just told to learn everything by heart’. The main reason why it was often the smart students who dropped

out, he claimed, was the strict life in the student barracks: 'In the barracks, students are asked to blindly follow orders instead of thinking for themselves', he argued. 'Some of these students drop out to enter a civilian university (*ippan daigaku*), just so that they can enter one of the officer candidate schools afterwards'. Citing a few examples of his former students who chose this path, he argued: 'They do this because they realise they can become an SDF officer by graduating from a civilian university, too. With better academic training, and without the student barracks'.

Similarly, a civilian instructor in the social sciences argued that life in the student barracks made it difficult for the NDA to secure enough students with appropriate academic abilities, particularly in the science and technology track. In his view, he explained, the NDA should accept fewer students in this track, for which the SDF should compensate by recruiting more officer candidates from civilian universities: 'Top-level engineering students do not want to put up with life in the student barracks and all of the rules that come with it. If the SDF wants to recruit science and technology graduates, the NDA is not the most effective way'.

Senior bureaucrats in the MOD noted that they were aware of these complaints, but argued that recruiting from civilian universities alone could not compensate for a smaller intake at the NDA. 'This might work for social science and humanities majors (*bunkei*), but not for science and technology (*riken*)', one MOD official working at the academy argued. Keenly aware of the relatively low salaries that civil servants receive compared to comparable positions in the private sector, MOD bureaucrats, civilian instructors, and SDF officers often point out that with the increasing competition for skilled labor on the Japanese labor market, the SDF struggles to compete with the compensation that highly qualified science and technology graduates can expect in the private sector. Even with a steadily dropping *hensachi* in the academy's science and technology admissions, the MOD official argued, the SDF was forced to rely on the NDA's role as a means to secure a sufficient number of personnel.

In the face of a problem that defies any simple solution, both staff and students regularly tended to resort to cynicism when referring to the decline of the competitiveness in the NDA admissions system, particularly in the NDA's science and technology admission track. One first-year student who had entered through the science and technology track after failing to get into his first-choice civilian university joked that 'at this point, nobody even fails [the entrance examination] anymore'. Likewise, two third-year students claimed that 'anyone can get into the NDA these days'. 'By now you basically just have to put your name on the exam in order to pass', joked one uniformed instructor

who graduated from the NDA herself. As a consequence, the instructor continued, she found herself having to adjust the way she taught her classes: 'In my lectures there are students who are sleeping so much that they don't understand at all what is happening anymore. So, I try to organise my teaching in a way that even the worst students understand at least the basics'.

Indeed, the shift in the academy's teaching towards emphasising the lowest performers, rather than focussing on the most engaged students, has become a pattern observable all over the academy. 'There are two simultaneous trends occurring at the NDA', a uniformed instructor stationed in the student barracks explained. 'The good students are getting better, and the bad students are getting worse'. With the declining number of applicants, he explained, the bottom line drops. Students who would previously not have managed to enter the academy were now able to pass the examination. On the other hand, he added, the rehabilitation of the SDF's reputation in society had resulted in an increasing share among the most talented high school graduates who saw no problem –neither ethically nor in terms of their reputation– in working for the military. Unlike in the previous decades, he argued, some of these top students now chose to enter the NDA, knowing that the academy could offer a range of experiences that no other university could. Still, the instructor concluded, the changes had resulted in a net-loss for the academy and the SDF. In his view, the declining quality of the weaker students was dragging down the stronger students, rather than vice versa. The growing number of weaker students, he argued, had notably changed the atmosphere (*fun'iki*) at the academy, negatively affecting the better students, as well.

Although the shift in the NDA's focus towards the lower performers of the student body is not a formal policy mentioned anywhere on paper, officials of the education department privately confirm that even on the administration level their efforts have shifted accordingly. 'People who are good at studying (*benkyō dekiru hito*) usually don't come to the NDA', one frustrated senior official lamented. 'So, the goal of the NDA is to make the students who are not good at studying into people who are good at studying within the four years that they are here for'. According to the official, instructors who were complaining about the declining quality of students were missing the point: 'Calling students dumb (*baka*) is not helping anybody. Whatever the quality of the students, it is the instructor's job to make them smarter'. Instead, the official argued, the NDA needed to focus on what it could do, which was to focus on the lower performers:

'The academic abilities (gakuryoku) of high school graduates [throughout the country] are gradually decreasing (dandan sagatteiru). So, of course, the quality of incoming NDA students is also decreasing. Still, what the NDA expects from students remains the same. That is why what we are doing now is to focus on the education for the first-years, to bridge this increasing gap between students' academic abilities and our expectations. Starting from next year we will have three new classes for first-years that focus on the students who are not good at studying (benkyō dekinai hito), particularly in the science and technology track' (translation by the author).

Defining the Desirable Applicant through the Admissions System

The discussion concerning the NDA's struggle to maintain a sufficient quality of students, both publicly and privately, revolves almost entirely around academic abilities. Indeed, the academy places academic abilities at the very heart of its admissions system. This might seem somewhat puzzling considering the NDA's structural emphasis on the non-academic components of life on campus.

While the broader socialisation students are exposed to at the NDA is designed explicitly not just to emphasise academics, but also the development of physical strength and character, the latter two play virtually no role in the admission process for at least half of each incoming cohort. This is because physical strength and character, some employees of the academy argue, can be developed to a sufficient degree during the students' four years at the academy. The NDA's admission process, they argue, therefore revolves largely around demonstrating academic abilities.

But not all employees agree that there is a functional explanation for the dominant role of academic abilities in the admission process. Particularly among the uniformed employees of the academy there are many who believe that the process should place a greater emphasis on physical abilities. Others believe the admission process should put more emphasis on motivation, leadership experience, and extra-curricular activities.

To some extent, the gap between what the NDA expects from its applicants and what it expects from its enrolled students is a matter of the academy's hybrid nature, combining elements of a university with elements of a job in public service. One senior administration official explained that whereas civilian universities have a lot of autonomy over the format of their admissions system, this does not apply to the NDA, whose students are classified as civil servants employed by the MOD. Formally speaking, the official explained, the NDA's entrance examination therefore is not a university entrance examination (*nyūgaku shiken*), but an employment examination (*saiyō shiken*).

Accordingly, despite the NDA's efforts to create new admission tracks that emphasise a broader set of skills, all students are still required to take an academic examination to comply with the heavily regulated and standardised nature of recruiting for public service jobs.

In the year 2024, there were three different admission tracks through which prospective students could enter the academy: The general employment examination (*ippan saiyō shiken*), the recommendation employment examination (*suisen saiyō shiken*), and the comprehensive selection employment examination (*sōgō senbatsu saiyō shiken*). All three tracks involved a written examination, an oral examination, and a physical examination (*shintai kensa*). Additionally, the recommendation track factored in a recommendation letter, while the comprehensive track factored in a variety of practical tests, involving fitness, problem-solving, and group tasks.

Importantly, the physical examination that was part of all three tracks did not constitute a part of the competitive selection system. Instead, the physical examination merely functioned as a baseline that applicants needed to clear. Among other requirements, applicants needed to be of a minimum height, might not cross lower or upper weight limits depending on their height, and might not have physical disabilities, 'a large number of cavities or missing teeth', or tattoos (Ministry of Defense 2024). Importantly, applicants only needed to pass these minimum requirements. If they did, their 'performance' in this examination did not affect their ranking vis-a-vis other applicants.

Although the introduction of the recommendation and comprehensive selection tracks represent efforts by the NDA administration to diversify the skill set of incoming cohorts, the majority of incoming student cohorts each year is admitted without their physical abilities considered as part of the competitive selection process. Among the 2024 incoming cohort, only 10 percent of students entered through the comprehensive selection track, which considers applicants' performance in physical fitness tests. This is in comparison to 50 percent of students who enter through the general track, and 40 percent who enter through the recommendation track. While recommendations in the latter might refer to the students' successful participation in high school sports clubs or other athletic achievements, such testaments to physical abilities are neither tested nor required in this admissions track.

In practice, this meant that for the majority of admission offers in the year 2024, successful applicants were only required to demonstrate academic abilities, provided that they passed the minimum physical requirements. In other words, the nature of the NDA's

admissions system seemed to signal that the desirable applicant was chiefly defined by their competitive academic abilities.

Considering this emphasis on academics in the academy's admissions system, one might extrapolate that in the effort to maintain the 'quality' of students, the NDA administration was focused on maximising academic ability among incoming cohorts. Curiously, however, another variable seems to be afforded higher priority in this process.

The Gender Gap in the Admissions System

Technically, the NDA's admissions system consists not just of three tracks, but of six. Each of the academy's three admission tracks, the general track, the recommendation track, and the comprehensive selection track, are further divided into two sub-categories, one for applicants hoping to major in social science and humanities, and another for those hoping to major in science and technology. Depending on the major, prospective students sit different written examinations.

Every year the NDA sets recruitment targets for each of these tracks, effectively separating the applicants into subgroups. Applicants then compete for the limited admission slots only with applicants within their track. Accordingly, depending on the specific recruitment target and the amount of applicants, the competitiveness rate, defined by the rate of applicants to admission offers, varies by track. In categories where there are fewer applicants, higher recruitments targets, or a combination of both, students may encounter a less competitive path to an offer than applicants in other tracks.

In practice, however, each of the six admission tracks are further divided into two additional categories: Male and female applicants. Within each of the six tracks, the academy administration sets two separate recruitment targets for male and female applicants. Although male and female applicants take the exact same examination, in practice, they therefore vie for separate admission slots. Female applicants compete exclusively with other female applicants, while male applicants compete only with other male applicants. Here, too, the competitiveness rate varies depending on the number of applicants and the recruitment target.

For the vast majority of incoming cohorts in the past decades, competitiveness rates for female applicants proved significantly higher than those among their male peers. Despite the fact that male applicants consistently outnumber female applicants in all six categories, a formal cap on the percentage of female students in each cohort results in significantly lower recruitment targets for female students across the board, thereby

increasing the competitiveness rate in the female categories. Each year, the NDA administration stipulates the share of female students it seeks to admit, which it calls the *josei waku*. Literally translated to ‘women’s bracket’, the term *josei waku* can refer to either a minimum quota or a limit for women. At the NDA, the *josei waku* serves to limit their number.

The first cohort of female students at the NDA was accepted in 1992, as a direct consequence of Japan’s Equal Employment Opportunity Law, passed in 1985 (Satō 2022, 109). At the time, the NDA recruited its student body only through the general employment examination and the recommendation employment examination. The recruitment target for female students in that year was set to roughly 33 (out of 500 students in total), of which 25 were to be admitted through the general track and roughly eight through the recommendation track (*Bōeidaigakkō gojūnenshi hensan jigyō iinkai* 2004, 960; 962). Since 1992, the recruitment target for female students, and accordingly the number of admission offers to female applicants, has been cautiously raised several times. Most recently, for the 2023 cohort, the recruitment target for female students was raised from 70 to 100, constituting a roughly 21 percent share of the total number of students at 480, up from 15 percent in the year before.

Even with the *josei waku* raised to 21 percent, however, the competitiveness rate among female applicants remained higher for half of the admission slots. The recruitment targets for the NDA's 2024 cohort stood at 240 students through the general examination, 190 through the recommendation examination, and 50 through the comprehensive selection examination. Among the 240 students of the general employment examination, the largest intake among the three examination categories, making up half the cohort, the recruitment target stipulated 45 students through the social science and humanities, and 195 students through the science and technology.

In the science and technology track of the general employment examination, with the largest intake among all tracks, the 195 targeted students were to be composed of 165 men and 30 women. 3,936 male applicants sat for the examination, of which 716 received admission offers. 1,199 female applicants sat for the examination, of which 178 received offers. For the men, this amounted to a competitiveness rate of roughly five examination takers for every admission. For the women, it amounted to a rate of roughly seven examination takers for every admission. Although significant, this gap was nowhere near as pronounced as in the social science and humanities track.

In the case of the social science and humanities track of the general employment examination, the composition of the 45 targeted students were to consist of 35 men and

10 women. 1.914 male applicants sat for the examination, of which 119 received admission offers. 1.701 female applicants sat for the examination, of which 43 received offers. This amounted to a competitiveness rate of 16 among the male examination takers, and a rate of 40 among the women.

In other words, when the 2024 cohort entered the campus in April 2024, a male and female student who both entered through the social science and humanities track of the general examination had overcome vastly different odds to get there. Statistically speaking, the male student would have had to prove himself the most qualified among 16 exam takers, whereas the female student would have had to be the most qualified among 43 exam takers, a competitiveness rate more than two and a half times higher.

Despite the dramatic difference in the competitiveness rate between male and female applicants in the general examination's social science and humanities track, the figures for the 2024 cohort actually represent an ongoing alignment in the competitiveness rates, as a result of the gradual expansion of the *josei waku*. Among past cohorts, this gap was considerably larger.

In 1992, the first year where women were admitted to the academy, the competitiveness rate for men in the general examination's social science and humanities track stood at 18, compared to 50 for the the women. From these figures, which are notably similar to those of the 2024 cohort described above, the gap dramatically widened with the gradual increase in the number of female applicants in the following years.

Within ten years, the number of female applicants sitting for the general employment examination's social science and humanities track had more than doubled from 701 in the year 1992 to 1.444 in the year 2000. At the same time, however, the number of admission offers in this category had only increased from 14 to 22. Accordingly, the competitiveness rate rose from 50 to 65.

Meanwhile, the number of male exam takers in this category had only increased marginally, from 3.503 in the year 1992 to 3.767 in the year 2000. Admission offers for men during this period also increased from 193 to 242. Accordingly, the competitiveness rate among male applicants in this category actually decreased from 18 to 16.

Among the cohort of first-year students in the year 2000, then, the competitiveness rate among male students who entered through the general examination for the social science and humanities track stood at 16, compared to the female rate of 65, a rate more than four times as high.

The gap between male and female competitiveness rates in the social science and humanities track of the general examination reached its peak in the year 2012. While the male rate stood at 14, with 220 admission offers for 3.177 exam takers, the female rate reached 87, with 22 admission offers for 1.906 exam takers. Securing a spot in the female bracket, therefore, was six times as competitive as in the male bracket.

Other than in the general examination track, the gap between the competitiveness rates for men and women in the recommendation and comprehensive tracks have not been quite as pronounced. In fact, in the year 2024, the competitiveness rate for female applicants was lower than the male one in every single sub-category of these two tracks. This was a direct result of the decision to expand the *josei waku* to 21 percent in 2023, prior to which female applicants faced higher competitiveness rates than their male counterparts in most of the years since the inception of the recommendation and comprehensive tracks in 1992 and 2013 respectively. In the years 2023 and 2024, therefore, being admitted through the recommendation or comprehensive track as a female applicant actually proved less competitive than as a male applicant.

Because the recommendation and comprehensive tracks featured lower competitiveness rates for female applicants compared to the general track, even for almost all years and sub-categories before 2023, the increase in the number of students recruited through these tracks has had the effect that academic abilities of female students at the NDA on aggregate have significantly declined compared to the days where most female applicants needed to overcome the vastly higher competitiveness rates in the general examination track. One civilian instructor lamented that compared to two decades ago, when he started teaching at the academy, the quality of female students he encountered in his classes had declined notably. For example, he explained, every year his department divided third-year students into smaller seminars depending on their English abilities. As the instructor who traditionally taught the seminar with the students with the lowest English skills, he said, he used to hardly ever be in charge of any female students, since they were all in the seminars for students with more advanced English skills. However, in the academic year of 2023, he noted, female students made up roughly a third of his seminar, while the share of male students in the top seminar had increased.

Beyond the gender gap in the NDA's admissions system, the expansion of the recommendation and comprehensive tracks vis-a-vis the general examination track has meant that academic abilities in the incoming cohorts have declined across the board. This, of course, was not unexpected, given how these tracks prioritise the non-academic

abilities of applicants. Although the expansion of these tracks is an indirect consequence of the demographic changes that led to lower applicant numbers, the negative effect that it has on the academic quality of the academy's student body is a separate one. As a result, academic abilities among NDA students have fallen at an even faster pace than in a scenario where all students were still to enter through the general examination track.

Although the commentary piece in the Yomiuri Shimbun, concerned with the NDA's struggle to maintain the quality of students in the face of demographic changes, mentions the expansion of the *josei waku* in a little text box titled '*josei waku* expanding this spring' on the side of the page, it curiously does not explicitly connect this change in the admissions system to the efforts to maintain academic quality within the student body. Rather, the issue is presented as an unrelated event. In practice, however, the two issues are inseparably connected.

Facing a decline in academic abilities among students not just in absolute terms, but also relative to other institutions of higher learning, the administration's decision to expand the *josei waku* by another six percent has shrunk the gap in competitiveness rates in every single one of the six admission tracks, effectively raising the academic quality of the student body. This is because smaller gaps in competitiveness rates result in fewer low-performing applicants who receive an admission offer only because of the advantage provided by their gender. Administration officials note that they are aware of this effect and have made the according changes to the recruitment targets consciously. Considering that the administration is aware of the *josei waku*'s detrimental effect on academic abilities in the student body, however, it remains puzzling why it does not get rid of it entirely, thus erasing the gaps in competitiveness rates once and for all.

As discussed above, one indirect function of the NDA's admissions system is to define the characteristics of a desirable student. While the introduction of the comprehensive selection examination in the year 2013 has introduced physical ability as a variable factored into the competitive process, rather than just a minimum hurdle to be cleared, this applied to only 50 of the 480 slots in the recruitment target of the 2024 cohort. In other words, physical abilities were used as a mandatory competitive factor in the selection of only 10 percent of this cohort. In selecting the remaining 90 percent of the incoming cohort, the NDA still relied predominantly on academic abilities. But if the goal was to maximise academic abilities among the NDA's student body, why did the administration continue to hold on to the *josei waku* at all, instead of making all applicants compete against each other on equal terms regardless of gender, and choosing those who prove most suitable according to the examination's own criteria?

Publicly, the MOD and the academy administration do not provide any answers to this question, neither in recruitment materials or websites, nor in public statements by officials. As so often at the NDA, in the absence of a formally provided reason, students and staff have moved to fill the void with their own justifications.

Justifying the *josei waku*

To show his students how to access a wider range of resources for their final research projects, and to provide them with a rare opportunity to leave the campus on a weekday, a civilian instructor at the NDA's social science department has decided to take the students of a fourth-year seminar on a day trip to Tokyo. After a successful book haul at the National Diet Library, the instructor takes the students to a restaurant nearby to celebrate, treating them with voluminous eel dishes and non-alcoholic beers. The students jokingly complain about the choice of drinks, but it is a Tuesday, and consuming alcohol on weekdays is against academy regulations. 'Those are the rules', the instructor says with a smile on his face, before opening the meal with a toast.

For his dissertation project, one of the students has chosen to examine the SDF's deepening recruitment issues. After taking a sip from his non-alcoholic beer, he starts laying out the current state of his research: 'We will probably need to recruit more women. At the NDA, too, the number of female students will need to increase'. Asked whether the share of women could go all the way up to half of the student body, the student, who has been allocated to join the MSDF upon graduation, shakes his head decidedly. 'No, that would not be realistic. There are many MSDF ships, for example, that don't have enough facilities for female sailors', he explains. Asked about his estimation of the ideal ratio for female NDA students, the student stops to look down on his drink for a while, before he enthusiastically provides an answer: 'Twenty percent! If you increase the share of female students, the quality of students (*gakusei no shitsu*) goes up, because female students have better academic abilities (*gakuryoku*)'. Asked whether in the pursuit of a higher quality student body the cap on female students should not be lifted entirely, then, the student grows thoughtful again: 'No, that is not realistic. That would be difficult to do at once. It will need more time'.

A few weeks later, a group of graduate students belonging to the academy's Graduate School of Security Studies have assembled at a seaside park in Yokosuka for a barbecue. With the exception of a few civilian bureaucrats, exchange students from military academies abroad, as well as the occasional private person interested in studying

security matters, the vast majority of graduate students at the NDA are uniformed members of the SDF, who have already served in various roles and locations before being granted the privilege to study for a graduate degree at the academy with a full salary. Given these characteristics, the average age among the NDA's graduate students is significantly higher than among undergraduates. Indeed, many among them graduated from the undergraduate program themselves. The atmosphere at the barbecue is relaxed and the graduate students feel notably comfortable discussing topics that tend to require a more delicate approach when they are at work.

'There is a biological difference between men and women', explains one of the male graduate students. 'Ideally, the SDF would be entirely made up of men, because they are stronger. But because of the declining birthrate (*shōshika*), it can't be helped (*shō ga nai*). More women will need to enter the SDF and the share of female students at the NDA needs to increase', he concludes. When asked whether this meant that the *josei waku* should be abolished, the student disagrees vehemently: 'That would be bad (*dame*). The NDA's selection process is based on academic ability (*gakuryoku*), not on physical strength (*tairyoku*). So, there would be more women coming in, which would make the physical strength [of the student body] decline. And physical strength is necessary in the military'. Asked why the NDA's admission process does not factor in physical strength, if it is necessary for the functional capabilities of the military, the student argues that considering gender in the application process sufficiently addresses this issue. Even if there was no difference between men and women at the time of enrolment, he explains, gender would ultimately prove as a useful proxy for physical strength: 'Men are biologically more capable than women to gain physical strength after enrolling in the academy'.

Another male graduate student seems to agree with his colleague, similarly focusing on the matter of physical strength: 'There can't be full equality (*kanzen byōdō*). Women can do cyber and communications, but they can't do all of the jobs in the SDF', he argues. 'Pilots, for example, need physical strength. And you can't fly fighter jets without moving around air defence systems on the ground. And that requires physical strength, too', he explains. When asked about the female fighter pilots who are already flying in the SDF today (Yomiuri Shimbun 2024), the student quickly adjusts his argument: 'They can fly. But the physical strain from flying a fighter jet might mean that they won't be able to bear children anymore'. To explain the importance of female fertility for the broader society, the graduate student resorts to a historical example: 'In the Pacific War there were so many casualties in Okinawa that the survival of the population was in

danger. The only reason why it survived, is because the women's share among survivors was so large. And women can bear children'. Tying the idea of the role of women as child bearers to a broader idea of national security, he continues: 'Men can't have children. Even if they survive, they can't guarantee the survival of the population'. Keenly aware that his theory goes well beyond how members of the NDA talk about the *josei waku* in public, the student qualifies his take with a broad grin on his face: 'If I said this publicly, I'd probably lose my job'.

Although they have not formally entered the SDF yet, the undergraduate students at the NDA are equally aware of the controversial nature of the SDF's relationship with the recruitment of women. Beyond the uniformed world which they inhabit, they know that increasing the share of female students at the academy would certainly be applauded in civilian society. After having finished their athletic club activities for the day, two fourth-year students have made their way to the bath-house on campus, where they scrub and rinse their tired bodies from head to toe, before taking a few minutes to soak in the large hot water pool. Breathing in the hot steam that fills all corners of the room, one of the students argues that the rise in the share of female soldiers in the SDF is in his view entirely attributable to the organisation's public relations strategy: 'It is very unfortunate, but the objective of much of the SDF's efforts is not to increase its ability to defeat the enemy (*teki wo taosu koto*), but to improve the reputation of the SDF in civilian society'. His roommate, whose head has been half submerged under water for most of the conversation, quickly sits up and nods emphatically: 'The objectives of a military are different in peace time and in war. Recruiting more women is popular in civilian society, that is why the SDF does it'. If the SDF were to go to war, he argues, the increased number of female soldiers would present a functional disadvantage: 'Because the number of women is rising right now, the SDF needs to build new bathrooms for women. That costs a lot of money. It is money that could be spend on other things'.

Compared to the private musings of NDA students, senior officials of the NDA administration chose a distinctly more cautious, if not diplomatic tone in justifying the *josei waku* and its detrimental effect on the academic abilities of the student body. 'As a university (*daigaku toshite*), of course we want to maintain academic abilities (*gakuryoku*)', one senior administration official explained. 'But because we educate future SDF officers', he qualifies, 'we have to consider what kind of impact changes here have on the SDF. So, we cannot just change things abruptly. We have to do it gradually. And we have to consult with the SDF to ask for their opinions'. Asked to specify the impact that an increase in female SDF officers would have on the SDF, the official continued: 'If you put more

women in the SDF, there are all kinds of consequences. For example, disciplinary violations (*fukumu jiko*) will increase. So, it becomes very difficult’.

In this official’s narrative, the problem with an increase in the number of female service members is not necessarily what these female members are able or not able to do, it is how male service members respond to this increase. And since a further increase in women in the SDF would presumably lead to more sexual harassment incidents, he concludes, such an increase would not be desirable for the organisation.

Other NDA officials justify the NDA’s *josei waku* by referring to instructions or preferences expressed by the SDF, conceding immediate responsibility for this issue. ‘I know that some may find it unfair, but this is not a regular university. The NDA educates SDF officers’, explained another senior official. ‘The three branches decide how many men and women they need, and then give us numbers. Based on that’, he continued, ‘the NDA recruits female and male students. So, to some extent it can’t be helped (*shikata ga nai bubun ga aru*)’.

When asked how the SDF justifies their gendered recruitment targets to the NDA administration, the first official explained that this was not communicated formally: ‘The three branches don’t explicitly (*hakiri*) say their opinion on this. They don’t show their real intentions (*honne*). So, it is quite difficult to understand what they want’. In the absence of a formal justification, the official resorted to a cultural explanation: ‘I know that from the Western perspective it looks like Japan is 30 years behind on this topic. But in Japan men and women have traditionally lived in different ways (*dentō-teki na danjo betsu no kurashikata ga aru*)’. Indeed, as the following episode suggests, the ambiguity surrounding the rationale for the academy’s *josei waku* at times appears difficult to understand for foreign visitors of the academy, given the severe recruitment shortages plaguing all-volunteer militaries around the world.

On a November afternoon, an officer from the U.S. military has come to visit the NDA for interviews with members of the academy as part of his research on the effect of demographic change on the Japanese military. The SDF’s main countermeasures to tackle the recruitment challenges caused by the demographic change, one instructor tells him, have been to expand the target population, such as through raising the maximum age for new recruits, gradually lifting retirement ages for all ranks, and increasing the share of women. At the NDA, he explains, the quota [referring to *josei waku*] of female students used to be around six to eight percent, before it was increased this year to above 20 percent. The American officer nods slowly, dutifully taking notes. Then he asks: ‘So, how does the NDA actually try to increase the number of female students?’ The

instructor pauses briefly, unsure if he understood the question. 'Well, we raise the caps', he replies. Equally perplexed, the American officer looks down at his notes with a puzzled expression. Suddenly, his face brightens up: 'Oh! You have caps', he bursts out. 'In the U.S. military we always want *more* women, not less' (emphasis by the U.S. officer). Contrasting the *josei waku*'s function to limit the number of female students, he explains his confusion, gender quotas in the U.S. military are generally viewed as tools to increase numbers of female service members.

Getting Ahead in the Disincentive Structure

The example of the *gurokomi* class at the top of this chapter demonstrates the extent to which the incentive structure students face at the academy inevitably deemphasises academic development in favour of life in the student barracks. From the perspective of students who have to participate in the *gurokomi* class, there are few incentives to dedicate much of their time and energy to it. For one, failing a class which is not required for graduation neither interferes with a student's ability to advance to the next year nor to formally join the SDF after graduating the academy.

More importantly, even a lower GPA will have virtually no impact on the students' future career in the SDF. All NDA graduates are guaranteed a spot at the SDF's one-year branch-specific officer candidate schools, their first stop as formal members of the SDF. After graduating from the OCS, the pace of their rise through the ranks of the officer corps is based almost exclusively on their performance at the OCS, their performance in their subsequent positions, as well as their performance in future examinations for further educational opportunities, such as for the prestigious Command and Staff Course. SDF officers uniformly state that in order to make sure that officer candidates at the OCS who did not attend the NDA receive the same treatment as their academy-educated peers, performances at the NDA are not taken into consideration. While SDF officers often joke that one's final ranking in one's graduating cohort at the OCS either privileges or haunts an officer until retirement, they note that academic performance at the NDA is essentially forgotten by the time graduates arrive for their first day at the OCS.

Keenly aware of this incentive structure, many NDA students consciously or unconsciously dedicate only the minimum amount of effort to academic studies that allows them to graduate. In the case of the *gurokomi* class, for students who failed to achieve the required score on the annual TOEIC test, the minimum effort amounts to little more than sufficiently frequent attendance. Without any structural incentive to dedicate

anything beyond their physical presence, up to one third of students regularly sleep halfway through the lecture. And although the structural nature of the *gurokomi* class makes it one of the classes in the NDA curriculum with the highest rates of students sleeping, the culture of ‘dozing’ pervades all departments and classes. Many instructors have accepted this as a given, concluding that they are powerless against the structural incentives working against their efforts.

As detailed above, the notable contrast between the strict culture in the student barracks and the more lenient approach of instructors further contributes to this incentive structure. While this is particularly true for civilian instructors, who generally subscribe to more liberal teaching philosophies, even the most uncompromising uniformed instructors cannot match the level of discipline which senior students resort to in the student barracks. As employees of the academy instructors are bound by a set of formal regulations and measures to ensure accountability which senior students can largely evade in the barracks. Unlike senior students in the barracks, uniformed instructors can not afford to shout at groups of students in a degrading way, single out students who made a mistake and subject them to humiliating lectures, punish students by forcing them to repeat menial tasks over and over again, or even resort to the occasional kick against the backrest of a sleeping student’s chair. As illustrated by the metaphor of the 38th parallel, this prioritisation structure effectively designates the classroom as the space for ‘break time’, where students can get away with putting in only minimal effort, while recovering some of the energy they need for the student barracks. In other words, the ‘dozing’ culture in the NDA’s class rooms is to no small degree a product of the structural incentives inherent to the academy in particular, as well as the SDF’s recruitment system more broadly.

The structural incentives that depress academic quality at the NDA, in turn, are the reason why a meaningful share of the students who drop out or refuse to formally join the SDF upon graduation are those with comparatively strong academic abilities and pronounced ambitions, as pointed out by both the commentary in the Yomiuri Shimbun and the whistleblower report in Shūeisha Online. Students entering the academy quickly learn that life in the barracks, as well as the compulsory participation in sports clubs, not only leave them with virtually no free time, but also with little energy to spend in the class rooms and time to spend on self-study. While discipline in the student barracks in particular is enforced relentlessly during their first year, they learn that no such enforcement occurs in the classrooms. These characteristics of life at the academy leave

some high-performing students disillusioned not just with the NDA, but also with the SDF as an employer that to them appears to disincentivise academic development.

One of the moments where this incentive structure, or perhaps disincentive structure, becomes particularly frustrating for some academically excelling students occurs towards the end of the first year, where students submit a preference ranking to the training department indicating which of the three SDF branches they wish to join upon graduation. From their second year on, designated personnel (*yōin*) of each branch then receive part of their military training in branch-specific groups for further specialisation. In most years, however, a disproportionate number of students express the desire to join the ASDF, exceeding the academy's recruitment target for this branch, presumably owing to the popularity of the profession of the fighter pilot. In allocating the students, therefore, the academy is not able to grant every student's first priority. While the training department states that it takes students' academic performance into account in the allocation process, the specific nature of the process is opaque, and even civilian instructors do not know how the training department decides which students are granted their first priority. It reliably leads to confusion, then, when a number of academically excelling students each year are surprised to learn that they were not allocated according to their first priority.

Indeed, training department officials confirmed that they are unable to grant first-ranked choices entirely by academic ability. As some branches are consistently more popular than others, this would lead to a trend where each year some branches end up with a disproportionately high share of academically outstanding students. In an effort to balance academic talent across the three branches, then, training department officials see no other option than to routinely allocate a certain share of high-performers to their second or third priority, and some low-performers to their first priority.

Because the training department appears to have opted not to explicitly communicate the rationale behind these difficult decisions, academically competitive students who were not allocated according to their preferences sometimes express frustration about the lessons which this process seems to impart: If excellent performance is not rewarded, why should students even try their best? In the eyes of some of the more critical students, this process seems to reward those who only do the bare minimum, whereas it incentivises academically competitive students to either drop out or refuse to join the SDF upon graduation.

***Ninkyo*: Refusing to join the SDF**

Despite a formal requirement for students to join the SDF (*ninkan*) upon graduating the NDA, in practice there is no penalty that might function to enforce it. In fact, the government in 2012 proposed an amendment to the Self-Defense Forces Law (*jieitai-hō*) to institute such a financial penalty (in the form of a tuition reimbursement), but the proposal was scrapped after encountering opposition in the diet led partly by lawmakers who had graduated from the NDA themselves, and who warned that the amendment might lead to a further decline in application numbers (Isurugi 2019).

Each year, therefore, a steady number of NDA graduates refuse to join the SDF and opt to pursue a career elsewhere, a process known as *ninkan kyohi* (refusal to be appointed), or *ninkyo* in its abbreviated form. This occurs despite the fact that students are formally barred from applying to jobs or further study at civilian universities as long as they are enrolled at the NDA. Students who have decided not to join the SDF, accordingly, simply ignore this ban and participate in Japan's notorious job hunting process (*shūshoku katsudō*) in secret.

Student Maruyama, a final-year public policy major, said he had already made up his mind. To get around the job hunting ban, and his inability to leave campus during the week, he attended a weekend job hunting fair during his third year. The interviews went well. So well, in fact, that he managed to secure a same-day job offer from a reputable American investment bank in Tokyo. Facing an entry salary about double the amount SDF officer candidates receive at an OCS, as well as the prospect of not having to move around every two years, he decided to accept the offer.

‘The moment where I realised that the SDF was perhaps not a great fit for me was during the preparations for the cutter boat race competition in my first year’, Student Maruyama explained. ‘The way our senior students treated us, the power abuse (*pawa hara*)... It made me realise that I did not want to work in an organisation like this’. Based on his experience at the NDA, he had developed an impression that the SDF seemed to neither value academic ability nor curiosity. It was no wonder, he stated, that he found these virtues lacking among his potential future colleagues in the SDF: ‘It’s not nice to say, but I feel like the uniformed instructors (*shidōkan*) who work in the student barracks are usually not very smart (*atama ga yokunai*)’.

Asked whether he regretted having come to the NDA, having now decided against joining the SDF, the student shook his head. ‘There are some professors here who are on the same level as the faculty at Tokyo University or Keio University’, he explained, referring to two of Japan's most reputable universities. ‘I am satisfied with my classes.

But life in the student barracks (*gakuseisha seikatsu*), he argued, ‘was a waste of time. Even during self-study time, senior students make you do all kinds of tasks (*sagyō*), like bringing out the trash and such things. So, you can’t actually study in that time either’. Campus life outside the class room, Student Maruyama explained, regularly interfered with students trying to make the most of the NDA’s academic opportunities, leading some students to ultimately seek employment elsewhere: ‘It is my impression’, he noted, ‘that last year most of the students who refused to join the SDF were the smart ones (*atama ga ii*) in the cohort’.

For his final year at the academy, Student Maruyama had taken significantly more credits than he needed to qualify for graduation, hoping to get as much as he could out of the classes. Having recently won an award in an academy-wide academic competition, he continued to impress both civilian and uniformed employees, who were still unaware of the fact that he had decided against joining the SDF upon graduation.

Because of the formal ban on job hunting and applying for advanced academic degrees at civilian universities, Student Maruyama pointed out, he and other fourth-year students who held outside job offers needed to be careful that the uniformed instructors stationed in the student barracks did not find out about their secret: ‘If you get caught, the instructors will give you bad service marks (*fukumu-ten*), which forces you to repeat the year (*ryūnen*). They know that if you cannot graduate on time, your job offer will lapse, and you might be forced to join the SDF after all’. A similar dynamic, he added, constrained students who applied for advanced degrees at civilian universities. In order to secure the necessary recommendation letters for such an application, Student Maruyama explained, networks of students who secretly planned not to join the SDF were exchanging information about civilian instructors who had offered to write such letters in the past in spite of official rules. This was a high-stakes game, he emphasised, since approaching the wrong instructors might result in getting reported to the training department.

In Student Maruyama’s telling, the NDA’s military component thus seemed to work against its academic component. Students who wished to make use of the academy’s academic opportunities found themselves held back by life in the student barracks, as well as by the uniformed officials and instructors at the training department. In the eyes of Student Maruyama, SDF officers on campus served not as role models, but as a rather uninspired group actively seeking to obstruct his personal and professional development, even resorting to sinister methods to pressure him into a career at the SDF against his will. While he did not regret having enrolled at the NDA, the academy’s de-emphasis on

academic development made him feel that joining the SDF represented a choice against the type of personal development he aspired to.

Academic Abilities and the Objectives of the NDA

While the dramatic drop in Japan's youth population poses recruitment issues for almost all sectors of society, including the NDA, the academy's structural characteristics themselves contribute a significant amount to depressing academic performance and development among the student body. Students enrolled at the academy face an incentive structure that prioritises life in the student barracks over academic training, leaving many academically motivated students disillusioned, while at times even rewarding students who opt to only deliver the bare minimum in the classroom. Perhaps the single most important structural factor depressing academic quality in the student body, however, is the nature of the academy's admissions system.

By separating male and female applicants in the admissions system through the *josei waku*, as detailed above, the NDA effectively creates conditions where some students have an easier path towards admission simply by virtue of their gender. The larger the gap in competitiveness rates between male and female applicants, the further the admissions system strays from the principle of meritocracy. For the most part, this admissions system has severely disadvantaged female applicants by subjecting them to higher competitiveness rates than their male counterparts in almost every single year across all admission tracks, sometimes by a factor of up to six. In practice, this has produced a formalised system of affirmative action for male applicants, crucially affecting the composition of the SDF officer corps through thirty years worth of NDA cohorts.

While the gap in competitiveness rates between male and female applicants has gradually decreased with the cautious expansion of the *josei waku*, there are currently no discussions to entirely eliminate it. As long as the *josei waku* remains, then, gaps in competitiveness rates between male and female applicants will continue to inhibit meritocratic principles. While the NDA administration can make efforts to minimise this gap by continually adjusting recruitment targets based on predicted applicant numbers, the only way to erase the gap entirely is to eliminate the *josei waku*.

Interestingly, as detailed above, at the same time as female applicants in 2024 still faced a competitiveness rate that was two and a half times larger than the male one in the general examination's social science and humanities track, female applicants in the recommendation and comprehensive tracks were facing an easier path to admission than

their male counterparts. In other words, the *josei waku* began to depress academic quality by simultaneously disadvantaging both groups of female and male applicants.

Importantly, the gradual expansion of the *josei waku* neither represents a repudiation of the obvious discrimination between male and female applicants, nor of the detrimental effect this discrimination has had on the student body's academic abilities in the previous decades. Rather, it represents a step taken hesitantly to make up for the dramatic decline in the numbers of men that apply to enter the NDA, a dynamic which Satō (2022, 101) has argued already characterised decisions to expand female recruitment across the SDF since at least the late 1960s. Considering the design of the NDA's admissions system, it does not appear to be the administration's primary objective to maximise academic abilities within the student body. At the same, maximising physical abilities does not appear to be the objective either.

In the absence of a formal justification for the *josei waku*, as described above, the argument that members of the academy advance privately is that average differences in physical abilities between men and women would render gender-blind admissions at the NDA detrimental to the SDF's war fighting capabilities. But if certain physical abilities are desirable, or even essential, for NDA students, why does the admissions system not afford them a more important role in the admission process? Indeed, in the case of half of the admission slots of the incoming 2024 cohort, a female applicant could have been taller, stronger, and achieved better examination results than a male offer holder of the same application track, and still not be admitted.

Consider the hypothetical case of two applicants, one female and one male, who applied in the 2024 cohort through the social science and humanities track of the general examination. In the examination, the female applicant scored in the top third percentile among the 1,701 female examination takers in her track. Standing 180 cm tall and with an athletic physique, she was a member of her high school's volleyball team, even competing in the national championships. Her male counterpart, in contrast, stood only 151 cm tall and weighed 45 kg, barely passing the lower minimum weight limit. A member of his high school's chess club, he has no experience in athletic activities. Among the 1,914 male exam takers in this category he managed to score in the sixth percentile. Because of the gap in competitive rates, and because physical abilities are not factored into the competitive selection process of the general examination track, the male applicant would have been awarded an offer for admission while the female applicant did not. Although the two applicants in this comparison are fictitious, the admission

conditions they faced were real, deciding over the fate of hundreds of real applicants each year.

The analysis of the NDA's admissions system presented in this chapter demonstrates that in selecting incoming student cohort the NDA neither maximises the student body's academic abilities nor its physical abilities. Rather than opening up competition to all applicants based on a set of clearly defined yard sticks pertaining to physical, academic, or other abilities and characteristics, many students and staff privately consider gender to constitute a useful enough proxy variable to predict what amounts to a peculiarly nebulous concept of student quality.

Just like the NDA's incentive structure on campus effectively places academic development near the bottom of the list of priorities, so does the academy's admissions system afford other variables higher priority. And although the clear disadvantage imposed by the *josei waku* on the female applicants of more than thirty cohorts is privately justified by narrating gender as a proxy variable for physical abilities, the exclusion of physical abilities from the admission system's competitive selection process in the vast majority of students admitted to the academy in the past three decades can serve to actively decrease, rather than increase, physical abilities among the NDA's student body.

Even if the idea of gender as a useful proxy variable for student quality is at no point formally communicated by the administration, incoming students, who all navigated the intricacies of the admission process themselves, receive the message nevertheless. Once they begin participating in student life on campus, the notion that their gender determines the extent to which they can live up to the expectations of the desirable NDA student is further reinforced. This lesson, too, as the next chapter demonstrates, is primarily conveyed in the academy's hidden curriculum.

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Chapter 3

Gendering the NDA Student - The Graduation Ball

Throughout their four years at the NDA, students are required to participate in academic classes, military training, sports clubs, and the student corps regardless of their gender. With the notable exception of different grading standards and minimum thresholds to be cleared in physical education classes, female students are generally expected to complete the same training as their male counterparts. This applies in particular to the formal military training administered by the uniformed academy employees. Here, female students march through fields and climb mountains with the same equipment on their backs, swim the same distances in open water, and learn to assemble and shoot the same rifles as their male counterparts.

The academy's education and training, students are frequently reminded, are designed to prepare them for the responsibilities they will face after graduating the NDA, completing their year of branch-specific officer training, and joining the SDF officer corps. Once commissioned, SDF officers may lead platoons in the GSDF, become pilots in the ASDF, or serve on an MSDF submarine, regardless of their gender. In principle, therefore, students at the NDA are taught that women can, and are indeed expected to, serve as SDF officers just the same as men.

In practice, however, more than thirty years after the first cohort of female students have entered the academy, the senior leadership of the SDF is still heavily dominated by men. No female officer has ever served as the Chief of Staff of either the Joint Staff or any of the three branches, and only a handful of female officers have been promoted to the rank of general. Although both male students and staff know better than to stray from the official line when they speak publicly, in private conversations, many of them express reservations about the extent to which female students are able to fulfil leadership positions at the NDA and in the SDF (Satō 2021, 232).

Some of the reservations that male NDA students and SDF officers express about women in the military relate to the perception of female inferiority in terms of physical attributes. They argue that because men are, on average, taller and stronger than women, they have a natural advantage on the battlefield. In today's SDF, however, female service members already serve in virtually all of the roles that would engage in combat in the event of an armed conflict. In fact, the only positions to which female service members

have failed to ascend to at this point are precisely those senior leadership roles that are expected to lead the organisation with experience and knowledge rather than by virtue of their physical abilities.

To explain the persistent aversions among male SDF members to the idea of female officers serving in leadership roles, it is necessary to explore the social construction of gender within the organisation and its affiliated institutions. This includes notions such as the idea that women should play a certain role in society and in the family, as well as a perception that women and men are defined by inherently different character traits which affect their capacity to serve as military officers.

The NDA's formal curriculum endorses no such notions, emphasising that graduates can assume the tasks and responsibilities that come with serving as an SDF officer regardless of their gender. Informally, however, the hidden curriculum that students are exposed to throughout their four years at the academy conveys lessons that often directly contradict this idea.

One particularly vivid example of the gendered nature of the socialisation in the NDA's hidden curriculum is the academy's annual graduation ball. Usually held in the final weeks of the academic year, it is an event primarily held to celebrate the departing fourth-year students.

According to the NDA administration, the graduation ball is not an official academy event, since it is paid for, organised, and hosted almost entirely by the students themselves. On the one hand, this gives students more latitude to plan the evening according to their wishes, such as with regard to alcohol consumption. At the same time, it relieves the NDA administration from the burden of responsibility.

In practice, however, the graduation ball is a major event on the students' calendar with a tradition that goes back to the founding years of the academy. Although participation is not mandatory, and many students choose to sit out the event, hundreds of students reliably participate each year. The academy's senior leadership, too, generally participate in the event, dine at VIP tables, give speeches, and formally present the student leadership with a donation from the NDA's alumni organisation.

Indeed, perhaps it is precisely because of its ambiguous status that the graduation ball features so prominently in the imaginations of the NDA, both among academy students and in the wider society. It is an occasion for students to celebrate the end of four long years with an evening of grandeur that vividly contrasts with the more spartan reality of student life on campus. As such, it has become both what students consider

one of the defining events of the NDA's identity, as well an important element of the gendered nature of the academy's hidden curriculum.

The Day of the Ball

It is a few minutes before noon on a mild February Sunday at Tokyo's Shinagawa station. In between the usual crowd of couples looking for cafés, tourists moving around large suitcases, and a few unlucky suited business men carrying briefcases, two NDA students in their distinctive navy blue uniforms are manoeuvring through the crowd, heading for the entrance of the Grand Prince Hotel.

After a short walk across the street and past the curious eyes of many onlookers, the two students turn onto an unassuming path leading to the main banquet hall of the hotel complex. A sign above the entrance reads: 'National Defense Academy - Graduation Ball of the 68th Cohort'.

The two students check in at the reception, which is managed by a group of equally uniformed students, and descend a carpeted ramp winding down into an opulent entrance hall. At the centre of the hall, an elevated stage is suspended above a pool of water, exposed on all sides to the ramp circling around it. Past the entrance hall, the venue opens up to a spacious reception room, where the two students drop off their bags and join a group of their classmates.

The ball does not formally start for another five hours, but there are already dozens of students buzzing around, preparing both the ball as well as their own appearance. In addition to the students at the reception, there are students in staff roles preparing the stage for performances from the NDA's cultural clubs, and others guiding arriving students to the changing rooms and the wardrobe. In the reception room, four students seated at a long table are inspecting multiple lists of students who signed up for professional hair and make-up services provided at the venue.

Next to the hair and make-up counter, there are also photo booths managed by a professional photography team. A sign advertising its products reads 'Memories for a Lifetime: The NDA Ball'. A few sample pictures show couples of men in uniform and women in brightly-coloured dresses. Standing in front of a pink background, the couples strike a set of poses that evoke old-fashioned Hollywood movies. In one picture, a woman wearing a pink ruffle dress and elbow-length white gloves is holding on with both hands to the carefully extended arm of her male partner. In another, a man with a stern look on his face, his feet wide far apart, and chest puffed out, is wrapping his arm around

his female partner's shoulder in a demonstratively protective gesture. The woman leans into him, with a wide smile on her face, and her arms nervously locked in front of her chest. In a third picture, apparently simulating a proposal, a uniformed man has gotten down on one knee, holding the woman's hand, gleefully looking up to her. The woman, whose hair is adorned with a large pink flower, holds one hand to her cheek, and returns his gaze with a shy smile.

As more guests descend down the winding ramp and trickle into the venue, the first item of the ball's pre-program, a mini concert, is set to begin on the stage in the entrance hall. First, the *ōendan* leader club, the NDA's cheer squad, takes the stage. One club member opens the act by banging on a large taiko drum as forcefully as he can, prompting four others to begin shouting from the top of their lungs, frantically gesticulating with their arms in perfect sync.

With roots in late-nineteenth-century Japan, reflecting the militarisation of sports and education that was introduced from Western Europe at the time (Langdon-Davies 1919; Mangan 1981), the *ōendan* performance and cheering function rely in large part on the sheer volume of the students. Usually, the NDA's *ōendan* leader club practices and performs outside, in a gymnasium, or large halls. In the closed environment and the dome-like acoustics of the venue's entrance hall, however, the sharp sounds produced by the performance violently contrast with the decidedly sophisticated atmosphere of the ball. Standing on the red carpet next to a water fountain showered in a soft pink light, two women in ballroom dresses discretely but promptly raise their gloved hands to cover their ears in order to guard against the sudden shouting. Another woman, seated on a chair directly in front of the stage, briefly winces at the first bang of the taiko drum, but decides to brave the noise, with her hands remaining graciously folded on her purse.

Adding to the eclectic combination of Western cultural influences, a group of students belonging to the NDA's hip hop club is warming up behind the crowd for the next performance. Dressed in the baggy jeans, oversize t-shirts, and bucket hats reflecting hip hop culture's urban American origins, they nervously shuffle back and forth while waving their arms against the backdrop of the piercing shouts and drums of the *ōendan* performance. A few moments later, after the hip hop club's performance, the atmosphere returns to a more festive tone with a musical performance by the academy's Jazz club, followed by two violinists playing a duet.

As the sound of the two violins fills the entrance hall with classical music and the mini concert comes to a close, the last few students check in at the reception and head down the ramp. At the point where the ramp passes the back of the stage, it is entirely

exposed to the eyes of the crowd at the other end of the room, whose members curiously observe each of the arriving guests and their company. By now, most of the female students at the venue have disappeared into the changing rooms in order to change out of their uniforms and into their dresses. The ball is about to begin.

Organisation and Objective

Even though the graduation ball is not part of the NDA's formal curriculum, its organisational structure is in many ways indistinguishable from the academy's formal events. Every year, the success of the graduation ball depends on the efforts of a whole legion of contributors. In total, there are about 100 students involved in staff roles on the organising committee, making it one of the academy's most labor-intensive events. At the top of the hierarchy there are two fourth-year students in managing positions. As in the case of events of the NDA's formal curriculum, such as the annual academy festival or the international cadet conference, the students serving in these top leadership positions are referred to as director (*sekininsha*). Below them, there is another director for each of the four battalions that constitute the NDA's student corps. Within each battalion, in turn, there is another director for each of the four companies. Next to these 22 fourth-year students, there are another twenty or so third- and second-year students per battalion assigned to assist the directors with various practical tasks.

As with all other major NDA events that are hosted on an annual basis (*nenkan gyōji*), whether officially part of the formal academy's training or nominally student-led like the graduation ball, managing a large committee like this itself is a formidable task and an opportunity for the students to practice their leadership and organisational skills. This educational element is evidenced by the fact that students generally assume top staff positions for NDA events rather reluctantly, often with the help of more or less subtle pressure from senior students. In almost all cases, students in director positions stress that their motivation in organising these events lies not in the passion for the particular event, but in the opportunity to practice their leadership skills. Notably, neither of the two senior directors at the ball depicted in this chapter were members of the NDA's own social dance club, the Akacia Club. In fact, both stressed that they did not know how to dance at all.

Unlike the events on the NDA calendar that are part of the formal curriculum, the graduation ball does not come with a codified objective stipulated by academy employees and distributed to students. In the absence of an explicit objective, the

students fill the vacuum with their own ideas. 'I would say there are two objectives', one female director explained. 'The first is to strengthen the sense of community among our cohort. The second is to teach manners (*manā*) and etiquette (*reigi*)'. When asked what kind of manners students were learning about at the graduation ball, the student added: 'How to treat a woman (*josei no atsukaikata*). Not all students have had the chance to learn this, because many have never had a girlfriend. At the graduation ball they can learn it'.

As the manners and etiquette mentioned here are primarily conceptualised as men's behaviour towards women, one primary function of the academy's graduation ball is evidently related to fostering a desirable performance of masculinity. Interestingly, in this instance, this desirable performance of masculinity has little to do with the military at all.

In the literature on the interplay between gender and military organisation there are several studies that have emphasised how men in civilian spheres seek to assert their masculinity by highlighting their experience in, or proximity to, the military. Altinay (2004, 82) notes that 'military service is not only, or perhaps not even primarily, seen as a service to the state, but one that defines proper masculinity'. Belkin (2012, 3) defines the term 'military masculinity as a set of beliefs, practices and attributes that can enable individuals – men and women – to claim authority on the basis of affirmative relationships with the military or with military ideas'. Similarly, Bickford (2002, 34) notes that 'militarized male identity was to become the "base line" by which all other ways of being a man were to be measured'.

Reversely, at the graduation ball, male NDA students learn to claim their identity as future military officers by virtue of their masculinity, rather than vice versa. In that sense, the gendering of future officers in the NDA's hidden curriculum is not specific to military organisations, but rather operates similar to the way in which civilian organisations throughout the world privilege their male members and inhibit representation of female members in particular at the senior level.

Indeed, the notion that membership in the SDF requires a strategic appropriation of masculinity dates back to the organisation's origins in the National Police Reserve (NPR). Winning back the trust and respect from society after the events of the Asia-Pacific War, the first head of the NPR Hayashi Keizō explained, was nothing less than a question of 'manly behavior' (*otokorashii kōdō*; Skabelund 2022, 53). He demanded of service members that they would master proper etiquette and become cultured gentleman, perfecting skills such as table manners and letter writing (*Ibid.*).

The most important element of a gentleman's etiquette that male NDA students are expected to learn at the NDA's graduation ball, as the female director explained, is how to engage with women. Importantly, this aspect of male-female encounters has been at the very heart of the ball since the beginning of the tradition. Shortly after the founding of the NDA, its first president, Maki Tomoo, granted the students' wish to establish a social dance organisation and volunteered to become the honorary president of the newly formed Acacia Club (Skabelund 2022, 98).

To this day, NDA students are reminded of how prominently social dancing featured in Maki's vision of nurturing desirable military officers. Upon their first arrival at the academy, all first-year students are provided with a copy of 'A Collection of Must-Reads for NDA students' (*boudaisei hitsudoku shiryoushū*) by the training department. The second item in this collection is a transcript of a speech delivered by Maki in 1961, titled 'Students and Social Life (*shakō*), Especially Male-Female Relations (*danjo no kōsa*)'. In this speech, Maki tells students about his visit to military academies in the United States, United Kingdom, and France in the year 1956, where he was impressed by how proactively these academies managed the social relations of their students through the organisation of ball dancing:

'West Point cadets are only permitted to leave campus during the summer and Christmas holidays. Other than that, students have no choice but to spend Sundays and holidays looking for recreation and entertainment on campus. Without the opportunity to engage in social relations, student life here would be lacking (mono tarinu) and wearisome (ajikenai). [...] As if to compensate for this lack, each military academy holds balls on campus. Many a Saturday is devoted to this purpose. Rather than leaving the organisation of these balls up to the students, the academy itself takes charge. It is an opportunity for men and women to socialise, as well as to take a break from the harshness of group living (kibishī shūdan seikatsu) [...]. Dancing requires a dance partner. And if one values social status (kakushiki), not just anyone will do. I was told that West Point negotiates with girls' schools within a 20-mile radius, asking them to select and recommend suitable dance partners. Female students seem to gladly attend these balls' (NDA Training Department 2022, 8-9; translation by the author).

According to Maki, balls at these military academies, however, were much more than just an exercise in entertainment and etiquette. They also explicitly fulfilled a matchmaking function, which drew a direct line between the cadets' private life and their occupational duties:

'I do not know in detail to what extent the school allows these relationships between men and women to develop. However, because marriage is not permitted while enrolled at the academy, each graduation day the academies' chapels are flooded with weddings. In the case of Annapolis [the United States Naval Academy], these days this number goes up to as many as 60 weddings. With that in mind, one may say that this ball system has achieved great results, depending on how one thinks about it. I believe that during my visit at West Point I asked the hostess of the grand hall whether it was encouraged for relationships between men and women to develop into weddings. I don't recall the exact answer, but she said something along the following lines: "Choosing a proper wife is not only desirable for the students themselves, but also important for the entire force. Nowadays U.S. soldiers are stationed all over the world, sometimes in remote and isolated locations. If family members are allowed to live with the unit, the morale of the unit (butai no shiki) is higher. The wife is the centre of the household (katei no chūshin), and the small society that the family constitutes depends largely on the strength of the woman (fujin no chikara). With this in mind, we expect students to choose such wives with great wisdom". This was the answer I received. And I remember being deeply moved at the time.' (NDA Training Department 2022, 10; translation by the author)

Before long, the matchmaking function of academy balls which Maki impressed upon his audience in 1961, and which NDA students continue to read about today, became a feature of the NDA's graduation ball, as well.

Finding A Suitable Dance Partner

Because the NDA's graduation ball revolves almost entirely around one-on-one dancing, almost all students who participate in the event do so with a partner. While there is no rule against attending without a fixed partner, in practice students don't seriously consider this an option. In fact, the majority of students who choose not to attend the ball do so because they do not know with whom they could go. The notable exception are students in staff roles, who are busy enough not to look lost in moments where everyone else is partnered up.

For students who are involved in a heterosexual romantic relationship, the obvious choice is to attend the ball with their partner. Although there are some former NDA students who after graduation open up about having been involved in same-sex relationships during their time as a student, disclosing such relationships while enrolled at the NDA, or attending the graduation ball as a same-sex romantic couple is unheard of. As is the case in military institutions around the world, heterosexuality at the NDA presents a norm that 'closely defines the ideal, or indeed the acceptable, soldier' (Altinay

2004, 80). Romantic partners who attend the graduation ball, therefore, are in practice limited to male-female couples.

Although the NDA administration formally banned all romantic relationships between students after the arrival of the first female cohort in 1992, this ban has recently been lifted and many such relationships have since formed – or rather come out into the open. These days, NDA students broadly insist that at least 90 percent of female fourth-year students are involved with a male partner, virtually all of whom are NDA class mates or graduates of above cohorts.

Female students, however, only made up roughly 14 percent of the cohort celebrating graduation at the 2024 ball. And while male students involved in romantic relationships with female partners outside the academy are not uncommon, students generally estimate that still more than half of fourth-year students tend to be single. This is where the matchmaking comes in.

Each year the organising committee of the NDA graduation ball arranges for around 60 students from a private women's university located in nearby Yokohama to join the event, where they are matched through a lottery system with male NDA students who signed up for the matchmaking in advance. This process is referred to as the 'coupling event' (*kappuringu ibento*), and constitutes a stand-alone item on the minutely planned schedule of the graduation ball. In fact, it is one of the main events of the evening.

In postwar Japan, the traditional practice of matchmaking with the intention of marriage, known as *omiai* and usually administered by the family, evolved into an affair often conducted by employers (Vogel 1963, 6). For one, such introductions were seen as a service provided by an organisation to its loyal members. At the same time, they were considered an investment into the development of the organisation's human capital. As Maki laid out in his speech, support for the creation of the family unit was in turn expected to benefit the organisation. While the practice of *omiai* has become less common in Japan over the past decades (Miles 2019, 150), it can still be observed at various levels in the SDF to this day (Dalton 2022). At the NDA, institutionalised matchmaking plays a key role in multiple events, such as the annual academy festival (Frühstück 2007, 148), but appears most prominently at the graduation ball.

At the ball itself, the 'coupling event' is never referred to as *omiai*, neither in writing nor in conversation. Still, almost all students and graduates of the NDA have stories to tell of couples who were matched at past graduation balls and became involved in romantic relationships. 'When students meet again after graduating, they often ask each other "are you still seeing the girl from the ball?" And a lot of them are', one student on the

organising committee in charge of the coupling event noted emphatically. 'Every year, pairs that are coupled end up in relationships. It is basically an informal *omiai*', explained another.

In an unwelcome surprise to the students in charge of the coupling event, however, this year, the students of the private women's university in Yokohama notified the organising committee that they would not be able to help recruiting women for the occasion. Instead, the students on the committee scrambled to get to the target number of 60 women to participate in the coupling event via three alternative routes.

First, the students reached out to an organisation called Jieitai Premium, a private matchmaking company specialising on connecting male SDF members with civilian women (see Dalton 2022). The company agreed to cooperate, making use of its platform and network to recruit women who were willing to join the NDA's graduation ball. Second, students on the ball's organising committee were asked to make use of their personal networks to contact friends and family who might be interested to join. And third, the NDA's Acacia Club was asked to contact former participants of its own annual dance parties.

By early February, to the relief of the students on the organising committee, enough women had signed up to join, and the coupling event was ready to go.

The Coupling Event

Right on schedule, the mini concert is wrapped up, making way for the hosts of the coupling event. Two male students, holding on to a set of notecards, jump onto the stage and begin to explain how the event will unfold. Trading quick and witty jokes, the two students skilfully loosen up the formal and increasingly nervous atmosphere with their showmanship.

If the mini concert had served as somewhat of a side show, drawing only a few dozen members in the audience, the entrance hall is now all but packed with curious onlookers. Not a single chair in front of the stage is empty, students standing behind the chairs are stretching their necks to catch a glimpse of the stage, and dozens of students are lining the ramp surrounding the stage from all sides.

Having explained the event's procedure, the two hosts now move on to introduce the first student to be matched:

'A native of Gifu prefecture and an avid member of the rugby club, our first student is simply good at everything. Not only does he have outstanding grades, his performance during military training also led him to be selected to represent the Japanese team of the annual Sandhurst military skills competition at West Point. But this hardened man also has a soft side. In his free time, he loves to cook, read, and take long walks in nature. From the first battalion, please welcome to the stage: Oikawa Haruki' (translation by the author).

As though they were hosts in a game show, the two students skilfully build anticipation by modulating their voices. After starting the introductions in a matter of fact way, listing basic information and the students' accomplishments, they gradually raise their voice and increase the tempo. Finally, they shout the name of the student as if he was a boxer entering the ring. To enthusiastic cheers and applause, the student jumps up from his chair and jogs onto the stage, while smiling and waving to his friends in the crowd.

At the centre of the stage, the student turns around, standing with his feet demonstratively wide apart, his hands locked behind his back, and a stern look on his face. As the applause dies down, the student seems to grow slightly self-conscious, changing his mind on how to present himself. He quickly pulls his heels together, and the stern look gives way to a wide and nervous grin.

Where the student had been introduced lavishly with personal information, banter and flattery, his female match is introduced much more modest and polite form: 'The lady with the entry number one, please enter the stage', one of the two hosts says into his microphone. The crowd has now fallen entirely silent, scanning the room to get a glimpse of the woman who will be the student's partner for the night. After a few seconds, a woman in a draped beige dress appears from the crowd, quickly ascending the steps to the stage to polite applause. 'She's cute', one student standing in the back of the crowd says to his friend, who approvingly nods back.

On stage, the two parts of the newly formed couple politely bow to each other and exchange a formal greeting. 'Please escort the lady back to her seat', one of the hosts addresses the student. In front of the watchful crowd, the student politely extends his right hand at chest-height with its palm facing up. The woman, with a nervous smile on her face, places her hand on top of his. As the student leads his partner off the stage, he is careful to walk down the stairs a step ahead of her, turning around to make sure she gets down the stairs safely.

With more than 50 couples to be matched and only 45 minutes of the minutely planned schedule allocated to the coupling event, the two hosts swiftly repeat the above sequence, matching couple after couple. After a while, the participants called onto the

stage seem to have eased into a routine, closely following the same pattern which they observed the previous couples perform. After the formal greeting and bow, each student readily offers his hand, upon which the female guest gracefully rests her own, before the student leads her down the steps and back into the crowd.

By the time roughly half of the couples have been matched, the routine is briefly interrupted.

'Our next contender hails from Fukuoka prefecture. He is the star of the swimming club and every professor's favourite student. Highly respected both by fellow students and among the instructors, he was selected in the first term of this year as the student leader of the third battalion. Please welcome to the stage, the NDA's very own superman: Misono Yuta'
(translation by the author).

The crowd bursts into applause, cheering the student's name, as he swaggers onto the stage with a confident grin, holding his left hand up and signalling a thumbs up. In his right hand, he is holding a flower bouquet. 'Entry number 26', cues one of the hosts, 'please enter the stage'. The crowd looks around, scanning the room for the lucky recipient of the flowers, but she does not appear. 'Entry number 26', the host repeats, this time with a nervous sub-tone, as the whole room fills with a suffocating silence. After about half a minute, which surely felt like an eternity to Student Misono, one of the hosts ventures to take back control of the situation: 'It seems the lady with the ticket number 26 is currently in the washroom. Student Misono, please take a seat again for now'. To the unsuccessfully suppressed giggles of some of his friends in the crowd, the student shuffles down the stairs with an awkward smile and returns to his seat. Hoping to salvage the situation, the rest of the crowd politely claps in support.

As the hosts move on to match the next couples and the event returns to its previous routine, a group of students on the organising committee frantically move around the venue to locate the missing guest. At the reception, the students in charge of the guest list confirm that the woman picked up her ticket and should be on the venue. At the hair and make-up counter, as well as in the adjacent photography corner, two further students in staff roles confirm that she is not there either.

Finally, the missing guest is found and the director in charge of the coupling event is informed. In turn, she passes on the message to the moderators. After the last couple on the list is successfully matched, Student Misono is once more called upon the stage, this time without a lengthy introduction. 'Entry number 26, may we ask you to enter the stage', one of the hosts asks politely, and the guest finally ascends the stage to the

applause of the crowd. 'Oh my, I am so relieved', exclaims the director in charge, visibly stirred by her sense of responsibility for the smooth execution of the event.

Beauty and the Beast: Ballroom and Gender Education

During the coupling event, each male student on stage performed a uniform routine: First, a polite bow to his allocated female partner. After expressing a formal greeting, he offers his hand, with the palm facing upwards. Finally, he leads her down the stage, descending the stairs ahead of his partner to offer assistance. Given the flawless execution of this routine across the board, it would likely come as a surprise to the civilian guests attending the graduation ball to hear that the students have had very little chance to practice such routines at previous occasions.

At the NDA, female students take great pride in studying and training just the same as their male counterparts do. They emphasise that women and men take the same classes and examinations together and complete the same military training. Likewise, female students insist that they receive no special treatment from staff. Indeed, both civilian and uniformed instructors are obliged to treat all students equally and without regard for gender.

In the NDA's formal curriculum, therefore, the question of how a man should treat a woman is not a concept that even occurs. Female students, who consider this a central part of their integration in the student body, take great pride in this.

Evidently, however, the graduation ball is an exception to this practice of de-emphasising gender. Male students, who learn in the academy's formal curriculum to treat their female classmates no differently from their male ones, are suddenly expected to unlearn this lesson. Instead, in the words of the female staff member, they must learn, 'how to treat a woman'.

In a society where cultural etiquette is often highly codified, this crash course on gender performance is no exception. To ensure adequate preparation for participating students, the organising committee made sure to distribute educational materials to all fourth-year students prior to the ball, laying out in detail the performance which is expected of them at the event.

Most prominently among the materials distributed to the students, are slides to a presentation titled 'Dance Party Education' (*dansu pātī kyōiku*), assembled by members of the NDA's Acacia Club. The subtitle, written in English, reads 'A true gentleman and lady could be a true warrior'. The background of the title slide is made up of a promotional

picture of the movie *La La Land*, a 2016 Hollywood musical featuring Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone. In the picture, the two actors can be seen dancing on a hill overlooking Los Angeles under a violet night sky.

The presentation, comprising no less than 35 slides, begins with a definition of the concept of escorting (*esuko-to*): 'To escort means to accompany someone. Principally, it refers to men bringing women somewhere (*okuritodokeru*), or chaperoning (*gireiteki goei*) them. To make women feel comfortable (*kokochiyoku*) and safe on dates, a spirit of "ladies first" ("*redifāsuto*" *no seishin*) is necessary'. For extra emphasis, the term 'ladies first' is not only written in brackets, but also underlined.

To demonstrate the correct way to escort a woman, the presentation continues with two photographs providing real-world examples. In one photograph, set at a movie premiere, two well-known Japanese actors can be seen ascending the steps to a stage. The man, at the top of the stairs, bows down and offers a hand to assist the woman on her way up. Responding with a smile, the woman has one hand gently placed on his palm, with the other making sure she does not step onto her dress. In the second photograph, set at an opening party for a fashion store in Tokyo, an unnamed male model, who is white, is holding the hand of a Japanese actress, as she walks across a red carpet. Their hands, held chest-high, are barely touching. If the first picture showed the man providing assistance to the woman, the man in the second picture seems to merely serve to add a sense of sophistication to the woman's appearance.

The following section of the presentation, titled 'Escort Basics 1', provides a detailed explanation of the man's escorting responsibilities:

- '1. When walking with a woman, adapt to her pace. Women's step lengths are small to begin with, and heels are difficult to walk in.*
- 2. Have simple conversations (*kantan'na kaiwa*), such as on today's weather or your partner's interests. Don't bombard her with questions!! Avoid private topics.*
- 3. How to lead: Hold out your hand with your palm facing up, so that the woman can place her hand on it from above. The man does not clasp the woman's hand. If you are escorting by offering your arm, don't hold her arm too firmly. Keep a light lead.*
- 4. Stairs and Escalators: Whether going up or down, it is standard to stand below the woman, so that she can be assisted if she loses her balance. If the stairs are steep, it is dangerous to stand at the bottom! In this case, escort the woman from the side.*
- 5. Doors: In the case of doors that need to be pushed open, enter first and guide the woman while holding the door open. In the case of doors that need to be pulled open, pull the door open, let her enter first, then enter yourself.*

6. *Do not leave the woman unattended (josei wo hottarakashi ni shinai). If you do leave her side, excuse yourself first* (translation by the author).

The next slide of the presentation opens a new section titled ‘dance manners’ (*dansu manā*). The background of this slide is filled with a still of the 2017 live-action adaptation of Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*. In the still, set in a golden ballroom, complete with the corresponding eighteenth-century European ballroom fashion, the beast towers over an intimidated Belle, holding her by the waist as though they are dancing the waltz.

As in the previous section, the following slides, titled ‘Dance Party Basics 1’, spell out in detail what is expected of the students: ‘When paired up, exchange a greeting (*yoroshiku onegaishimasu*). When the dance is over, say “Thank you”’. Next to these instructions, there is a still of Disney’s 2015 live-action remake of *Cinderella*. Again, the two main characters are facing each other in a ballroom. Surrounded by dozens of onlookers, Cinderella and the prince are wearing opulent nineteenth-century fashion, as they anticipate their dance.

‘How to ask for a dance’, the presentation proceeds to explain: ‘1. Gently extend your hand and ask “May I have this dance” (*ikkyoku onegaishimasu*) with a smile!! 2. Enjoy the dance. 3. After the dance, spin your partner around once, bow slightly and say “Thank you”. 4. Escort her back to the table. If you can dance comfortably with anyone’, the tutorial concludes, ‘you are already a gentleman (*shinshi*)’. The word gentleman is written not only in bold characters, but also in a size twice as large as the surrounding text.

The section also provides some advice of a more general nature. ‘Avoid bad breath, body odour, and smelling of sweat. Also don't forget beard care!’. ‘Lead gently’, it cautions, ‘NDA students tend to be very strong’. In an accompanying manga illustration, a visibly nervous young man is drawn next to a speech bubble that reads: ‘Handle her even more courteously (*teichō*) than a flower or a butterfly’.

The section on ‘Dance Party Basics 1’ ends with a call to keep in mind the vulnerability of the female dance partner: ‘Be considerate: Could she be tired? Could her feet be sore from wearing shoes she is not used to? If she is tired, take a break and have a conversation’. Two accompanying pictures serve to illustrate this final point. In one, Belle can once more be seen dancing with the beast. As he towers over her, she leans back into his supporting arms. Above her, the students of the Akacia Club added a thought bubble that reads ‘My feet hurt’. The other picture is a stock photo of a woman’s foot with blistered heels, standing next to high heel shoes.

Whether intended or not, the 'Dance Party Education' distributed to the participants of the graduation ball serves not only as a crash course on the procedures of the event, but also as an education on gender performance and male-female interactions. It describes not just what its authors consider inherent attributes of the male and female sex, or in other words *how women and men are*, but also what it considers desirable performances of gender, meaning *what they should do* (Butler 1999). In terms of physiological attributes, men are assumed to be taller, stronger, and more enduring. Women, reversely, are assumed to be smaller, weaker and vulnerable. Gender performance, however, is something that male students are told they must learn, echoing Frühstück's (2007, 52) characterisation of SDF members assuming 'a militarized manhood that is trained, practiced, and achieved in the Self-Defense Forces'. At the NDA's graduation ball, the men are advised to be gentlemen, who take care of their beard, as well as potential body odour and bad breath. No such explicit advice on gender performance in the presentation is given to female students.

Based on the assumptions regarding physiological differences, as well as the gendered expectations regarding gentlemanly behaviour, the presentation also details the desirable character of male-female interactions at the ball. Fundamental to this piece of education is the notion that it is the man's role to protect the woman, a notion that Dalton (2022, 119) has identified as a common theme in the SDF's broader matchmaking activities.

Chiefly, the man here is expected to protect his female partner from her own vulnerabilities. According to the presentation, these vulnerabilities derive not just from the physical disadvantages of her sex, such as her lack of strength and endurance, but also from her gender performance as a lady, whose high heels and dress make her more prone to fall, tire, and get hurt. At the same time, the man's protection involves shielding his female partner from his own physical superiority. With longer legs and stronger arms, he must make sure not to hurt or exhaust her, by escorting too tightly or walking too fast. Finally, the man must also protect his female partner from others. After all, to chaperone means to stand guard, and the man must not leave his female partner alone.

In addition to his duty to protect, the presentation also details the gentleman's responsibility to entertain tactfully. He must hold conversation, preferably about the weather, her interests, or other 'simple' topics, without veering into private topics or asking too many questions.

Beyond the rules of social dancing or the procedures of the graduation ball, the presentation also seeks to prepare male NDA students for their informal *omiaiai*. It serves

as a guide not just for the first conversation, but for the first impression, ranging from the man's appearance to his ability to make his female partner 'feel comfortable' and enjoy the 'date' after she tires of dancing and requires a break.

The textual guidance surrounding the assumed physiological features of sex, desirable gender performance, and advice on male-female encounters is accompanied and illustrated by references to recent remakes of twentieth-century Disney classics. In both referenced movies, the ballroom dance scenes famously serve as the cinematic peak of the blossoming romance between the main characters, while exemplifying the American postwar imaginations of pre-industrial European aristocratic chivalry that have helped make Disney the multinational entertainment conglomerate it is today. This demonstrates the need to understand the formation of military masculinities, or 'militarized masculinity', through a perspective that is not limited by methodological nationalism (Duriesmith and Ismail 2019).

While this presentation was distributed to all NDA students participating in the graduation ball, and although the title slide makes sure to note that not just the gentleman, but also the 'lady could be a true warrior', the content of the 'Dance Party Education' reads first and foremost as advice to male students. Many of the points listed apply only to men and how to treat female partners, and there is no advice exclusively given to women on how to dress, dance, or talk to men during the ball. This reflects the idea, made explicit by the student of the organising committee, that a large part of the graduation ball's function is to teach male students 'how to treat a woman', and not vice versa.

In this process, the concept of the NDA student is implicitly merged with that of the man, while the concept of the civilian guest is merged with that of the woman. The presentation is both directed at the NDA student, as well as exclusively at men: The NDA student is taught how to dance with a woman. NDA students are portrayed as strong and tall, while their civilian female partners are portrayed as weak and vulnerable. Somewhat unflatteringly, this equation is repeatedly illustrated through usage of stills from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*.

In the subtext of the presentation, in Maki's description of the ball's function, as well as in oft-repeated comments by students and staff, it is explicitly assumed that the closed-off nature of academy life restricts the ability of students (*men*) to meet and interact with women (*civilians*) in the way that young people are able to elsewhere in contemporary society. Therefore, the narrative goes, the function of the graduation ball is to provide an opportunity for the students to practice such male-female encounters.

This equation of the man and the student, and reversely of the woman and the civilian, rather curiously contradicts the fact that female students have been attending the NDA for more than thirty years. Having read the 'Dance Party Education', one might be forgiven for assuming that female NDA students do not participate in the ball at all. Indeed, a similar notion is implicitly conveyed at the the graduation ball itself.

The Female NDA Student and the Graduation Ball

Once all couples have been matched, the dancing is set to begin. Before the formal opening of the ball, however, the participants will receive a short course on ballroom dancing delivered by the members of the Akacia Club. All couples, whether they arrived together or met for the first time on the stage of the entrance hall, move on into the reception room, where they spread out across the room.

At the centre of the room, a student from the Akacia club speaking into a microphone explains the basic steps of the waltz. Two further club members deliver a demonstration for the couples in the audience to imitate. Having practiced ballroom dancing for multiple years, the Akacia club dancers seem to beam with pride and bathe in the spotlight, as they float across the room. Their outfits, too, notably stand out from the crowd. The female dancer is donning an extravagant purple dress, while the male dancer is wearing a stylish three-piece suit.

To the eyes of the nervously watching couples, the members of the Akacia club in many ways embody the objective of the night. It was the Akacia club that assembled the 'Dance Party Education', and here, on the evening of the graduation ball, members of the Akacia club are showing the audience not just how to dance, but how to perform the two components of the ideal ballroom couple: the gentleman and the lady.

Yet, there is one important way in which the male students of the Akacia club differ from the male participants surrounding them. Instead of three-piece suits, the male students in the reception room who do not belong to the Akacia Club are without exception wearing the NDA's navy blue uniform.

The female students of the graduating cohort, on the other hand, are all wearing dresses. There are beige dresses, black dresses, revealing dresses, and conservative dresses. No female student among the graduating cohort is wearing her uniform.

Many female students had arrived at the venue in their uniforms and worn them throughout their staff duties in the early afternoon. But as the final preparations were winding down, the female students disappeared into the changing rooms, changing out of

their uniforms and into their dresses. By the end of the coupling event, the female NDA uniform, characterised by a slightly different cut from the male one, had almost disappeared from the ball.

The gendered nature of the dress code among the fourth-year participants of the graduation ball is further contrasted by the fact that the dress code for all other attendees applies regardless of gender, instead solely depending on the attendee's status. Among the second- and third-year students that attend in staff roles, both male and female students are required to wear their uniforms. Male and female members of the Akacia Club, as mentioned above, are permitted to wear ballroom fashion considering their role as instructors and performers at the ball. Likewise, all male and female commissioned officers in attendance wear their SDF uniforms.

This raises the question: Why do male fourth-year students at the NDA's graduation ball not wear suits? Or reversely, why do the female fourth-year students not wear their uniforms?

As curious as this observation may seem to an outsider, students and staff at the academy, surprisingly, had no prepared explanation for it. Members of the organising committee prompted on this issue conceded that it was not something they felt strongly about, or had even discussed as a committee: 'Honestly, I haven't thought about this before', one senior director of the event noted.

The lack of an explicit or conscious reasoning for the separate dress codes for male and female students is further complicated by the fact that the members of the organising committee were not in agreement about whether this gendered dress code was based on explicit rules or not. Both senior directors agreed that there was no rule preventing female students from wearing their uniform. In the case of male students, however, one insisted that they were not allowed to attend in suits, while the other insisted that they were. In any case, in practice, no female fourth-year students attended the ball in their uniform. And no male fourth-year students, other than the members of the Akacia club, attended the ball in anything other than their uniform.

In the absence of a formal narrative explaining why male students at the graduation ball wear the NDA uniform and female students do not, the students fill the vacuum with their own functionalist explanations. 'I think the guys want to wear their uniform because they take pride in it', one female student noted. Another added: 'They probably want to wear their uniform because it serves as a symbol for the NDA student (*bōdaisei no shōchō*)', added another. When asked whether this did not apply to herself, she shook her head: 'I want to be seen as a woman (*josei toshite mirareru*), so I wanted to wear a dress'.

In this narrative, the NDA uniform, whether by design or association, is inevitably tied to the concept of masculinity. For the graduation ball, this female student wanted to emphasise her femininity in a way that she felt a dress could, but the uniform could not. Not all female students at the graduation ball, however, decide against wearing their uniform for this particular reason.

While there were no female fourth-year students wearing the NDA uniform at the 2024 graduation ball, there were a handful who instead opted to wear three-piece suits. At the risk of standing apart from the crowd and having to withstand a battery of comments from curious male classmates and academy staff, these women decided against both their dress and their uniform. Seeing as the suit is not an option for male fourth-year students in practice, this resulted in the curious situation where next to the performers of the Akacia club, these female students were the only participants at the ball in a civilian suit. In other words, even the female students who chose to reject the normative expectations of the lady in the ballroom dress, appeared in the crowd dressed not as students, but as civilians.

Without their uniforms, distinguishing female NDA students from the civilian female partners who are attending the ball becomes a decidedly more difficult task. 'I've only ever seen the students in their uniforms. I don't even recognise some of the female students here', one amused uniformed lecturer in attendance noted.

In addition to the civilian clothing, many of the female students participating in the ball had applied an amount of make-up that would constitute a violation of service regulations (*fukumu kiritsu ihan*) had they worn their uniform. While the NDA's ban on wearing make-up on campus, or rather the ban's enforcement, has been relaxed to some extent in the past years, students are only tolerated to apply it in moderation when wearing their uniform, maintaining what is referred to as a 'natural' look. At the graduation ball, in contrast, most of the female fourth-years are making use of their non-uniformed appearance by applying make-up considerably more generously. Similarly, while female students on campus are required to wear their hair tied up in a small bun (*dango*), which in turn is covered in a black hair net, at the ball they wore a variety of different hair styles, ranging from stacked up or worn open to elaborately braided.

The consequence of the attending female students distancing themselves from the regulated appearance of the NDA student is that even to the students, who have spent four years living with each other, female fourth-years at the ball are often difficult to make out among the civilian women in the crowd. Indeed, the merging of these two categories,

the female student and the civilian woman joining the ball as a guest, is a central theme of the evening.

First, as detailed above, the discursively established objective of the graduation ball is for male students to learn how to treat a woman. Female students have no such task they need to attend to at the event. As women, they are merely at the receiving end of this exercise.

Second, the 'Dance Party Education' makes this gap explicit, laying out what is expected of the male student, particularly with regard to how he should treat a civilian woman. The female student is neither addressed nor even mentioned anywhere in the document. Indeed, official publications by military organisations which largely ignore the existence of female service members, equating the soldier with the man, and providing him with advice on how to find a civilian female partner, have been a phenomenon highlighted in research beyond Japan. Bickford (2002, 72) argues that military magazines published by the German Democratic Republic read 'like a training guide for young men', focussing on 'how to find and keep a girlfriend and how to act like a "decent" man in a relationship'.

Third, at the coupling event, only male students are provided with a civilian partner. Given the informal matchmaking function of this event, the male students are not just expected to dance with their partners, but are also explicitly instructed how to walk and talk with them. The historical explanation provided to the students to this day without any contextualising annotation is that the ideal military officer needs a wife at the centre of his household, not just for his personal fulfilment but also to boost troop morale. The more contemporary and practical justification, repeatedly brought up in academy life by staff and students, is that male students have few opportunities to meet civilian women due to the closed-off nature of NDA life. The female participants without a partner, however, are not provided with a civilian partner through the coupling event. Although a handful of female students attend the ball with classmates with whom they share a platonic relationship, these are the exceptions. In practice, most female students without male romantic partners choose not to attend the ball.

Fourth, although occasionally there are female NDA students with male romantic partners who are neither students or graduates of the academy, such couples generally do not attend the ball. Among the dancing crowd at the 2024 graduation ball, all men were either NDA students, graduates, or employees. With the exception of the few civilian members of the academy administration attending, who are notably employees of the MoD themselves, the concept of the civilian man does not appear at the graduation ball.

Fifth, reversely, all female dancers in the crowd perform the role of a civilian. Whether student or civilian guest, the female attendees of the graduation ball wear dresses and don hair and make-up styles that are permitted neither on campus, nor off-campus when wearing the NDA uniform.

As a consequence, from the moment the dancing begins, the concept of the female NDA student has all but disappeared from the graduation ball. Whatever educational purpose the graduation ball holds, it is exclusively targeted at the male students. For the remainder of the evening, the female students perform the same role of the civilian as the women who have come to attend the matchmaking.

In the literature seeking to understand how female soldiers navigate the male-dominated nature of military organisations, researchers have debated the extent to which female soldiers may seek to strategically adopt facets of masculinity to get ahead. Kilshaw (2009, 180) notes: 'Masculinity is a social construct and, thus, women can be considered as embodying masculine ideals as much as men. Women who join the military could be seen as likely to embrace dominant notions of masculinity'. At the NDA's graduation ball, however, the dress code leaves no such option for women. The institutionalisation of the event's rules, passed down by successive cohorts and enforced discursively in the name of maintaining tradition, allocates all female students to the role of the civilian. Even female students who decide not to wear a ballroom dress still comply with this allocation by choosing to wear a civilian suit instead of their NDA uniform.

In direct contrast to their formal training, which stipulates that male students are to treat female students the same way as their male counterparts, tonight the students learn that women, after all, need to be treated differently after all. They learn that it is the man's responsibility to recognise and compensate for the woman's vulnerability. And they learn that just as the protective function of the man is indistinguishable from the role of the soldier, so is the vulnerability of the woman indistinguishable from that of the civilian. In the exercise of the graduation ball, there is no space for the concept of the female NDA student.

Into the Grand Ballroom

Finally, the curtains to the grand ballroom are opened. It is a vast hall, with a wooden dance floor in the centre, above which more than two dozen chandeliers are suspended from the ceiling. Lining the dance floor on three sides are tables filled with food and drinks, while the fourth side opens to tables for the VIP guests and a large stage.

Suspended from the wall above the stage is a set of items that is familiar to students from formal events at the academy: A large white banner carrying the title of the event, the national flag of Japan and the flag of the academy.

Despite the graduation ball's status as a student-organised event, the order and character of its opening procedure hardly differ from events belonging to the academy's formal curriculum. After the students have poured into the grand ballroom, carefully avoiding the wooden floor that marks the dance floor, a student on the organising committee announces the entrance of the VIP guests. Right on cue, the senior members of the administration enter the hall, followed by a few instructors who serve in advisory positions to the Akacia club.

Once all VIP guests are sat at their tables, the opening ceremony begins. Two students of the organising committee step onto the stage, declare the ball officially opened, and hand over the microphone to one of the event's senior directors. The student politely thanks the VIP guests for joining, as well as the members of the organising committee for their hard work. 'Tonight is about forgetting all the bad memories, so please enjoy yourselves', the student instructs the room to polite applause from the attendees.

Then, it is the NDA president's turn to deliver his welcome speech. After thanking the students for organising the event and the ASDF's Music Corps for providing the music, he directly addresses the civilian women who have come for the coupling event: 'I want to express my gratitude for those who are joining us from outside today for the sake of our lonely (*sabishii*) NDA students', he jokes to laughter and applause from the crowd. 'The graduation ball is a tradition that dates back to the days of the NDA's first president Maki. But there is also a lot that has changed since those days. Now there are also female students at the academy', he notes, attempting to bridge the historical origins of the ball with the present reality.

After the president has concluded his speech, and the two announcers have introduced each VIP guest by name, the dance floor is opened with a demonstration by the Akacia Club's dancers. The lights emanating from the chandeliers are dimmed and three couples, illuminated by spotlights from above, begin to fly across the parquet. As with the 'Dance Party Education', the members of the Akacia Club have chosen to accompany their demonstration with Hollywood and Disney references. In their first demonstration the couples dance to the soundtrack of a movie of the Fast & Furious series. In their second demonstration, they dance to the soundtrack of Disney's Aladdin.

Once the dance floor is opened to all participants, it is the students' turn to demonstrate what they have learnt in preparation for the ball. All over the room, male students can be seen escorting their female partners onto the parquet, with their hands extended, palm facing up, or offering their arms for their partners to hold on to.

Just seconds before, as if on cue, virtually all male students relieved their female partners of their purses, wearing them around their own shoulders instead. Contrasting the navy blue uniforms, the backs of male students across the room are now decorated with golden, pink, or violet fabrics.

Some male students go even further in their efforts to make an impression with the extent of their chivalry. Leading his partner with his right hand, one student approaches a junior student in a staff role standing idly on the side of the dance floor. Without a word, with a straight face, and with the poise of a general commanding his subordinate, the fourth-year student hands over his partner's purse to the third-year for safekeeping. Demoted to the role of a valet, the junior student politely bows as he accepts the purse. The senior student once more extends his hand, his partner places her hand on top of it, and together they walk onto the dance floor. At the centre of the dance floor, the two partners turn towards each other in closed position, and begin to dance to the ASDF Music Corps' rendition of the soundtrack to the 1986 movie *Top Gun*.

Gendering the Military Officer in the NDA's Hidden Curriculum

When the first cohort of female students entered the NDA in 1992, a consequence of the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1985, an important pathway was opened for female officers to climb into the highest echelons of the SDF leadership. Although Satō (2022) has argued that decisions like these to expand the scope of positions open to female service members reflected the government's public relations strategy more than it did considerations for gender equality, the presence of female students at the NDA has undoubtedly served to increase the number of senior SDF officers in recent years.

Still, the question of whether the sheer presence alone of women in the military, just as in other male-dominated fields, has the power to transform the gendered nature of military culture has preoccupied researchers throughout the world. 'Women may well be "accepted"', Higate and Hopton (2005, 438) ask, 'but will they be accepted as equal? How would we know if the negative aspects of military masculine culture—in particular, those that serve to marginalize women—had been neutralized'?

The NDA's formal curriculum has taken significant efforts to adapt to the presence of female students over the past three decades. Fundamentally, all students are expected to participate in the same academic classes and military training regardless of their gender. Likewise, employees of the academy generally seek to avoid creating the impression during their instruction or in formal documents that women are inherently less capable of fulfilling the responsibilities of a military officer than men. Notably, they do so even when they disagree privately.

The fact that employees of the NDA have taken such efforts to eliminate overt discrimination against female students in the formal curriculum can in large part be explained by the fact that this curriculum is under the direct control of the NDA administration and, in turn, the MoD. As part of the government, the administration and the ministry are obliged to conform with the law, including regulations that address gender equality in public service. An array of civilian bureaucrats serve to ensure that these legal requirements are met in the academy's formal operations. At least in theory, in instances where they do not, investigations, other compliance measures, and journalistic scrutiny can serve as correctives to hold members of the NDA leadership accountable. This does not, however, apply to the NDA's hidden curriculum, a set of institutionalised customs and traditions that is tacitly condoned, if little understood, by the academy's leadership, but for which it takes no responsibility. As a consequence, this leaves no obvious person in charge that can be held accountable.

The above description of the NDA's graduation ball demonstrates the extent to which the hidden curriculum continues to instil students with notions of gender that directly contradict the formal curriculum. In the hidden curriculum, the NDA student, and by extension the profession of the military officer, is directly linked to masculinity, in a way that categorically precludes female students from successfully fulfilling the expectations of an ideal officer that are created in the process.

Although academy officials stress that the graduation ball is student-led, and therefore not an official event, this distinction makes little difference to the students, who perceive the event as central part of academy life, identity, and tradition. First, the organising committee is structured in the same way as major events that are part of the formal curriculum, including the terms of the leadership positions and the process by which students are recruited for these positions. Second, the presence of the NDA and national flags on the wall, as well as the presence of the academy's senior leadership, including speeches and a formal entrance and exit that are distinctly similar to events on campus, serve to create the impression that the ball is an event that is no different from

formal events and sanctioned by the academy's leadership. And third, the contextualisation of the ball's historical origins distributed to all students by the administration in the form of Maki's speech in the 'must-reads' volume further advances the impression that the event is not just condoned by the administration, but presents an important part of the NDA's tradition.

Likewise, the nature of the graduation ball as a student-led event does not mean that the socialisation students are exposed to at this occasion is subject to frequent changes that are up to the organising committee of each cohort. To the contrary, as the inclusion of Maki's speech demonstrates, the graduation ball is an institutionalised component of academy life that dates back to the days of its establishment. As a venerable tradition of the NDA, students on the organising committee of each graduating cohort have proven to take great care organising the event the same way as it was done in previous years. Information and documents on the organisational practicalities are passed down along cohorts in the student corps in the same way as in the case of events belonging to the formal curriculum. As with life in the student barracks, this has led to a remarkable continuity in the lessons that are conveyed to participants of the graduation ball over the years, even as both the the reality of student life on campus and of the SDF's officer corps have drastically changed.

As a consequence, even as the NDA's formal curriculum has evolved to adapt to a reality in which female NDA graduates have been serving as SDF officers in all three branches for almost three decades, the academy's hidden curriculum continues to instil students with rigidly gendered ideas of the military officer profession that directly contradict this formal curriculum. Because student life at the NDA is dominated by the hidden curriculum, a prioritisation that is tacitly condoned by both the academy's civilian and uniformed leadership in the name of fostering independence and self-reliance (*jishu jiritsu*), the values that NDA graduates bring into the SDF's officer corps each year continue to quietly undermine the efforts that have been made to reform the SDF and its affiliated organisation.

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Chapter 4

‘Let us follow their dying wish’ - The SDF and the Imperial Military

A Long Journey

Just a few minutes before noon on a December Saturday, nine students belonging to the student corps' 24th company have gathered around a table in the student barracks to have lunch together. On this weekend, and this weekend only, they form a distinct unit, going by the name of the 242nd squad (*buntai*). After finishing their meal, they will set out on foot from campus heading north, all the way up to central Tokyo. They will embark on this 65-kilometre journey without intention to stop for sleep on the way. By nightfall they will reach the city of Yokohama, pass through the city of Kawasaki around midnight, and in the dark of night cross a bridge over the Tama river to enter the capital city. Their destination lies in Tokyo's Chiyoda district, where they will pay their respects at the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery, before visiting the Yasukuni Shrine and its military museum.

This year more than 530 students will participate in the Tokyo *kōshin* (march to Tokyo), as the event is known at the NDA, amounting to almost one third of the entire student body. As a student-organised event, held each year on an autumn weekend, participation is not formally required. Nevertheless, it is a major event on the students' calendar with a long tradition, and virtually all graduates of the NDA have participated at least once during their four years at the academy.

On this Saturday, more than half of those seated around the table of the 242nd squad are students in their first year. First-year students are particularly encouraged to participate in the Tokyo *kōshin*, not only to face the physical challenge which the event presents, but also in order to learn about the NDA's traditions, identity, and mission. Indeed, against the backdrop of the strictly hierarchical organisation of the student corps, such encouragement from senior students often takes the form of less than subtle pressure.

Still, each year a considerable amount of first-year students are excited to join the Tokyo *kōshin*, and this year is no different. Students who participate in the event receive special permission from the training department to skip roll call both on Saturday night and Sunday morning. For this cohort of first-year students, it will be the first night which they are allowed to spend outside the purview of the administration since enrolling eight

months ago. For them, the Tokyo *kōshin* promises to be a rare night of adventure spent together with their class mates.

The students of the 242nd squad in particular have been looking forward to this day for weeks, claiming the honour of forming the toughest among all participating squads. Instead of walking the 65 kilometres, a task already daunting enough for most participants, they will attempt to run most of the distance. In addition to the already strenuous physical training that characterises everyday life at the academy, the nine students have found extra time in their busy schedule to go for additional runs around campus to get in the best shape possible. Even on this morning, only hours before setting out to Tokyo, the students had met up after breakfast for a five-kilometre warm-up run.

Given the voluntary nature of the event, within their companies students can largely decide for themselves in which composition they want to participate in the Tokyo *kōshin*. In the case of the 242nd squad, the shared ambition of running, as opposed to walking, to the capital has brought the members together. Despite this act of collective decision making, each squad taking part in the event is required to appoint and report a designated squad leader (*buntai-chō*) who is in charge of communications with the organising committee and carries the final decision making authority for the group. In this way, the Tokyo *kōshin* mirrors the way students are organised during the NDA's formal training. Generally, this leadership position is filled by a fourth-year student. As something of a practical joke, however, today the two fourth-year students have decided to designate one of the first-year students as squad leader. Sensing the lighthearted banter of his senior students, the first-year student initially protested, before giving in after assurances that not too much would be expected of him.

After finishing their seafood bowls, paid for by the squad's two fourth-year students as tradition demands, the students make some final adjustments to their equipment and outfits. Whereas in the past students conducted the Tokyo *kōshin* in combat uniform (Saji 2022, 52), these days students simply wear private clothes for most of the journey. Almost all students wear running shoes and sportswear, yet, there are also some covering the long distance in simple jeans and sneakers.

It is only in Tokyo where the students change into their navy blue academy uniforms for the last stretch of the journey. Together with the other squads of their battalion, the uniformed students then march towards the cemetery, before making their offering to the deities at the Yasukuni Shrine and visiting the shrine's museum. The uniforms are brought to the vicinity of the cemetery and shrine in advance by a number of busses organised by the event's organising committee, allowing students to make the

long journey carrying only what they need to make it to Tokyo, including food, drinks, and warm clothes for the night.

At noon, the students of the 242nd squad begin their adventure. After a student of the NDA's photography club organises the jovial group for a final picture on campus, the security guard positioned at the main gate waves the students through with a smile on his face and the students politely greet back as they spill out onto the street. Once outside, the two-fourth year students turn to the designated leader of the squad with a teasing grin. 'What do you say, squad leader', one of them asks, 'should we start?' The first-year student dutifully nods and utters a reluctant command to advance. In single file, the students of the squad begin to run north, over sidewalks, along highways, through tunnels, and across bridges. Despite the event's name, in reality students only begin marching in formation after changing into their uniforms in Tokyo. For the more than 60 kilometres before this happens, students of each squad are free to run or walk as they please.

Using the command system which they have learned as part of their military training, the students carefully make sure that their group does not pose any nuisance for others on the street. 'Keep left' (*hidari yore*), the student all the way in the back shouts, having noticed a bike approaching from behind. One by one, in order of the file, the students repeat the call until it reaches the student at the front of the squad and all students have moved to the side. A few minutes later, approaching a red traffic light, the student at the front raises his right hand signalling an abrupt halt. Again, the signal is passed to the back of the file by each student in rapid succession.

Every thirty minutes or so the two fourth-year students signal the group to stop for a break. At first, the students stop at a convenience store to purchase drinks and energy bars. For the second break, they choose a scenic park overlooking the United States Navy base in Yokosuka. Pointing at the docked vessels, two students who are set to join the SDF's maritime branch upon graduation begin a heated discussion about the names and classes of the ships stationed at this base.

Briefly joining the students in the park are the parents of one the squad's first-year students. Hoping to get a quick glimpse of their son and to cheer on his squad, the parents have flown all the way from the city of Fukuoka for this occasion. They briefly introduce themselves, pass around energy drinks to each student, and take a picture of the whole squad in front of the American warships, before the students run off again.

Reflecting the status of the Tokyo *kōshin* as a special event on the academy's calendar, such small interactions with people outside the academy are scattered

throughout the students' day. As they pass the border between Yokosuka and Yokohama, a woman passing by in her car leans out of her window and shouts: 'Are you with the Tokyo *kōshin*? Do your best (*ganbatte*)!'. The students thank her politely and smile at each other proudly. 'I guess there really are a lot of NDA fans', says one. 'Yeah, the Tokyo *kōshin* is pretty famous', confirms another.

As they run, the students alternately play music through their smartphone speakers. After listening to a few songs regularly used at the academy's athletic competitions, one student starts playing soundtracks to various Studio Ghibli movies. At one point, two first-year students sing along to a song from an animated television series titled 'How heavy are the dumbbells you lift?', before another puts on Ben E. King's Stand by Me.

The next stop, at an elevated park overlooking Tokyo bay, serves as the first of four checkpoints through which squads participating in the Tokyo *kōshin* are generally required to pass. Mirroring the logistical elements that are part of the academy's formal military training, students with staff roles on the organising committee are posted at each of these checkpoints, taking note of the squads passing by on their clipboards to make sure that all participating students are accounted for. While these four checkpoints are set definitively, squad leaders are free to decide which route to take between them, as well as where to take breaks along the way.

As the sun sets above the park, the students note how much time has already passed and how quickly the temperature has dropped. Noting that they are well ahead of schedule, the two fourth-year students decide that the squad will stop running for a while, and instead walk the rest of the way to the restaurant where they have made a reservation for dinner. After putting on a layer of sweatshirts and jackets, the students make their way into the heart of Yokohama.

Soon after, the squad arrives in the port town's Chinatown, where they stop for snacks at a street food vendor, before entering an all-you-can-eat okonomiyaki restaurant. As with the lunch on campus, the fourth-year students pay for all of the food and drinks, explaining to the younger students that they will be expected to pay for everyone once they reach their senior year themselves. They share a toast, snap a group picture, and begin to eat.

About halfway through their meal, another group of students enters the restaurant. It is quickly established that other than the 242nd squad, this squad has come to Yokohama by train, will go to karaoke after dinner, take the last train to Kawasaki, and only then begin walking to the capital from there.

Although more than 530 students signed up for the Tokyo *kōshin* this year, less than half of all participating squads, according to the organising committee, are completing the entire distance on foot. A majority of the squads make use of trains or bikes for a section or even all of the journey. The only fixed requirement is to appear at the meeting point near the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery on time. Whether to get there on foot or not is left up to the squads themselves. To some students, paying their respects at the shrine is the main part of the event, while making the journey on foot is merely an optional aspect. To others, it is the walk, the run, or just the night spent outside out of campus that makes the event memorable.

For the organising committee, the important figure is the number of students who ultimately show up in uniform at the Yasukuni Shrine. 'If we were stricter, by not allowing trains and such, the number of participants would become too small', notes one of the senior members on the organising committee. It is at the shrine where spectators come to watch the students march in formation, where videos are taken and shared on the internet, and where the shrine records the number of students who made a donation in order to enter the sanctuary. Whether or not students walked the entire 65 kilometres to the meeting spot at the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery is not discernible at the Yasukuni Shrine (therefore importantly not affecting the public image of the academy) and is quickly lost to history after the event is completed.

After finishing their meal at the restaurant, the students of the 242nd squad once more begin to run northwards. Passing through Yokohama station, the students even go out of their way to avoid an escalator to get up a flight of stairs. '*Norimono* [things that one rides] are not allowed', shouts one of the fourth-year students with a grin on his face, and starts running up the stairs instead. The other students dutifully follow him, running up the stairs in a single file.

As they pass through Yokohama station, the contrast between the students of the 242nd squad and the world around them has grown notably stark. It is a busy Saturday night in the city's crowded nightlife district and thousands of patrons are flooding its streets and establishments. Almost all of them are visibly older than the NDA students. There are groups of intoxicated men smoking cigarettes, couples dressed in fashionable dresses and trench coats, female night workers advertising girls bars, and a noisy ambulance passing through the crowd showering the street in flashes of red light.

Surrounded by the sights, sounds, and smells of the urban nightlife, the students have suddenly become very quiet. Having run all day, and now filled to the brim with okonomiyaki, they have started feeling a sense of exhaustion. At the same time, the

students seem lost in a world that is markedly different from their own. The bubble that surrounds their entire life at the academy suddenly seems remote and insignificant here. With their young faces, pragmatic haircuts, colourful sportswear, and brisk running pace, the students distinctly stand out, drawing curious looks as they make their way through the crowd.

As the students leave the nightlife district behind, the fabric of the academy's social bubble quickly regenerates around them. On the other side of the street the students have spotted another squad. To leave the right impression with their classmates, the students of the 242nd squad begin running a bit faster. 'They are probably not used to seeing squads who are running', one student proudly notes. 'One of them just asked if we are Sandhurst participants', adds another with a wide grin on his face, referring to the international military skills competition to which some of the most physically fit students of the academy are selected each year. 'Do your best', a student can be heard shouting from the other side of the street. Newly invigorated, one of the first-year students starts to play Mariah Carey's 'All I want for Christmas' on her speakers, and the students sing along as they run on.

After leaving another three squads behind them, the students pass a group of about a dozen elderly men and women who have come to watch the event. Equipped with backpacks and walking sticks, they have been getting on and off the train to cheer on the students at different locations and seem eager to strike up a conversation. 'Are you all in the same athletic club?', one of the men asks knowingly. The students politely shake their heads. 'The same battalion, then?', he asks again. 'That's right. We are from the second battalion', one of the fourth-year students replies. 'I see', the man continues, 'and are you really walking all the way?' 'We are *running* all the way', the student replies proudly. Clearly satisfied with the answer, the man pats the student on the back and cheers the squad on as they run off.

At midnight, one of the fourth-year students takes a look at his watch and informs the other squad members of the important mile stone which they have just passed: 'It's the new day. Congratulations, first-years!' Since enrolling at the academy more than half a year ago, the first-year students have spent nights not only in the student barracks, but also in tents and barracks of proving grounds, as well as crouched on the seats of large transport busses. Tonight, however, marks the first time they are beginning a new day outside the purview of the academy administration. Applauded by their seniors, the first-year students cheer in celebration as the squad begins to cross the Tama river, leaving behind them the prefecture of Kanagawa. As the students stop to take a group picture in

front of a sign marking the beginning of the capital administrative region, another squad is passing by on rented bikes. The students briefly exchange some banter and then separate again. Tired both from running and the late hour, the students of the 242nd squad decide to walk for a while.

After a few minutes of silence, one of the fourth year students begins to play a military song on his phone. Titled 'Song for Soldiers Setting Off to War' (*shusseï heishi wo okuru uta*), the song was the result of a public competition in 1939 jointly hosted by the Army Ministry of the Japanese Empire and the predecessor of the publishing company Kodansha, allowing citizens to submit their own lyrics and songs (Ishii n.d.). A creation of the Imperial government's propaganda efforts to boost morale and inspire public support for the war, the song outlived its original purpose and later found a prominent place in the newly established SDF. At the NDA, all first year students are even required to learn the song for an annual inter-company a cappella song contest (*taika konku-ru*), the first major competition students participate in after enrolling at the academy.

Having learnt the lyrics by heart, the students of the 242nd squad quietly sing along to the sorrowful song, as they make their way through the dark and unfamiliar streets of the Ōta ward, the capital's southernmost administrative district:

*'Called up by His Majesty
They feel exalted in the morning sun
A hundred million people see them off
With cheers of praise rending the air
Forward, warriors
Sons of Japan!*

*Like blossoms in full bloom
They are full of joy under their uniforms
Wherever the righteous soldiers go
No one can ever disrupt their advances
Forward, warriors
Sons of Japan!*

*Following the shining colors
They cross mountains and rivers in triumph
The invincible Japan's feats of arms
It is time for the world to know them
Forward, warriors
Sons of Japan!*

*All quiet on the home front
The Yamato spirit is unshakable forever
With the solidarity and harmony among us
We have established a cast-iron defense
Forward, warriors
Sons of Japan!*

*For our Lord, of unbroken lineage
We shall drown at sea or be food for grass
All loyal soldiers must pledge so now
How valiant they look as they set off
Forward, warriors
Sons of Japan!*

*Against our forefathers' blood
The sun flag shines as our national pride
Let's raise it splendidly to the great sky
As we lay the foundations of a new Asia
Forward, warriors
Sons of Japan' (translation by Mori Kōta).*

Tired from the many kilometres they have already run, and weary of the many that are still ahead, the students look down at their feet making one step after another, as they quietly sing the military song characterised by its minor key together. From the soundtrack of Ghibli movies to recent pop songs from around the world, the students have played an eclectic variety of songs today, laughing and joking as they were singing along. At this moment, however, none of the students are joking and there is no irony in their voices. To the students, it is a somber and deeply personal song.

Another few kilometres on, the students notice that one of the male fourth-year students has started trailing the group by some distance. As they wait for him to catch up the other fourth-year suggests that someone else could carry his backpack for a while. 'I'll take it', two female first-year students immediately burst out simultaneously. Visibly embarrassed, the lagging fourth-year student vehemently declines the offer and attempts to shut down the ensuing banter. 'I'm fine', he insists. 'Great, shall we start running again, then?', the other fourth-year student asks in reply. 'Absolutely not', the former counters, prompting laughter from the whole group.

At around 3 a.m. the squad arrives at a natural hot spring located in a large department store. Because this hot spring is open throughout the night, it has become a tradition for many of the squads participating in the Tokyo *kōshin* to make it a brief stop to recover some energy. Indeed, tonight virtually all guests inside the establishment are students of the academy. In the lobby, the students pass by about a dozen of students from other squads who have stretched out on the tatami mats covering the room to get a few minutes of precious sleep. Past the changing room, the students of the 242nd squad sink into the hot water, grateful for the break and the revitalising effects of the hot spring. Immediately, they begin to plot their next moves. Although some students of the squad cautiously express their desire to join some of their classmates in the lobby for a quick nap, they are quickly overruled. 'Sleeping would be a waste of time', one student poses, eager to demonstrate his energy. Instead, the senior students soon decide, the squad will make a short visit at a karaoke hall located in the same department store before moving on.

Inside the Karaoke hall, the students order coffee and caffeinated soft drinks, before beginning to sing an equally eclectic set of songs as they have been playing on their phones throughout the day. One student opens with a popular anime theme song, followed by another singing the soundtrack to a recent Hollywood movie. A third student then entertains the squad with an impressive interpretation of 'Singing in the Rain'. After an hour has passed, the students prepare to leave and a first-year chooses the 'Song for Soldiers Setting Off to War' as the final song of the night, upon which the entire squad once again joins in to sing the familiar tune together. After the students settle the bill, the single remaining employee locks the door behind them, closing down the establishment for the night. It is now 5 a.m., and the students begin the last leg of their journey.

At daybreak, during a quick stop at a convenience store, one of the fourth-year students draws attention to what has been plain to see for a while now: The three female students, all first-years and members of the academy's notoriously tough women's field hockey team, seem to be in the best shape among all students of the squad. Positioned at the front of the squad throughout most of the journey, they have been engaged in vigorous conversations and loudly singing song after song together. In contrast, the fourth-year points out, the students who have fallen silent, were straggling behind the group, closed their eyes at karaoke, or lobbied for the groups to get some sleep at the hot spring, were all male.

Prior to the event, there had been much talk among male students about 'girl squads' (*joshi buntai*), referring to all-female or majority female squads, who purportedly

tended to walk slower than other squads during the Tokyo *kōshin* renditions of the past years. In practice, however, female students who choose to participate in all-female squads note that they do so mostly because they want to make the journey among their close friends.

Likewise, in many of the mixed groups, the female students are often the ones accelerating the pace. Since leaving the karaoke hall, the students of the 242nd squad have continued their path north walking, rather than running, falling behind schedule as a result. In the ensuing deliberations, three female first-year students begin to lobby a fourth-year student to begin running again. Quietly, if emphatically, the fourth-year student replies that he would not be able to keep up. Again, one of the female first-year students offers to carry his bag. Again, the fourth-year student vehemently declines: 'Never', he declares for the whole group to hear, 'this is about a man's pride (*otoko no puraido*)!' Disappointed, the female students retreat to the front again as the squad continues walking.

As they turn onto a long and winding traditional shopping street, the students can now see the famed Tokyo Tower emerging between a seemingly endless sea of tall residential and office buildings sparkling in the morning sun. Expressing their excitement, the students immediately begin to take a plethora of pictures. Hailing from all corners of the country, many of them have grown up seeing Tokyo's landmarks only on their television screens. For them, being here in person marks a special moment.

Despite the academy's geographical proximity to the capital, most students only go to Tokyo very rarely, and many can count the times they have been there on one hand. During the week, students are prohibited from leaving the academy, while on weekends they often stay on campus for sports and other club activities, or choose to spend the day in the closer city centres of Yokosuka or Yokohama. Many first-years, in particular, have not been to Tokyo at all since entering the academy more than eight months ago, because of the many duties which they are expected to attend to on campus. As a consequence, most NDA students are strikingly unfamiliar with the capital, which is not just the centre of the country's politics and economy, but also the heart of its youth culture.

Just a few hundred meters next to the Tokyo Tower, the students stop and gather around a sticker attached to a traffic light pole, reading a curious message. 'Hate war and the patriarchy (*sensō to kafuchō-sei wo nikumu*)', the sticker reads. Following these letters, there are two cat symbols adorning the sticker. Scratching his head, one of the male students notes that he was already puzzled when he saw this sticker somewhere in

Yokohama last week. After a few seconds of silence, the students leave the matter for someone else to interpret and move on.

If the students were unsure what to make of the curious message on the traffic light pole, they seem to be much more comfortable passing through the storied Kasumigaseki district, home to many of the most powerful components of the central government. The students excitedly point out the various institutions they recognise: The Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, the National Diet, and the Supreme Court.

Finally, right on schedule, the students of the 242nd squad can see the designated meeting spot at the Chidorigafuchi moat on the north side of the Imperial palace, located only a short walk from the National Cemetery. The students breathe a sigh of relief and make the last few steps towards the parking lot where the busses carrying their uniforms have been waiting for them.

As the students turn into the parking lot, a few older civilian men who have come to see the event are rushing over to snap some pictures of the students. Like paparazzi, they swarm the students from left and right to take pictures from multiple angles. Exhausted and keenly aware of their appearance, the students appear uncomfortable and overwhelmed, but stoically brave the sudden attention, now reminded again of their capacity as representatives of the academy.

On the parking lot, they join the hundreds of classmates who have already arrived. Here, overlooking the scenic view of the Chidorigafuchi moat, the first part of their journey comes to an end. The students make their arrival known to staff students of the organising committee who cross their names off a list, and then disappear into the busses to change into their uniforms.

An Internal Logic

While there are dozens of spectators who cheer on the participating students at various points of their journey from Yokosuka to the capital, for the students the logic of participation in the Tokyo *kōshin* is largely an internal one. Interactions with spectators remain on a superficial level and constitute more of a necessity to the students, rather than the objective of the event. Indeed, the participating students feel most comfortable where the presence of students from other squads preserves the social bubble of the academy, even as they are venturing far outside of it. Students are also aware that most of the spectators who make up the audience during the event are either friends and family

of participating students, or military aficionados who regularly follow other NDA and SDF events. The public relations component of the Tokyo *kōshin*, therefore, is only of secondary importance to the participating students.

Despite the controversial nature of the Yasukuni Shrine and the outsize role that it plays in Japan's international politics, participation in the Tokyo *kōshin* from the perspective of the students is neither a calculated provocation directed at an international audience nor an ideological statement intended for the domestic audience. In fact, whether to participate or not is not really a choice most students think about much at all.

Although the event is not part of the formal NDA curriculum and participation is therefore not mandatory, on the social level there is a clear expectation among the student body that students take part at least once during their four years. Because of the hierarchical component of the student corps, first-years are also sometimes pressured to participate by senior students in their rooms, platoons, or companies. While recent efforts to reform life in the student barracks have made the way such pressure is exerted somewhat less explicit, participation in the Tokyo *kōshin* is still considered a rite of passage, and in practice particularly first-year students who do not wish to participate require a good excuse to explain themselves in front of their seniors.

At any rate, similar to the NDA's graduation ball, from the perspective of the students the issue of whether the Tokyo *kōshin* constitutes a formal academy event or not is not as clear-cut as it seems on paper. Just like events that belong to the formal curriculum, every year students participating in this event are organised in the same elaborate hierarchy of positions, chaired by the student corps director (*gakuseitai sekininsha*) at the top, one director in charge of each battalion (*daitai sekininsha*), squad leaders (*buntai-chō*), and various other positions on the organising committee. Students in these roles do not just shoulder the organisational tasks of distributing information, collecting a participation fee, and coordinating with the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery, the Yasukuni Shrine as well as the bus company, they also take shifts on the day of the event, keeping lists of the squads at the checkpoints, and commanding the four battalions as they move through the cemetery and the shrine. It is no surprise, then, that in the academy's own student magazine, the *obaradai*, the Tokyo *kōshin* is mentioned in the same category of 'annual events' (*nenkan gyōji*) as the academy's various competitions (*kyōgikai*), the NDA's public festival (*kaikōsai*), and the international military skills competition held at West Point in the United States, all of which are formal academy events supported by the administration. From the perspective of the students, therefore, the Tokyo *kōshin* is an event that is firmly embedded in the regular structure of the NDA.

This is not to say that participating students are not enthusiastic about participating. Like many of the other formal and informal events at the academy, most students look forward to the Tokyo *kōshin* because of its festival-like (*matsuri*) atmosphere. Participants are allowed to skip roll call, spend the night out with their friends, and make once-in-a-lifetime memories as they enjoy Karaoke and hot springs in the middle of the night. On their journey to Tokyo, students regularly run into their classmates, with whom they exchange stories or share a laugh about the various creative ways in which some participants violate the relaxed rules. Particularly for first-year students the Tokyo *kōshin* marks the first chance to briefly escape the academy's daily life, characterised by often harsh rules and restrictions, in order to simply enjoy a weekend of adventure with their classmates.

Next to the festival-like nature of the Tokyo *kōshin*, NDA students also take great pride in the physical challenge of this arduous 65-kilometre journey. More than one and a half times the distance of a marathon, participating students have to contend not just with the limits of their muscles and joints, but also with the lack of sleep. This challenge neatly fits into the general athletic culture at the academy, where physical strength and endurance is not just a mandatory part of the curriculum, but also functions as an important social marker.

As a social marker, the students link the accomplishment of completing the Tokyo *kōshin* to prevalent gender narratives regarding the ideal NDA student and SDF officer. Indeed, in the 2022 issue of the *obaradai* student magazine the Tokyo *kōshin*'s student corps director writes that overcoming the physical challenge of the event is an expression of masculinity itself:

I think it is a well-known fact that the Tokyo March is a manly (masurao-kei) event, where participants walk about 65km on foot to pay their respects (sanpai) at the Yasukuni Shrine. I'm sure that during the march many had thoughts such as "I'm in pain, I'm exhausted, I'm tired, why did I take part in such an event". But were you not captivated by the sense of accomplishment at the moment of crossing the border between Kanagawa Prefecture and Tokyo on foot, the sight of Tokyo's cityscape shining in the morning sun, and the honour one feels marching through Yasukuni in uniform, all scenes that one can only experience after overcoming hardships? [...] I hope that participants from next year on will also take on the challenge of manly thinking (masurao shinkingu) and try to experience "the joy that can be felt beyond hardship" (Saji 2022, 52; translation by the author).

In the rationale presented in this account, one of the primary motives of the march does not even require a destination. Submitting to the challenge and demonstrating the ability to overcome the inevitable hardships becomes its own logic. Those who participate and complete the journey can then claim the virtue of manliness and ‘manly thinking’ that constitutes the essence of the soldier. Still, despite this internal logic of the Tokyo *kōshin*, the students are, of course, not just marching anywhere. Their destination is the Yasukuni Shrine. And the second part of the event, known as the Yasukuni *sanpai* (worshipping at Yasukuni), has its own logic.

The Yasukuni *sanpai*

The students emerge from the busses fully dressed in their navy blue uniforms, complete with peaked caps and the white gloves which students add only on special occasions. Not a minute behind schedule, the dozens of participating students from the squads of the second battalion assemble at the parking lot’s exit. The battalion’s manager gives the command to march, and the students set off.

The students complete this final leg of the journey, stretching from the parking lot at the Chidorigafuchi moat to the Yasukuni Shrine, marching in formation. Neatly organised in rows of two so as to fit onto the narrow sidewalks, the students loudly count along to synchronise their steps just as they do when they march on the academy’s campus.

Before the students enter the Yasukuni Shrine, they make a stop to pay their respects at the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery. Established and maintained by the government as a memorial and final resting place for the remains of the many unknown soldiers who died in the Asia-Pacific War (Ministry of the Environment n.d.), the cemetery is a separate entity from the privately run Yasukuni Shrine.

After entering the grounds of the cemetery, the students arrive at an open space in a well-kept garden in front a hexagon-shaped hall. At the centre of the hall sits a large ceramic coffin, forged from stones collected from various major battlefields of the Asia-Pacific War (Ministry of the Environment n.d.). The second battalion’s director commands the long procession of students to halt, turn to the right, and line up in three rows facing the hall. After a few more commands and synchronised movements, two of the battalion’s students are ordered forward to place flowers on a pedestal in front of the coffin.

Once the two students have rejoined the formation, an older NDA alumnus appears in front of the students to give a brief speech. He congratulates the students for having

made it all the way to the cemetery and shares a few words about the value of honouring one's ancestors (*senjin*) and acknowledging their sacrifice to the country. Against the sounds and scenery of the cemetery's extensive garden, the words of the alumnus are only faintly audible to the students standing in the back of the battalion's formation. A fourth-year student standing on the far end of the last row discreetly turns his head to inspect his surroundings. His eyes meet a large memorial stone with an engraved poem by the Shōwa emperor, the head of state during the Asia-Pacific War. The poem reads: 'Whenever we ponder on those who dedicated their lives for the cause of our nation, our heart aches with deep emotion' (translation by the Ministry of the Environment n.d.).

After the alumnus has concluded his speech, the commanding student shouts an order for the students of the second battalion to turn to the left and continue their march. Marching along the Chidorigafuchi moat to the north, the students then cross the street and finally turn onto the central path of the Yasukuni Shrine's grounds. On the central path, distinctly larger than the sidewalks outside of the shrine, the students reorganise in rows of four and march through the characteristic *torii* gates towards the shrine's main building.

This marks the first moment of the Tokyo *kōshin* that is decidedly public. The spectators who cheered on the students along the way and at the parking lot were few in numbers and for the most part connected to the academy in some capacity. At the cemetery, there were no spectators at all. At the Yasukuni Shrine, however, hundreds of visitors are crowding the premises on this late Sunday morning. Most did not know they would share their visit with students of the NDA, appearing visibly confused at the sight of the unexpected spectacle. The fast pace of the hundreds of marching students in uniform sharply contrasts the relaxed stroll of the other visitors. As they notice the hundreds of cameras pointed at them, the students realise that they have become the main event on the scene.

In front of the shrine's hall of worship (*haiden*) the procession of students make a turn to the right, where the commanding student orders his classmates to line up in front of the building's entrance in three rows. The students then receive instructions to take off their shoes, enter the reception room, and take a seat to wait for a priest who will lead the students further inside the shrine for the ceremony.

Once seated on an array of neatly lined up folding chairs, the students politely wait while inspecting a large screen advertising some of the items visitors are able to buy at the shrine's own restaurant. Some of these items are familiar to the students. The advertised imperial navy curry (*kaigun* curry) and imperial navy coffee (*kaigun* coffee), for

example, can also be purchased on the NDA campus. There are also products, however, which the students have never seen before, such as a scrambled egg rice bowl set priced at 1,200 yen, titled 'Mother of Special Attack [Pilots]' (*tokkō no haha*). The dish references units of the Imperial military which in the final days of the Asia-Pacific War were tasked with suicide attacks, in which soldiers steered aircraft, boats or submarines directly into enemy targets.

A few minutes later, a priest dressed in long white robes appears, and signals the students of the second battalion to follow him into the inner shrine. As they do during formal ceremonies on campus, the students stand up from their seats row by row, turn to the right, and then begin marching in a long line. In rows of four, the students follow the priest down a long wooden path leading into the shrine's hall of worship. Inside the hall of worship, the commanding student instructs his classmates to line up in formation facing the priest. Although covered by a roof, the hall of worship is open to the sides, allowing visitors who are offering their prayers outside to catch a glimpse of the uniformed group inside. The priest, facing the rows of students like an instructor on campus, briefly explains the purpose and layout of the shrine, before instructing the students to follow him deeper into its sanctuary (*honden*).

Again, marching in rows of four, the students follow the priest along the wooden path, down a flight of stairs and up another, before it opens into the Yasukuni Shrine's sanctuary. Once the last students have entered the sanctuary and reassembled into formation, the priest instructs the students to lower their heads, and starts rhythmically whisking a ceremonial branch over their heads a few times. The two students who earlier offered the flowers at the cemetery are now instructed to move forward and offer a *tamagushi*, a ceremonial tree branch. In a motion familiar to students from Shinto shrines throughout Japan, all students in the formation then bow twice, clap their hands twice, and bow one more time to complete the ritual. The priest thanks the students for their visit, and advises them to make use of this opportunity by paying a visit to the *yūshūkan*, the shrine's own military and war museum.

On their way out, two employees of the shrine have prepared a set of parting gifts. Each student is handed with a small bowl filled with sake, and presented with sweets and a sample of the shrine's own tea. Finally, the students are each handed one entry ticket into the *yūshūkan*. Once outside, the commanding student orders the students to line up one final time. He informs the group of the departure time of the busses in the afternoon, noting that students who wish to ride back on the busses have ample time to visit the

museum first. Then he dismisses the students, who are now free to move by themselves once again.

The *yūshūkan*

With the exception of one third-year student, who stresses repeatedly that he has already been to the *yūshūkan* the previous two times he participated in the Tokyo *kōshin*, all students of the 242nd squad now move on to enter the museum. Past the entry gates, where other visitors are required to pay up to 1.000 yen per ticket, the students split up into smaller groups and spread out to take in the array of exhibits and informational panels.

Two first-year students of the squad make their first stop in front of a large map that sets the scene for the museum's narrative. Titled 'Western Powers Encroach upon Asia', the map depicts various attempts from representatives of European countries and the United States to expand their influence across the Asian continent as early as in the 15th century. 'By the 19th century', the English translation of the accompanying text concludes, 'most of Asia had been colonized by the Western powers'.

In the following halls, the two students read about the establishment of the new Japanese state in 1868 and the first battlefield successes of its western-style military. The Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905) is portrayed in particular detail, with the accompanying text highlighting its importance as the first victory by an Asian military over a Western power. Next to the national flag of Japan and the Rising Sun Flag of the Japanese Imperial Navy, two flags which students regularly see on the NDA's campus, a large video projection shows footage from the war. The students gaze at the screen for a few minutes, before turning to the next panel, which showcases a newspaper representing international media coverage of the war. The English-language headline reads: 'Togo smashes Russian Fleet', referring to Tōgō Heihachirō, the admiral in charge of the Japanese combined fleet at the time. As though in agreement with the content of the panel, one of the students slowly nods her head and moves on.

On another panel detailing the exploits of the Russo-Japanese war, the two students recognise another flag they know from the academy grounds: The 'Z' flag, representing the final letter of the alphabet in the international maritime signal system. Because Tōgō had ordered the flag raised on his fleet's flagship during the war's decisive battle at Tsushima, it has ever since been attributed with special importance among the

Japanese military. Indeed, decades later, the flag was also raised on the flagship of the Japanese fleet attacking Pearl Harbour in 1941 (Dower 2010, 53).

A fourth-year student who has joined the two first-year students explains that the letter 'Z' represents the final or decisive nature of a battle (*kessen*). In the event of failure, he explains the symbolism, there are no other plans left to pursue. At the NDA, he continues, students fly the flag during sports competitions to motivate students to give their all as though their life depended on it.

Tired from the strenuous journey behind them, the two first-year students decide to increase their pace and skip a few text-heavy vitrines detailing the outbreak of the Asia-Pacific War. They walk past panels on the 'China Incident' (*shina jihen*), laying out a narrative in which the Chinese side instigated the Second Sino-Japanese War, and on the 'Nanking Incident' (*nankin jiken*), describing in English what is more commonly referred to as the Nanjing Massacre as a military campaign characterised by 'strict military disciplines' where 'Chinese soldiers disguised in civilian clothes were severely prosecuted' (sic).

In the next hall the two students are confronted with the run-up to the United States' entry into the war. The students stop in front of a large panel with the English title 'Japan's Quest for Avoiding a War', and dutifully read the headlines of dozens of text boxes telling a story of a plethora of efforts by the Japanese government to prevent simmering tensions between the two countries from escalating. By the time they reach the end of the panel, despite all the government's efforts presented, the war has begun anyway.

Soon overwhelmed with the amount of textual information on the numerous minor and major battles of the Asia-Pacific War, the students find a welcome break in a vitrine showcasing the peaked cap of an Imperial Navy officer. Leaning over the vitrine to get a closer look, they inspect the similarities and subtle differences from the peaked caps which they are wearing on their own heads. For a brief moment the three caps, which share the same navy blue fabric, black brim, chin strap, and golden ornaments, are less than an arm's length apart, only separated by a thin layer of transparent glass.

Meanwhile, a few students from another squad have entered the room with company. Together with friends, family, and partners from outside the academy whom they had arranged to meet at the shrine, they are now exploring the halls of the *yūshūkan*. One first-year student is showing around his girlfriend. With her pink shoes, white laced skirt, and purple hair ribbon, her appearance notably contrasts the student's navy blue uniform complete with peaked cap. Cautiously holding hands, a subtle transgression of

NDA regulations concerning behaviour in uniform, they inspect the contents of a vitrine titled 'Defence of the Japanese homeland against the U.S. military's indiscriminate (*musabetsu*) bombing raids' (translation by the author).

On the other side of the room a group of four students, one of whom accompanied by his ten-year old brother, are fixated on the contents of a vitrine with the English title 'The Formation of the Special Attack Corps'. The vitrine is decorated with dozens of portraits and group pictures of pilots who embarked on the infamous suicide attacks that were intended to destroy U.S. military assets in the final days of the war. Displayed next to the pictures are artefacts which belonged to the pilots, including farewell letters and hand-signed flags. The students, who until seconds ago had excitedly been pointing out and discussing various items of interest in the previous rooms, have now become quiet, studying the artefacts on display in respectful silence.

At the vitrine detailing the Battle of Iwo Jima, a site which all NDA students visit in their third year to learn about the Imperial military's defensive campaign, one of the first-year students of the 242nd squad encourages the other to take a closer look at an item on display titled 'A Note to Roosevelt'. Written in the final days of the battle by the commanding officer of the Imperial Navy's forces on the island, the note addressed to the U.S. president, displayed at the museum in both Japanese and English language, argued that the blame for the war lied squarely with the U.S.:

'Nippon in retaliation to your imperialism tried to free the oriental nations from your punitive bonds, only to be faced by your dogged opposition. [...] The completion of this Greater East Asia War will bring about the birth of the East Asia Co-Prosperity Area, this in turn will in the near future result in the everlasting peace of the world, if, of course, is not hampered upon by your unending imperialism. Why is it that you, an already flourishing nation, nip in bud the movement for the freedom of the suppressed nations of the East. It is no other than to return to the East that which belongs to the East'.

'This [note] was read by many people in the US, even by the president', the student knowingly explains to her classmate. 'Apparently many people were very moved (*kandō*) by it'. Her classmate respectfully nods in agreement and the two move on.

In one of the final panels, with the English title 'Postwar Independence Movements', the *yūshūkan* once more provides its visitors with an overarching narrative to tie up all the information presented in the previous rooms, spanning from the establishment of the modern Japanese military to the end of the Asia-Pacific War. Once again, this narrative seeks to portray the wars conducted by modern Japan as one

cohesive chain of campaigns to liberate Asia from Western imperialism, ultimately benefitting the very neighbours which the Japanese forces invaded and occupied in the process. The English translation on the panel reads:

'Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War inspired other oppressed peoples, particularly Asian peoples, to dream of achieving independence. Many future leaders of independence movements visited Japan as a model for independence and modernization. But even when the turmoil of World War I subsided, the road to independence seemed endless to the peoples of Asia. Not until Japan won a stunning victory in the early stages of the Greater East Asia War, did the idea of independence enter the realm of reality. Once the desire for independence had been kindled under Japanese occupation, it did not fade away, even though Japan was ultimately defeated. Asian nations fought for their independence, and achieved triumph'.

Surrounding this paragraph are a number of portraits depicting famous leaders of various independence movements across the Asian continent, including Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese communist revolutionary, Aung San, the Burmese revolutionary, and Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of India's independence movement. The two students excitedly point out all the countries listed on the panel from which there are exchange students studying on scholarships from the Japanese government at the academy today: Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

On their way out of the room the students walk past a banner that situates the imperial family in the *yūshūkan*'s narrative of agency and leadership in the final days of the Asia-Pacific War. In both Japanese and English language, it displays another poem written by the Shōwa emperor: 'Saddened by the loss of the precious lives of so many of my people, I ended the war. It mattered not what became of me'.

Having completed their history lesson, the students of the 242nd squad arrive at what most of them consider the highlight of the *yūshūkan*'s exhibition. One by one they spill into a grand hall with white walls, flooded with sunlight entering through the translucent ceiling. It is filled to the brim with large-scale weapons and equipment which were used by Japan's imperial forces. In a contrast to the educational nature of the previous rooms, this hall allows visitors to simply indulge in fascination with the technological achievements of wartime Japan. The students pass by a tank recovered from the Imperial Army's campaign in Micronesia, a large dive bomber used by the Imperial Navy in the final years of the war, and various scale models of grand battleships.

The two first-year students stop to study one of the larger exhibits in the hall, a 15-meter long suicide torpedo developed specifically for the 'special attack units'. A

description of the torpedo's internal design details the narrow pilot's chamber, the location of the periscope, and the amount of space taken up by the lethal warhead. As the students' eyes search the smooth black surface of the exhibit, they listen to a voice recording playing from an attached speaker. The voice belongs to a young suicide torpedo pilot who was able to record a farewell message shortly before departing on his final mission:

'Dear father, mother, brother, sister, to the town that has raised me for so long, and to my school, I bid you farewell. Thank you so much. [...]

I want to live happily with everyone like this forever. [...] But even more than being a part of such a happy family, I have to remember that I am Japanese. Japanese, Japanese, the breath of our ancestors, passed down for 3.000 years, is pulsating in our blood. The same scent of blood that colored the grass on the wild paths of the warriors, clad in armour, who died on their horse, is flowing through our veins.

And now, an imperial decree to destroy the sworn enemy has been passed down from the emperor. From that moment on December 8, we, the young men, have had the glorious honour to devote the remainder of our lives to our country. Twenty years of life. Let us devote all of our remaining energies to this moment of decisive battle. Defeat the sworn enemy. The blood of my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather cries out. We will conquer and overcome anything for the sake of victory.

To you who are older than us, may you fight bravely to protect us after we are gone and build the Greater East Asia. May your hair grey before you return to the heavens. And to you who are young, step over our corpses and move forward with your bayonets flashing. Let the flag of Japan wave in the air as you advance. This is the emperor's command, the spirit of the Japanese people. May Japan, our homeland, prosper forever.

We must now go forth and fight, risking all in the southern seas and on the northern islands. The heavens and earth of Greater East Asia are calling on us. Billions of people are beckoning with eyes full of hope. Farewell, everyone. I will go and conquer in good spirits (translation by the author).

Listening to the somber voice of the young soldier through the flickering static of the recording, one of the students is overcome by her emotions and bursts into tears. The other student, her own eyes, too, now welling up with tears, places her arm around her classmate's back and offers her a tissue. After silently studying the exhibits about American bombing campaigns, the doomed defence of Iwo Jima, and the portraits of

those who sacrificed their lives for the ‘special attack units’, the voice recording playing in front of the suicide torpedo has finally unleashed the pent up emotions of the exhausted students.

A few steps behind them, a group of other students are watching the scene unfold. So as not to disturb the two classmates, they lower their voices and speak with a soft and respectful tone. As if on cue, an announcement through the hall’s loudspeaker urges visitors to refrain from speaking with loud voices and to be mindful of the *yūshūkan*’s objective to not only remember history, but also honour those who were a part of it.

Floating above the students, suspended from the ceiling, looms the centrepiece of the grand hall: A full-scale replica of a *kamikaze* aircraft designed and employed by the Imperial Navy in the final days of the Asia-Pacific War. Painted almost entirely in white, interrupted only by a cherry blossom and a red circle on the side to represent the Japanese flag, the compact body of the aircraft only features a single seat for the ill-fated pilot. Suspended by six metal ropes, the plane tilts slightly forward, as though it is approaching its first and final target.

On their way through the gift shop, the students pass a stand selling the three flags which they have encountered throughout the exhibition and know well from the NDA’s campus: The national flag of Japan, the Rising Sun Flag, and the ‘Z’ flag. Back in the entrance hall, the students of the 242nd squad assemble one last time to take a group picture in front of a Mitsubishi A6M ‘Zero’, the famed fighter aircraft operated by the Imperial Navy during the Asia-Pacific War. The students smile into the camera, say cheese, and conclude this year’s Tokyo *kōshin*.

Controversies Surrounding the Yasukuni Shrine

Because the Tokyo *kōshin* is not a formal academy event, the participating students are not directly provided with an explicit interpretation as to why there is an organised visit to the cemetery and shrine by the NDA’s student corps each year. There is also no major speech given either before or after the event, neither by staff or students, that would provide a unified narrative to all students. The notable exception is the speech delivered to the students of each battalion at the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery by a senior graduate of the academy. Given the speech’s brevity and matter-of-fact style, however, as well as the speaker’s status as neither a student nor employee of the NDA, this speech hardly serves as a major reference point for the students. Instead, as with virtually all of

the academy's informal socialisation, the students learn about the meaning of the event by listening to their senior students.

In the 2022 issue of the *obaradai* magazine, the fourth-year student in charge of that year's Tokyo *kōshin* lays out his interpretation of the event's objective:

'For the last 60 years, the spirit (seishin) has been "to honour (kenshō) the spirits of the war dead (eirei), the unnamed soldiers, who sacrificed their lives for their country in the last great war (saki no taisen)". It is a privilege (kōei) to serve as head of the student corps (gakuseitai no chou) at such an honourable event' (Saji 2022, 52; translation by the author).

In this narrative, the student corps' visit to the cemetery and Yasukuni Shrine is primarily linked to the Asia-Pacific War, referred to by the student as 'the last great war'. This term is commonly used by those seeking to avoid choosing a side between the more commonly-used term 'Pacific War' (*taiheiyō sensō*), preferred by most mainstream historians, and the more controversial term 'Greater East Asia War' (*dai-tōa sensō*; for a discussion of the terminology see Shōji 2011). More specifically, the student explains that the Tokyo *kōshin* is about honouring those who died fighting in this war on the side of the Imperial Japanese forces, to whom he refers to using a term (*eirei*) which translated to English can refer to both 'spirits of the war dead' and 'great men'. It is precisely this characterisation, and the question of whom it applies to, that renders the Tokyo *kōshin* a controversial event.

At the heart of the controversy surrounding the Tokyo *kōshin* is the visit to the Yasukuni Shrine. Importantly, the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery and the Yasukuni Shrine are two separate institutions, managed by different operators and serving a different purpose. The cemetery was established by the Japanese government in 1959, which continues to maintain it, and houses unidentified remains of soldiers and civilians who died during the Asia-Pacific War (Ministry of the Environment n.d.). The Yasukuni Shrine, in contrast, is a privately run institution with a more complicated history.

Established in 1869 by order of the new Meiji government as the Tokyo *shōkonsha*, the shrine originally served to honour those who had lost their lives fighting on the side of the imperial forces who overthrew the Tokugawa Shogunate in the Boshin war (Cheung 2017, 28). The shrine received its current name in 1879, and was later placed directly under the authority of the new Imperial Army and Navy in 1887 (Ibid., 29). By that point, it had already begun enshrining the spirits of those who had died fighting in the government's following wars. Next to the deities of the Boshin war, therefore, the present-

day Yasukuni Shrine honours more than two million spirits of those who died in the Saga Rebellion (1874), the Taiwan expedition (1874), the Satsuma Rebellion (1877), the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), the First World War (1914-1918), and the Asia-Pacific War (1931-1945; *Ibid.*, 29; Takenaka 2015, 47).

With the amalgamation of Shinto institutions under the imperial government in the years leading up to the Asia-Pacific War, the army and navy authorities steadily expanded their influence over the Yasukuni shrine. By 1938, they had even appointed a former army general as chief priest (Powles 1976, 498). Only after the defeat in the war and under the resulting American occupation, was the shrine formally separated from the government and military, assuming its current status as a private entity (Cheung 2017, 29).

In the years after the war, however, the Yasukuni Shrine once again sparked controversy when newspapers reported that its priests had secretly enshrined spirits of hundreds who had been convicted as war criminals at the Tokyo Trial (Takenaka 2007). This stood in particular contrast to the fact that soldiers who had been court-martialled and executed by the Japanese military authorities were not enshrined (*Ibid.*, 4). To critics, the shrine's distinction between these two groups amounted to an implicit rejection of the legitimacy of the Tokyo Trial.

In a tacit acknowledgement of the controversial nature of the subject, the Yasukuni priests initially opted to only enshrine war criminals convicted in the categories Class B and C, stopping short of enshrining those convicted of Class A war crimes (Takenaka 2007, 5). This was despite the fact that the somewhat confusing nomenclature of the three categories did not, in fact, imply a hierarchy of criminal gravity.

When a new chief priest was appointed at the Yasukuni Shrine in 1978, even the taboo around Class A war criminals fell. The new chief priest, Matsudaira Nagayoshi, who had not only served in the Imperial Navy, but also in the newly established GSDF, did not share his predecessor's reservations regarding the convictions in the Tokyo Trial (Higurashi 2013). Indeed, in another personal connection to the matter, his own father-in-law, an admiral in the Imperial Navy, had been convicted of Class B and C war crimes, executed, and subsequently enshrined at Yasukuni. Only three months after his appointment, Matsudaira moved to secretly enshrine all remaining Class A war criminals, including Tōjō Hideki, the most notorious among them (*Ibid.*).

When journalists uncovered the secret enshrinement in the following year, the Yasukuni Shrine promptly drew a wave of criticism, including from Emperor Hirohito himself. A regular visitor even after the war, Hirohito subsequently stopped visiting the shrine in protest, a stance both of his successors have adopted since then (Cheung 2017,

32). Nevertheless, some prime ministers did decide to visit the Yasukuni Shrine in the following years, each time prompting furious backlash from segments of the public as well as foreign governments, particularly those of China and South Korea (Ibid., 33).

The shrine's role as a flashpoint in Japan's international relations is also the sole reason why the dozens of long-term exchange students at the NDA, sent by the militaries of South Korea, Mongolia, as well as all ASEAN member states (with the exception of Brunei), generally do not participate in the Tokyo *kōshin*. Although the students of the organising committee stressed that exchange students were more than welcome to participate, most exchange students noted that they are prohibited from participating by their home countries. Whether this prohibition is communicated explicitly or implicitly varies by sending country.

Interestingly, even among exchange students from the same country there are competing interpretations about the nature of this prohibition. One student from South Korea reported that prior to his departure he had been instructed not to participate, while another student from the same country insisted that he received no such instruction. Not that it would be necessary, the latter quipped: 'It is common knowledge (*jōshiki*) [not to participate]. You're also not told not to kill anyone while you're on exchange'.

A third South Korean student noted that personally he would have liked to participate. The head student of his room, with whom he had developed a good relationship, had personally invited him to join. As an exchange student, he felt that it was his objective to try to understand how his Japanese class mates thought about the controversial shrine. Besides, he added, completing the long journey to Tokyo on foot with his friends simply sounded like a promising adventure. Ultimately, however, after consultations with his parents and the other Korean students at the NDA, he decided that his participation could have ended up posing a problem for his career in the future.

While the NDA's short-term exchange students, dispatched by militaries from several countries in Western Europe as well as the United States, had already departed a few weeks before the 2023 Tokyo *kōshin*, they generally do not participate even in years where they are still present. According to one Japanese fourth-year student, American exchange students whom he had befriended in the previous years were sent to Japan with only two instructions: First, not to participate in the *bōtaoshi* event, the academy's most violent sports competition, known for regularly causing broken bones and even worse injuries. And second, not to cause 'international problems' (*kokusai mondai*). 'The Tokyo *kōshin*', the Japanese student explained with a grin on his face, 'probably belongs to the latter category'.

The controversial nature of the student corps' visit to the Yasukuni shrine is further exacerbated by the timing of the event. In 2023, the Tokyo *kōshin* was held in the same week as the anniversary of the Japanese Attack on Pearl Harbour, the infamous military strike that prompted the United States to join World War Two. The students on the organising committee insisted that the date of the Tokyo *kōshin* fell on different dates each year and that this year's concurrence with the anniversary of the Attack on Pearl Harbour was coincidental. Some employees at the NDA, however, insisted that in the past there were at least some instances where the event was deliberately organised during the week of the anniversary. Ultimately, one SDF officer who had previously been stationed in an inter-military liaison position argued, it did not matter whether the timing was coincidental or not. In his view, the appearance of a deliberate concurrence was enough for the event to be considered an unwelcome instance of 'divisive activity' (*rikan kōsaku*) between Japan and its international partners, and should be avoided in the future.

In March 2024, only four months after the students' visit, the Yasukuni Shrine once again made headlines in domestic and international media when it announced that for the first time in the shrine's postwar history a former SDF general, Ōtsuka Umio, who graduated from the NDA in 1983 himself, had been appointed as its new chief priest (Nishimoto 2024). Particularly given the controversial legacy of Matsudaira, the former SDF-officer turned chief priest who moved to enshrine the Class A war criminals, this prompted critics to raise questions concerning the separation of the shrine from the state and its military. This separation of state and religion, stipulated in Japan's postwar constitution, has become the focal point of the controversy around visits of state representatives to the Yasukuni Shrine.

'Unit Visits' and the Separation of State and Religion

Critics of visits by Japanese state representatives to the Yasukuni Shrine generally focus on two separate points. First, they argue that the enshrinement of war criminals at Yasukuni amounts at best to an attempt to delegitimise the verdicts of the Tokyo Trial, and at worst to a glorification of Japan's imperial aggression during the Asia-Pacific War. Visiting the shrine, they argue, represents a state endorsement of this revisionist agenda. Second, they argue that shrine visits by state representatives present a breach of the constitutional separation of religion and state. In practice, this second point, characterised by a more legalistic than ideological nature, has proven a more practical avenue for critics to apply pressure on state representatives who have visited the shrine.

The argument that shrine visits by state representatives constitute a violation of the constitutional separation of state and religion is also the mechanism that indirectly governs the issue of SDF personnel visits to Yasukuni. An internal directive issued in 1974 by the most senior bureaucrat of the then-Defense Agency titled ‘Regarding religious activities’ (*shuukyou-teki katsudō ni tsuite*) is still to this day used by the MoD as the relevant guidance on shrine visits by SDF personnel. Item three of the directive stipulates that ‘unit visits (*butai sanpai*) to shrines, Buddhist temples, and other religious places of worship, as well as forcing employees (*buin*) to participate in such visits should be strictly avoided’ (Ministry of Defense 1974; translation by the author).

This ministerial directive took centre stage during two back-to-back scandals surrounding groups of SDF personnel visiting the Yasukuni Shrine in 2024. In January, media outlets reported that a total of 22 mostly senior GSDF members, including the vice chief of staff, had visited the shrine together (Tajima 2024B). Although the subsequent investigation launched by the MoD resulted in reprimands for the vice chief of staff and two further officers for making use of an official car to get to the shrine, the ministry stopped short of condemning the visit as a violation of the 1974 directive, arguing that participants were not obliged to participate, did so on their private time having taken the afternoon off, and paid for the ‘*tamagushi* fee’ (*tamagushi-ryō*) out of their own pockets (Ibid.). As evidence that the visit was not compulsory for staff members, the ministry cited that while the vice chief of staff had sent invitations to participate to 41 officers, 19 had chosen not to participate (Satomi and Tajima 2024).

Less than a month later, another scandal made waves in the media when journalists learned that an MSDF admiral had visited the shrine with no less than 165 of his uniformed subordinates in the previous year (Satomi and Tajima 2024). In his capacity as commander of a training squadron of recent graduates of the MSDF’s officer candidate school, the general had taken his unit to the area in which the shrine is located as part of a formal training session. As in the case of the visit of the NDA student corps, the squadron’s visit involved the collection of the participation fee for the collective *tamagushi* payment from each participant in advance. In a defiant response to the media reports, the MSDF’s chief of staff defended the event by arguing that while the training (*kenshū*) had involved a history lesson (*rekishi gakushū*) at the Nippon Budokan (an indoor sports arena) and the Kudanzaka Park next to the shrine, visiting the shrine itself had been a voluntary activity during the break, and as such did not violate the directive (Ibid.).

In response to the MSDF chief of staff’s defence, critics were quick to point out that the absence of a formal obligation did not mean that participants had not been under

significant social pressure to take part in the event. As though it was written about the Tokyo *kōshin*, an editorial in the Asahi Shimbun read:

‘By appearances, however, the group visit (shūdan sanpai) by the SDF members in uniform appears an organized action (soshiki-tekina furumai). It also appears as if the visit represented an integral part of the development process for senior SDF officers. We are left to wonder if young SDF members can really decide if they will participate in a similar visit at their own free will (kojin no jiyū ishi)’ (Asahi Shimbun 2024; translation by the newspaper).

As these scandals demonstrate, the enforcement power of the internal directive entirely hinges on the interpretation of what constitutes a ‘unit visit’. In the above two cases the ministry and staff office took the stance that in the absence of a formal obligation to participate, uniformed visits of SDF units were permissible and did not constitute a violation of the directive. Still, as the media coverage following these two visits demonstrated, the wording of the directive proved sufficiently ambiguous to cause the ministry severe public relations headaches. It came as little surprise, then, when three days after the ministry’s decision to reprimand the three GSDF officers for using an official car to visit the shrine, the Defence Minister remarked in a press conference that ‘the directive is 50 years old’ and that ‘its contents should be revised as necessary (*hitsuyō ni ōjite*)’ (Tajima 2024A).

The annual visit to the Yasukuni shrine by the NDA’s student corps, despite its large numbers of participants and uniformed nature, has not been attracting the same media attention as similar visits by SDF units, perhaps because it is considered less vulnerable to the legalistic line of criticism. The 1974 directive does not apply to NDA students, since students are not formally members of the SDF, but considered ‘special employment national civil servants’ (*tokubetsu-shoku kokkakōmuin*) working for the MoD. When journalists do occasionally contact the academy for comment regarding the Tokyo *kōshin*, the administration readily refers to the facts that the event is student-led, that students participate in it voluntarily, and that the administration plays no part in it.

As argued in the Asahi Shimbun’s editorial on the MSDF training squadron’s visit to Yasukuni, however, the absence of a formal obligation to participate in the Tokyo *kōshin* does not mean that the students do not experience the event through the framework of their membership at the academy. As detailed above, the organising committee of the event is structured in the same way as the formal NDA events led by the administration. The most senior position on the organising committee is referred to as director of the student corps (*gakuseitai sekininsha*). Below this position, the students are organised in

battalions, each led by one director who serves as the commanding student from the moment students leave the parking lot at the Chidorigafuchi moat to the moment they leave the Yasukuni Shrine's sanctuary. Even though only slightly more than a quarter of students participate in the event each year, then, the event is conducted as the NDA's student corps and in its formal organisational structure, not just by a group of people who happen to be students of the academy. This is further evidenced by the fact that participation is limited to members of the student corps, excluding outsiders of the academy.

Even on the shrine grounds, students move as per their formal NDA training, divided in battalion units, wearing their navy blue uniform, and marching (*haya-ashi kōshin*) and lining up (*seiretsu*) to the orders of their commanding students. Throughout their visit to the shrine, most participating students who are not part of the organising committee are neither aware of the schedule nor the way, and simply follow their commanding students or the students in front of them. The students on the organising committee, for their part, consider their role not as initiators or shapers who design the visit based on their motivations and ideas, but as guardians of a longstanding and honoured NDA tradition who are merely tasked with the operational implementation. The format and schedule of the event, therefore, largely remains unchanged, passed down each year from the graduating cohort to the next cohort of fourth-years. As detailed in the first chapter, this process of passing down the rules and traditions of student life from one cohort to another itself is a formally recognised part of the academy's education system and is continuously practiced at all of the major annual events, whether they are part of the formal or informal curriculum.

Setting aside the distinction between the NDA's formal and informal events, on a practical level the Tokyo *kōshin* no doubt constitutes a major component of the academy's institutionalised socialisation. Seeing as virtually all students join the event at least once during their time at the academy, and given the disproportional representation of academy graduates at the top of the SDF's officer corps, the educational impact that the Tokyo *kōshin* has on its participants should be of obvious interest to those seeking to understand the formation of the SDF's organisational culture.

At the very least, the fact that the student corps' annual visit to the Yasukuni Shrine is considered a venerable NDA tradition certainly has an effect on the students' perception of the controversies regarding the shrine, such as whether convicted war criminals should be honoured as enshrined deities, and whether prime ministers, emperors, or soldiers of the SDF should be allowed to worship such deities. Whether

conscious or unconscious, formal or informal, this process of shaping the students' ideological stance is part of the academy's institutionalised socialisation.

The Perspective of the Students

To the students themselves, the controversies surrounding the Yasukuni Shrine and visits to it by representatives of the state are not a major topic of discussion during the Tokyo *kōshin*. In fact, many of the participating students do not seem to have a particularly strong grasp of the arguments which are usually brought forth by its critics.

'I don't think there are many students joining the Tokyo *kōshin* who have strong feelings about these things', explained one third-year student of the 242nd squad, who had participated in the event every year since joining the academy. Looking up into the evening sun as the squad passed through southern Yokohama, he added: 'But I know that many people in Korea don't like the Yasukuni Shrine, because it enshrines the spirits of some who were involved in the Japanese occupation'. When asked which enshrined deities Koreans might object to, the student stopped to think for a brief moment. 'I don't know. Maybe Itō Hirobumi?', he asked, referring to the first prime minister of Meiji Japan and the first resident-general of Japanese-occupied Korea, who is not enshrined at Yasukuni. 'For me the spirits in the Yasukuni Shrine are those who died in order to protect this country (*kono kuni wo mamoru tame*)', he continued, 'so it is just about honouring our ancestors (*senjin*)'.

Two of the first-year students in the squad expressed a similar view: 'I think it is problematic that people criticise the fact that Japanese people are expressing gratitude (*kansha*) for those who worked for the country (*kuni no tame ni hataraita*)', said one. The other added: 'We are going there to pray that there is no war like this again. I don't think there should be a problem with that'. When asked whether that applied to those convicted as war criminals at the tribunal, the student grew more thoughtful. 'Ah, yeah. Tōjō Hideki', she said, before her class mate jumped in again: 'I don't think the Tokyo Trial was fair. It was just made up of the victors and they made all the decisions by themselves'.

The students participating in the Tokyo *kōshin* neither consider themselves agents of a revisionist agenda nor activists seeking to change the interpretation of the constitution. Indeed, a majority of the participants graduated high school less than a year ago and have hardly had the chance to form any particular views on the controversies surrounding the Yasukuni Shrine. If anything, the students who newly enrol at the

academy each year seem to be shaped by the same cultural and political forces as their peers outside the academy. They grew up listening to the same pop songs and watching the same movies, including notably those made by the fervently anti-militarist film maker Miyazaki Hayao.

Rather than bringing any specific agenda to the academy, it is only through their participation in the Tokyo *kōshin* that students are exposed to a very particular take on history and the controversies that surround the Yasukuni Shrine. In turn, the unique character of the Tokyo *kōshin* as an event combining adventure, camaraderie, and honoured tradition, allows for this narrative to shape the students' views on these controversial issues in a way that the civilian instructors in charge of the formal curriculum are simply unable to match.

History According to the *yūshūkan*

While the Yasukuni Shrine mostly appears in the news media when high-profile representatives of the state pay their respects at the shrine, to the NDA students, the act of worshipping in the sanctuary itself is not nearly as emotionally or intellectually stimulating as the visit to the museum operated by the shrine. Even if the Tokyo *kōshin* formally ends when the students are dismissed by their battalion manager after exiting the sanctuary, in practice, the visit to the *yūshūkan* is an integral part of the event.

The entry ticket to the *yūshūkan*, handed out to the students by the shrine's staff upon leaving the sanctuary, is part of the fee each student pays to participate in the worshipping ceremony. Officially, this fee serves as a voluntary donation to the shrine, representing the collective purchase of the ceremonial *tamagushi*. In practice, it is a participation fee paid to the shrine, which includes the ticket to the museum. Likewise, the departure time of the busses, from which students retrieve their uniforms at the Chidorigafuchi moat and which many students ride back to the academy, is scheduled explicitly with the purpose of allowing students to enter the museum first.

Given its status as an institution operated by the shrine, and with its location on the shrine's grounds, the *yūshūkan* effectively blurs the line between the traditionally educational objectives of a museum and the worshipping function of a shrine (Sakamoto 2015). To the students, who have an obvious personal connection to the commemorative objective of the Yasukuni Shrine, the content of the museum therefore has a uniquely emotional impact on their understanding of history, politics, and their own role in society as future military officers. This is particularly relevant considering the *yūshūkan*'s

aggressive historical revisionism, which famously veers far to the right of mainstream academic consensus among historians in Japan (Buruma 1994, 223; Jeans 2005; Matayoshi et al. 2013).

The core narrative presented in the *yūshūkan* is that all military campaigns conducted by imperial troops from the Boshin War to the Asia-Pacific War were waged in the context of resistance against Western imperialism. In this narrative, the expansion of the Japanese Empire and its occupation of vast territories across the Asian continent and the Pacific were not acts of aggression, but acts of liberation which ultimately served the interests of those people who the Japanese imperial forces sought to subjugate. The United States and its allies, accordingly, were not undoing the expansion of the Japanese Empire, but rather acted as the imperialist aggressor themselves, forcing a war onto the region which imperial Japan's leaders did not seek. This narrative importantly allows the *yūshūkan* to portray the years of war with the United States from 1941 to 1945 exclusively through the lens of Japanese suffering and sacrifice for a noble cause. In turn, this is where the *yūshūkan* blurs the line between the museum's function of historical education and the shrine's function of honouring the spirits of those who have died in the service of Japan's wars.

The exhibits on the suicide missions of the euphemistically titled 'special attack units' serve as the didactical centre of the *yūshūkan*'s narrative, making use of the topic's emotional force to underline the broader revisionist narrative. Here, suicide attacks in the final days of a hopeless war served as the ultimate sacrifice for the country, for the emperor, and for the noble cause of liberating the Asian continent from imperialism. The voice recording of the suicide torpedo pilot, presented without any critical annotation, draws a single line of Japanese warriors going back 3,000 years, connecting the mounted feudal warriors of the past with the suicide pilots of the Asia-Pacific War, and ultimately the academy students of the present. The mission ascribed to the ancestors who are enshrined at Yasukuni, in this narrative, is the same as that of the students. According to the *yūshūkan*, soldiers who died in the Asia-Pacific War did not do so as a result of a disastrous foreign policy failure, but as an honourable sacrifice for a greater good. Just as NDA graduates today, they were sworn to protect their country and its people.

At the Yasukuni Shrine, the students of the NDA see themselves in the soldiers whose spirits are enshrined there. This connection is palpable at various points throughout the *Tōkyō kōshin*. On their long journey to Tokyo the students sing the same songs that imperial soldiers heard when they were sent off to war. The meaning of the 'new Asia' they sang about is then explained to them at the *yūshūkan*. The flags they are

proudly flying on competition days on campus are the same ones that were flown during previous wars and which are on sale in the *yūshūkan*'s gift shop. The peaked caps that students are wearing as they are navigating the shrine grounds have hardly changed from the peaked caps that have now become exhibits in the museum's vitrines. In the 2022 issue of the *obaradai* magazine, the student corps manager of the preceding Tokyo *kōshin* makes the connection between the participating students and those who are honoured at the shrine explicit:

'There is one more thing that I want to say as the director of this event. Most of the spirits of the war dead (eirei) who have their final resting place at the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery and the Yasukuni Shrine are people who were about the same age as us. The world of peace they aspired to (kikyū) is now here. Let us follow their dying wish (ishi wo tsugi) and protect the peace and independence of our country' (Saji 2022, 52).

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Conclusion

Eighty years after the end of the Asia-Pacific War, the elevation of the Japanese SDF's status, budget, and capabilities by recent administrations has blown past self-imposed restraints which had come to define the country's postwar defence posture. If dominant anti-militarist sentiments among civilian society and an absence of combat missions had left the SDF operating with a relatively low profile throughout much of its existence, this bold policy departure sparked a wave of journalistic scrutiny and media coverage. Just as the government sought to tackle the difficult task of gathering political support for a major defence budget hike amidst a public debt crisis, the SDF became embroiled in a flurry of high-profile scandals.

Within a matter of months, media coverage was ripe with allegations of sexual harassment, power abuse, defraudation of public funds, improper ties with defence contractors, statements of historical revisionism, as well as prohibited visits of SDF units to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine. It seemed that despite efforts by successive administrations to frame Japan's postwar military as an organisation rooted in the democratic postwar state, an apparent lack of civilian oversight had allowed the SDF to foster an organisational culture which proved unacceptable to the very society it was meant to protect.

This is the puzzle that informs the research question at the centre of this dissertation: If the establishment of the SDF in postwar Japan has been marked by a sharp break from its imperial predecessor and a rigorous system of civilian control, why have recent scandals laid bare an organisational culture that appears to be sharply at odds with the rest of society?

To answer this question, this dissertation offers a detailed look inside the NDA, Japan's joint military academy. Although NDA graduates only make up roughly a quarter of the SDF officer corps, they dominate its senior leadership. This arguably makes the academy the single most influential institution in the formation of the SDF's organisational culture. Partly due to access restrictions, however, little research has been conducted so far about the type of socialisation future SDF officers are exposed to at the NDA.

This dissertation is based on primary data collected through 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork at the NDA. Marking the first time participant observation was permitted at the academy, this research project offers an unprecedented look inside the

process of how the NDA shapes its students by following them throughout their academic classes, military training, and daily lives in the student barracks.

To conceptualise the way in which the NDA shapes its students, this dissertation is based on Lave and Wenger's (1991) framework of communities of practice. In their theoretical treatise on the concept of learning, they shift 'the analytic focus from the individual as learner to learning as participation in the social world' (Ibid., 43). Rather than understanding learning as the process of "receiving" a body of factual knowledge about the world', they conceptualise it as a 'situated activity' that is 'part of social practice' (Ibid., 33; 40). They argue that this reveals how a learning person, such as at an educational institution, is 'transformed into a practitioner [...], whose changing knowledge, skill, and discourse are part of a developing identity'. In that sense, situated learning is 'not itself an educational form, much less a pedagogical strategy or a teaching technique', but the socialisation which occurs among members of a community of practice, whether intended or not (Ibid., 40).

Informed by this approach to the military academy as a community of practice, the data presented in this dissertation shows that virtually all of the crucial experiences that constitute the socialisation of future SDF officers at the NDA occur outside of its formal curriculum. In other words, rather than the time spent in academic classes and military training, which are conducted by uniformed and civilian instructors employed by the academy, student life on campus is chiefly characterised by interactions with peers during moments before the morning roll call, during lunch time, and after the last class of the day has finished.

The sum of these moments of learning outside the formal curriculum are conceptualised in this dissertation as the NDA's hidden curriculum. As per Jackson (1968), this curriculum is defined as a variety of implicit lessons, whether created intentionally or not, which students of any educational institution must learn to navigate in order to successfully make their way through it. In this dissertation the NDA's hidden curriculum is understood as the institutionalised socialisation of students which the academy's leadership does not directly control and is for the most part unaware of. Unlike the NDA's formal curriculum, the hidden curriculum is dominated by relationships between students themselves.

The central argument of this dissertation is that the NDA's hidden curriculum fosters a set of values that often directly contradicts the lessons taught in the formal curriculum administered by the academy's civilian leadership. This set of values, in turn, feeds into the scandals revolving around the SDF's organisational culture laid bare by

recent journalistic scrutiny. The four ethnographic chapters of this dissertation have sought to explain how students at the academy are exposed to the hidden curriculum, and to highlight the set of values which it conveys.

The first chapter shows how students experience daily life in the academy's student barracks. Focussing on the hierarchical nature of inter-student relations, it demonstrates the unrivalled formative power of the student barracks vis-a-vis the formal curriculum. It shows how senior students, through the use of highly ritualised traditions passed down over generations of students, teach incoming students to accept and submit to a set of rules and norms which often directly contradict the academy's formal curriculum. As uniformed and civilian employees concede virtually all authority over rules and enforcement in the student barracks to senior students, incoming cohorts of first-years quickly learn that the only rule that matters is that they must accept whatever senior students say. Senior students subject first-year students to rigorous and often unreasonable routines of cleaning, bed-making and uniform maintenance, while following hardly any of the standards they set for first-year students themselves. A student's seniority status as determined by their year of study not only dictates their responsibilities, but also their privileges, resulting in tiered access to academy facilities, equipment, and even the ability to use one's voice. For senior students, the ability to enforce even the most unreasonable rules is considered a demonstration of successful leadership itself. The declared objective for first-year students, meanwhile, is not to foster any specific skills or character, but to learn how to submit to such unreasonable treatment and overcome one's natural resistance to it. Many of the tasks first-year students are subjected to are framed in a context of spiritual education, prioritising discipline, obedience, as well as growth through hardship over outcomes and efficiency. Hardship, in particular, is imposed on first-year students through institutionalised and purposefully disrespectful treatment, effectively blurring the line between what is considered legitimate inter-student *shidō* on the one side, and bullying and harassment on the other. Finally, the chapter shows how a primary objective of life in the student barracks is to keep students busy, demanding all of their time and energy. This results not only in a state of perennial exhaustion, but also structural sleep deprivation. As a consequence, life in the student barracks critically inhibits the students' ability to dedicate time and energy to the academy's formal curriculum.

The second chapter showcases how students experience the NDA's formal curriculum, shining a particular spotlight on academic training. It shows how even within the formal curriculum the students face structural incentives which depress academic

quality and development. First, students stand to gain little from outstanding academic performance, neither at the NDA nor in their future careers as SDF officers. Second, the stark contrast between the more liberal atmosphere during academic classes and the strict discipline enforced in the student barracks has led students to consider academic classes as an opportunity to take a break, fostering what amounts to an entrenched culture of sleeping in class. Third, recent efforts by the NDA administration to focus their attention and resources on lower performing students signal a shift towards preserving the bottom line, as opposed to offering opportunities for the proverbial front of the class. NDA students and staff, as well as voices in the news media, have warned that this incentive structure risks alienating hard-working and talented students, who in some cases choose to drop out or refuse to formally join the SDF upon graduation. Beyond the incentive structure students face once enrolled at the academy, the NDA's academic standards are also under pressure from the severe demographic changes in the broader society. Declining birth rates have led to a rapidly declining pool of eligible applicants. With lower applicant numbers, competitiveness in the admission process as popularly measured by the *hensachi* has dropped notably in the past years, particularly in the academy's science and technology admission tracks. But while the administration is broadening its efforts to counter this trend through more vigorous recruitment campaigns, it is holding on to an admissions system which caps the number of incoming female students through the *josei waku*. By creating separate competitiveness rates for male and female applicants, this system has not only made admission offers significantly more difficult to attain for female applicants of almost all previous cohorts, it also effectively depresses academic quality at the NDA by routinely admitting a number of academically less competitive applicants simply by virtue of their gender. While physical abilities are not part of the competitive process for a majority of admission slots, NDA students seem to interpret this cap on the number of female students as an endorsement of the idea that gender serves as a sufficient proxy variable for physical abilities. Administration officials, who did not explicitly support this narrative, instead relayed responsibility by referring to the gender-specific recruitment targets issued by the SDF each year, and justified the *josei waku* system by referring to cultural norms regarding supposedly traditional gender roles.

The third chapter further explores how the NDA's hidden curriculum teaches students to gender the concept of the SDF officer. Using the example of the annual graduation ball, it illustrates how the military officer profession is associated with masculinity in a way that categorically precludes female students from successfully

fulfilling the role of a desirable future SDF officer. The discursively established objective of the graduation ball is to teach an appropriate performance of masculinity, as well as a lesson on how men should treat women. This objective is tacitly endorsed by the administration via the transcript of a speech by the NDA's founding president Maki Tomoo, which is distributed to all students among a collection of 'must-read' materials. In this speech, Maki relayed to students that the purpose of the ball was for male students to find a suitable female partner who could serve as the centre of their household. Inspired by visits to militaries abroad, Maki argued that morale among SDF troops benefitted when male service members could depend on a wife at home. As Maki believed that the academy should take an active role in the effort to equip SDF students with suitable female partners, the graduation ball evolved to contain a matchmaking event coupling male students with civilian female attendees recruited by the organising committee. To assist the matchmaking process on the eve of the ball, the organising committee even provides students with an explicit guide on desirable gender performance and male-female interactions through an informational presentation distributed to all participants. Largely based on Euro-American cultural imagery and models, rather than traditional Japanese cultural norms, the presentation conveys the idea that it is the role of men to protect women, whose presumed vulnerabilities derive not only from the physical disadvantages of their sex, but also from their gender performance as ladies. As the event's objective and the advice given in the presentation concerns primarily male students, the graduation ball implicitly merges the concept of the NDA student with that of the man, while merging the concept of the civilian guest with that of the woman. This erasure of the role of the female NDA student at the graduation ball is illustrated further by the fact that female students are dressed in civilian clothes, whereas male students attend in their uniform. Even as the formal curriculum has adapted to the reality of female academy graduates serving as officers in all three branches since the 1990s, then, the graduation ball demonstrates how the hidden curriculum continues to instil students with rigidly gendered ideas of the military officer profession.

The fourth chapter details how the NDA's hidden curriculum teaches students how to think about the SDF's role as the successor to the imperial military. It illustrates how in contrast to the formal curriculum, which emphasises a break from the past and a new SDF identity rooted in the democratic postwar state, the hidden curriculum emphasises continuities between the two organisations and conveys a revisionist history. By shining a spotlight on the student corps' annual march to the Yasukuni Shrine, the chapter shows how the adventurous and festival-like character of informal academy events draws

students into a revisionist history lesson that veers far to the right of mainstream academic consensus among historians in Japan. In this lesson, presented chiefly by the *yūshūkan* on the grounds of the Yasukuni Shrine, the expansion of the Japanese Empire during the Asia-Pacific War and its occupation of vast territories across the Asian continent and the Pacific were not acts of aggression, but acts of liberation which served the interests of those people who the Japanese imperial forces sought to subjugate. Through presenting particularly the United States as an imperialist aggressor, who forced Japan into a war it did not seek, this narrative portrays the years of war from 1941 to 1945 exclusively through the lens of Japanese suffering and sacrifice for a noble cause. This revisionist narrative is impressed upon students at the *yūshūkan* by employing the emotional power of the topic of the suicide missions, as well as through the context of the shrine's spiritual mission to not only remember but also worship the war dead. In the process, the imperial military is both intellectually and emotionally connected with the SDF, creating a direct line between the soldiers who fought in the Asia-Pacific War to the students at the NDA. Since the SDF in this narrative shares the same mission as the imperial military, students at the academy are urged to follow in the footsteps of the imperial soldiers. Students thus learn that continuities which connect the NDA with the imperial military, such as the countless shared customs, traditions, and symbols that can be found on the academy campus, are not only permissible, but even desirable.

By exemplifying the four topics of life in the student barracks, the role of academic development, gender, and the SDF's connection with the imperial military, the four constituent chapters of this dissertation show how the lessons students take away from the NDA's hidden curriculum stand in stark contrast to the formal curriculum. Among the two, given the incentive structure of student life on campus, the hidden curriculum proves significantly more formative in the students' socialisation.

Whereas the formal curriculum is designed and administered under a rigorous system of civilian control, exemplified by a civilian NDA president and the MOD's final authority, the hidden curriculum almost entirely evades such control. Institutionalised in the social system of the student barracks, the hidden curriculum is dutifully passed on each year by the students, demonstrating a remarkable resilience to change. Although the NDA's civilian leadership is unaware of most of the particularities that define the hidden curriculum, its recognition of the student barracks as an important educational component provides crucial legitimisation to the hidden curriculum in the eyes of the students. Even in cases where the administration seeks to change individual elements of the hidden curriculum that it deems problematic, this indirect legitimisation leads students

to fiercely resist such intervention, even if it entails lying directly to the academy's most senior officials.

As a result, the NDA's hidden curriculum has for decades exposed future SDF officers to a set of values and ideas that not only evades civilian oversight, but often directly contradicts the objectives of the civilian authorities which are constitutionally tasked with supervising the SDF. Given the dominance of NDA graduates among the SDF's senior leaders, the effect of the hidden curriculum on the broader SDF's organisational culture is considerable, and arguably larger than that of any other single institution. Indeed, the recent flurry of scandals emerging from within the SDF, revolving around cases of sexual harassment, power abuse, defraudation of public funds, improper ties with defence contractors, statements of historical revisionism, as well as prohibited visits of SDF units to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, can be directly connected to the set of values and ideas transported in the NDA's hidden curriculum and detailed in this dissertation.

Implications for Women's Participation in the Japanese Labor Market

Writing about women's role in the Japanese postwar economy, Brinton predicted in 1994 (237) that '[c]hange in gender stratification patterns in Japan will occur mainly as new cohorts move through a human capital development system that itself is undergoing change'. She argued that this change in the human capital development system could be attributed to two exogenous shocks that were occurring across Japanese society at the time. First, the ratification of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) in 1985, which was a consequence of Japan signing the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1980. And second, a progressively worsening labor shortage caused by declining birth rates. The combination of these two shocks, Brinton argued, 'creates a situation where it will be in more employers' interests to create incentives for women to remain in the labor force' (Ibid., 235).

The EEOL proved considerably controversial in a society where gender stratification was often narrated in functionalist terms. Brinton (1994, 230) noted that some critics of the legislation argued that it would 'threaten the "cultural ecology" of Japanese society by destroying traditional sex roles', and warned that the 'Japanese family would crumble as an institution'. Even if the law provided women with greater access to previously male professional spaces, some of these functionalist critics argued

that women were not actually keen to abandon the existing gender roles. 'It could be argued, then', Brinton mused, 'that the impact of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law will not be significant because many Japanese women do not aspire to bring their working lives into conformity with what they see as the harsh working conditions of men' (Ibid. 233).

Beyond the debate about whether women themselves even wanted to enter male-dominated professional spheres, Brinton (1994, 233) argued that since the EEOL did not actually come with any explicit penalties that would serve to enforce it, its impact would largely depend on how exactly employers implemented it. To explain the incentive structure behind such implementation in the private sector, she quoted a government official who optimistically reasoned that 'major corporations have an image to protect, and if it is seen as prestigious to try to be progressive and egalitarian, they will try it' (Ibid., 230).

In the case of the SDF, the ratification of the EEOL, as the first shock cited by Brinton, had a considerable and immediate impact on the opportunities for female service members. Satō (2022, 108) notes that the proportion of SDF positions theoretically open to women shot up from 39 percent to 75 percent, going beyond positions previously associated with female employees, such as nursing, human resources, accounting, and communications. One of the major changes caused by the ratification, of course, occurred at the NDA, which took in its first cohort of female students in 1992. Satō argues that while these changes did have a real impact, they did not reflect a sudden support for gender equality among the leadership of the SDF or the government more broadly. Instead, she argues, they reflected a desire to be seen as modern and democratic on the international stage and by important allies (Ibid., 109).

Although the government official's prediction quoted by Brinton was referring specifically to the EEOL's utility in the private sector, it seems that the employment practices of the government as well can be understood as an effort to enhance its public image through compliance with the legislation. This point of explaining top-down changes to gender stratification in the SDF by focussing on the government's concern with public relations has further been emphasised by Satō (2022) and Fröhstück (2007) who demonstrate how female service members and their images have since been strategically employed to 'camouflage' the SDF's military nature and soften negative feelings towards the SDF among civilian society.

Next to the EEOL, Brinton's prediction that demographic changes, as the second shock, would lead to an expansion of opportunities for women in the labor market can be

observed in the SDF, as well. Indeed, Satō (2022) notes that the SDF's strategy to compensate for a shortage of men by falling back on female recruits dates back to the high-growth era of the late 60s to early 70s. At the time, she argues, conditions in the private sector were so favourable that not enough men were applying to the SDF to fill their ranks. Satō argues that women were thus hired for simple office roles with the objective of more effectively using male recruits for 'manly' (*otokorashii*) tasks (Ibid., 101). The men that the SDF did manage to hire, she continues, often constituted the proverbial bottom of the barrel (Ibid., 104). In her assessment, the resulting high resignation rate led the SDF to branch out and discover women as an untapped pool for high quality candidates (Ibid., 105). Satō notes that this trend accelerated in the bubble era, where the share of female service members grew from 1,7 percent in 1986 to 3,4% in 1991 (Ibid., 108). As the NDA's gradual expansion of the *josei waku* demonstrates, recruitment shortages caused by the declining birthrates have since only intensified efforts within the SDF and MoD to compensate for the lack of male service members with female recruits. Importantly, however, this pressure has not eliminated the cap on female students at the NDA, demonstrating the persistence of the unspoken assumptions that men ultimately make for better SDF officers and that a higher share of female students at the academy would therefore come as a detriment to the functional capabilities of the SDF.

Accordingly, the data presented in this dissertation supports the above arguments that the expansion of opportunities for female SDF recruits are not the result of an increased sensitivity to gender equality considerations among the organisation's leadership, but rather the consequence of the combination of public relations objectives and the response to the recruitment shortages caused by declining birthrates. While this assessment is in line with Brinton's prescient prediction about the drivers of change to the human capital development system, the findings also complicate our understanding of how exactly this human capital development system, in this case observed at the NDA, continues to inhibit female participation in the labor market.

Even as the SDF and MoD have increased both the share of female service members and the share of positions that are open to them, the functionalist ideas justifying existing patterns of gender stratification in Japanese society cited by Brinton continue to inhibit female SDF members' ability to move up the ranks and into leadership positions once they are hired. This dissertation shows how these ideas, regarding ostensibly traditional gender roles in the military as well as in the broader society, are institutionalised in the social and structural fabric of the NDA, to the extent that they can undermine genuine efforts by civilian and uniformed officials who are seeking to level the

playing field for female SDF recruits. The persistence and impact of these ideas, conceptualised in this dissertation as the NDA's hidden curriculum, can thus work directly against top-down efforts to manipulate gender stratification. In other words, this dissertation shows that the hurdles preventing equal opportunities for female employees within the SDF and throughout Japanese society may in many cases persist despite the efforts and objectives of employers, not because of them.

Implications for the Debate about Continuity and Change in Postwar Japan

One of the dominant debates that runs through the literature on the institutions of the Japanese postwar state revolves around the issue of continuity and change. Historians, economists, as well as political scientists have long debated to what extent the characteristics of the postwar state marked a departure from, or a continuation of the characteristics that had defined the institutions of its imperial predecessor. A prominent focus in this debate has been placed on what became known as the reverse course occurring halfway through the American occupation of Japan.

After the first two years of the American occupation were marked by a focus on the declared objectives of democratisation and demilitarisation, Dower (2000, 525) argues that Cold War considerations led occupation officials to largely jettison these ideals in favour of building up Japan as an American ally by elevating conservative and even right-wing groups and persons, some of whom had previously been purged for their involvement in the war effort. This de-purging of right-wing politicians, Dower notes, was accompanied by a new 'red purge' targeting left-wing groups, as the levers of the economy were given back to big business and the bureaucracy (Ibid.). Towards the end of the occupation, Dower concludes, 'the notion of a genuinely democratic revolution — from above, below, or anywhere else — seemed more and more, as the cliché had it, a dream within a dream' (Ibid., 526).

This argument has been supported by political scientists and economists who have placed a particular focus on continuities in the bureaucracy. They have emphasised that while imperial military officials and senior politicians found themselves in the cross hairs of the early purging campaigns, the personnel of the imperial bureaucracy was largely left intact, accounting for only a fraction of the purges (Noguchi 1998, 406; Woodall 2014, 105). This 'continuity of both personnel and purpose', Pyle (2007, 226) posits, 'ultimately allowed the conservative elite the foothold it needed to retain its old dominance' (Ibid., 220)

In addition to these institutional aspects, it has likewise been argued that choices made by American occupation officials ultimately paved the way for an ideological continuity, too. Pyle (2007, 220) argues that particularly the decision to 'retain the imperial institution and to absolve the emperor of any war responsibility' clouded the public sense of responsibility for the war and 'provided the conditions for a conservative resurgence once the occupation ended'. 'Despite the revolutionary reforms that the Americans imposed during the early years of the occupation', Pyle concludes, 'conservative leaders, values, and institutional practices survived the upheaval and served as central features of postwar Japanese politics and foreign policy' (Ibid., 225).

The establishment of the NDA was intended to minimise precisely these continuities, or at least assuage criticism of a rearmament program that to many seemed to blatantly violate the new postwar constitution. Although the accounts cited above juxtapose their findings of continuity in the bureaucracy to a military which 'was completely dismantled by the Allied Forces' (Noguchi 1998, 406), previous studies on the SDF have identified a number of continuities that seem to connect the imperial military with its postwar successor. Despite the government's narrative that the re-introduction of a Japanese military organisation under a new name and under civilian oversight demonstrated a clear demarkation from its predecessor, Auer (1973, 5) has argued that the continued minesweeping operations conducted by remnants of the imperial navy throughout the occupation and up until their incorporation into the MSDF allowed 'direct linkages between the Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Imperial Navy through activities, organizational continuity, customs, symbols, personnel, and engineering techniques'.

In terms of personnel continuities, persisting leadership shortages and new objectives under the reverse course quickly led to the reversal of purges which had been designed to limit the number of former imperial military staff serving in the SDF. At first only a handful of high-level positions were staffed by former imperial military officers, but by 1961 most senior officers in all three branches of the SDF had in some capacity previously served in the Imperial Army and Navy (Sadō 2006; Welfield 1988, 371). Skabelund (2022) argues that it was in this context that Yoshida ordered the establishment of the NDA, with the express purpose of reducing the SDF's reliance on former imperial officers and developing an officer education that broke with the imperial past.

In the literature on the SDF, the scholarly consensus to this date has been that the creation of the NDA substantially contributed to this goal of providing a break from the

imperial past in Japan's officer education. Unlike the imperial academies, these studies emphasise, the NDA was placed under the authority of civilian bureaucrats as well as a civilian president, and focussed on academic training, character development, and civic education, while leaving specialised military training to the officer candidate schools (OCS) of the three branches (Skabelund 2022; Kawano 2008). Skabelund (2022, 65; 77) has argued that particularly Maki Tomoo, the first NDA president, 'sought to infuse' the NDA with democratic ideas and practices, declaring that the NDA needed to make 'gentlemen' of the cadets, before they went on to branch-specific training at the OCS which focussed on more practical military skills and knowledge.

This argument has been emphasised by juxtaposing the purported break from the imperial past at the NDA to the more apparent continuities in the OCS of the three SDF branches. Similar to Skabelund's assessment, Auer (1973) argues that rather than at the NDA, it was only at the OCS where cadets were instilled with a military spirit. In his study on the MSDF, Auer argues that this spirit was marked by continuities with the imperial military, surrounding students in the form of imperial military buildings, songs, and mementoes. In a functionalist assessment of these continuities, Patalano (2015, 148) argues that this 'dialogue with the imperial past' within the MSDF and its OCS in particular was 'essential to rebuild its professional standing, both technically and in terms of ethos'. In his narrative, then, these continuities did not represent 'a political statement about the past', but merely a 'part of a complex set of traditions and practices aimed at instilling "a military soul"' (Ibid., 147). In contrast to this continuity at the MSDF's OCS, Patalano argued, students at the NDA 'were socialised with a strong 'civic-oriented' outlook' (Ibid., 77).

The ethnographic data presented in this dissertation demonstrates that beyond the obvious structural discontinuities emphasised by the studies above, the socialisation future SDF officers are exposed to at the NDA is still characterised to a notable degree by certain continuities to the imperial military. It does so by highlighting the NDA's hidden curriculum, which dominates student life at the academy and thus shapes the organisational culture of the SDF's officer corps in a way that arguably surpasses the impact of the formal curriculum designed and administered by the academy's civilian authorities. In contrast to the formal curriculum, which has been the exclusive focus of the studies above, many elements of the NDA's hidden curriculum are characterised by continuities in the form of shared customs, traditions, and symbols which serve to both intellectually and emotionally connect the imperial military with the SDF. In addition to the democratic principles, academic training, and civic education which are emphasised by

the above studies, the NDA through its hidden curriculum thus also provides students with lessons that often directly contradict this formal curriculum. These lessons range from spiritual education with roots in the imperial military and which prioritises form over outcome, often frustrating SDF officers who seek to reform Japan's officer education along with the changing nature of warfare in the 21st century, to overt historical revisionism, which at times borders on a rejection of core elements of Japan's postwar constitution.

The relationship between these continuities in the hidden curriculum and Japan's postwar constitution also have implications for the way in which SDF members think about the role of their organisation in the wider society. Based on her ethnography on the SDF conducted roughly twenty years ago, Frühstück (2007, 183) wrote that the SDF's historical background, constitutional restraints, and the resulting anxiety about the 'normality' of Japan's postwar state and military had left 'the lives of Japanese soldiers [...] permeated by an uneasiness, ambivalence, and discomfort, a nostalgia for times imagined to have been simpler, as well as a subdued pride in their work'. Younger Japanese, however, she noted at the time, did not associate the SDF's complicated legal status with the imperial past, instead interpreting it as an 'abnormality' in the international community (Ibid., 184). This dissertation shows how two decades on, continuities in the NDA's hidden curriculum offer academy students belonging to these younger generations a narrative that seemingly resolves the above tensions, by rehabilitating the reputation of the imperial military and thereby absolving the SDF and its personnel of the difficult task of justifying its existence. While Frühstück explicitly contrasts the *yūshūkan*'s version of history with the more complex 'ersatz histories' created in the SDF's base museums, which impart the sense 'that history is deeply problematic and not an easy source of pride' (Ibid., 177), this dissertation shows that revisionist narratives on the imperial past can still dominate the informal socialisation of service members. Amidst the rapid elevation of the SDF's status, budget, and capabilities by recent administrations, and as memories both of the disastrous consequences of the Asia-Pacific War and the SDF's long and contested path of societal rehabilitation recede into the past, the utility of the more nuanced 'ersatz histories' for the SDF diminishes, while the lessons of this informal socialisation are decreasingly likely to be challenged by the experiences made by service members as part of their careers in the SDF.

Implications for Studying the Military and Society

While Huntington's (1957) argument on civil-military relations, according to which a military culture marked by an emphasis on tradition and conservative values which stand in conflict with those of civilian society is necessary to maximise functional capabilities, continues to be influential in military circles, the related literature has since coalesced around the idea that it is instead desirable for militaries to continuously adapt along with their changing host societies (Janowitz 1960, 439). To ensure the military's adaptive abilities and 'commitment to the democratic system', Janowitz argues, militaries should be subjected to continuous civilian intervention in the form of political education (Ibid.).

The findings presented in this dissertation demonstrate how such civilian intervention in the formation of military culture can be undermined by educational institutions even when they are formally and operationally under civilian control. They show how the all-encompassing nature of student life at military academies can limit the permeability between civilian and military spheres, sustaining a military culture whose values and customs often directly contradict the civilian authorities constitutionally tasked with its oversight.

At the same time, these findings demonstrate that the values and customs at the heart of the NDA's hidden curriculum should not be misunderstood as attempts within the SDF and its leadership to covertly influence a system of officer education and subvert civilian control. Rather, the hidden curriculum constitutes a largely unintentional result of traditions and customs passed along decades of cohorts within the student corps, which neither civilian nor uniformed employees of the academy directly control or even fully understand. In other words, even SDF officers who try to reform the hidden curriculum during their typically short tenures at the academy often find themselves powerless to do so, facing a student corps that resists interventions even from the NDA's most senior uniformed officials.

Likewise, this dissertation shows that the formation and persistence of the NDA's hidden curriculum should not be seen through a functionalist lens, whereby its values, customs, and traditions that are often in conflict with civilian society are ultimately necessary to increase the SDF's military capabilities. Rather, the NDA's hidden curriculum should be understood as a set of entrenched customs and incentive structures which have proven difficult to change by members of the academy's civilian and uniformed leadership even when they deem the consequences of these customs and incentive structures detrimental to the SDF's military capabilities.

While Japan's complicated relationship with the past no doubt makes the NDA an unusual case both for a study on military organisation and on contemporary Japanese society more broadly, this dissertation shows how implications of such a study can yield important lessons for the literature on both of these fields. Indeed, at a time when the budget, capabilities, and responsibilities afforded to militaries are rapidly rising throughout the world, the intersection between these two fields is likely to become only more apparent.

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