



**NUS**

National University  
of Singapore

**IDENTITY AND IDEOLOGY IN  
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SHIMBUN  
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## Declaration of Academic Integrity

This thesis represents my own work and I have duly acknowledged in the footnotes and bibliography the sources and information which I have consulted for the purpose of this study. This thesis has not transgressed the maximum word limit of 12,000 words. The total word count for this thesis is 12,000 words.



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Kurohi Rei  
April 17, 2018

## Abstract

This thesis focuses on *Sakura Katakana Shimbun*, a children's newspaper published in Singapore during the Japanese Occupation, as an example of Japanese imperial propaganda targeted specifically at children. In Japan, child-oriented propaganda was widespread in the form of *kamishibai* paper plays, but in occupied Southeast Asia, *Sakura* is perhaps the only such specimen. In examining the discontinuities between the first and second halves of *Sakura's* publication run, this thesis aims to shed light on the roles and ideologies of Japanese propagandists in wartime Singapore. In addition, it considers how local children's identities were imagined, constructed, and manipulated by the authors of *Sakura* to various ends. When the 25<sup>th</sup> Army captured Singapore, they sought to Japanese it not only by making formal changes to its systems, institutions, and name but also by transforming the minds of its people. For military leaders and conscripted literati, this meant implementing a strong Japanese language policy. *Sakura* was one such tool used to educate the local children in both Japanese language and cultural knowledge. The use of music and visually attractive illustrations in *Sakura* created a pleasant aesthetic and made it a relatively successful example of Barak

Kushner's definition of effective propaganda. However, as Japan's success in the war began to falter, a strategy of manipulating children's subjectivities emerged in the second half of *Sakura*, with propagandists attempting to instil in local children a sense of collective will. They started to encourage a pan-Asian identification, with more content catered specifically to the local context as compared to previous efforts. They also began to view local children, especially Malay boys, as potentially useful future soldiers. However, more blatant applications of propaganda slogans and imperialist ideology may have made the second half less effective overall.

## **Preface**

This thesis was motivated by my interests in news media and propaganda; the manipulation of identity and subjecthood in cults and new religions; Japan's struggles with modernity and pan-Asianism; and the lives of individuals on the margins of society (where children often find themselves). Each of these are topics I have studied in my previous work. To some degree, this thesis combines a little of my interests in each area.

For the sake of clarity, where I refer to 'Singapore' and 'Syonan,' the former refers to a geographical space, and the latter refers to the political entity that existed in Singapore during the Occupation. Singapore, in turn, had been part of British Malaya at the time. Hence, references to Malaya include Singapore, and references to Singapore include Syonan.

Most Anglophone scholarship refers to World War II, a period of global conflict that lasted between 1939 and 1945. However, Japan had been at war since the Manchurian Incident (*Manshū-jihen*) in 1931 through to the Second Sino-Japanese War which began with the China Incident (*Shina-jihen*) in 1937. Japan's involvement in World War II was in the Pacific War, also called the Greater East Asia War (*Daitōa sensō*) which began with the Japanese attack on

Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 and the subsequent US declaration of war. I therefore refer to Japan's 'Fifteen Years War,' encompassing the whole period, when discussing the war from Japan's perspective, but 'World War II' when discussing the war from the perspective of the Allies. References to 'the Japanese Occupation' of Singapore and Malaya may be embedded in either the 'Fifteen Years War' or 'World War II,' though I have not found it necessary to distinguish between them in this context.

Due to the constraints of this paper, I was not able to include a detailed discussion of the *kokugo* (national language) debates that were ongoing at the time, which affected the application of language policies in the occupied territories from Korea and Manchuria to Syonan in the Southern Region.<sup>1</sup> Jimbo Kōtarō's positions on some issues regarding *kokugo* affected his work in both *Sakura* and Syonan Nippon Gakuen. It also goes without saying that Japanese imperial propaganda did not go unchallenged. With regard to children, retaliation in the thought war included anti-Japanese cartoons in both China and the US.<sup>2</sup> A comparative analysis of children's propaganda across borders may prove fruitful for further research.

Japanese, Chinese, and Korean names are written in traditional order, with the family name preceding the given name. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of text from *Sakura* are by the author. The original Japanese, rendered in *rōmaji*, has been given in parentheses where relevant.

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<sup>1</sup> See Lee (2009) for an excellent and comprehensive study of *kokugo*.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of China, see Pozzi (2015). A concise discussion of Disney's animated propaganda can be found in Raiti (2007).

## Acknowledgements

This thesis is the culmination of not only my undergraduate career but also my young life thus far. It is borne on a debt of gratitude that I owe to a great many people, just a few of whom I am able to acknowledge here, in somewhat chronological order.

My parents first sparked my interest in Japan and its culture when I was barely old enough to walk. To my dear mother, who first helped me learn to read, so that I could read to learn, thank you for believing in me and the value of my education from the beginning. To my father, who kept me on my toes, thank you for always pushing me to be the best possible version of myself. Additionally, my two younger brothers have given me a constant incentive to leave a good example, even if I often fail to do so. Thank you for looking up to me; may you both surpass me, and reach greater heights.

My history teachers at Anglo-Chinese School (Independent) showed me that history is more than just the deeds of dead men. To Mr Jarett Kan and Mr Brian Chirnside, thank you for giving me the confidence to engage in dialogue with the living past, and I'm sorry for sleeping in your classes so much. The best was (and still is) yet to be.

My Japanese teachers from Bunka Language School to NUS Centre for Language Studies and Tokyo University of Foreign Studies gave access to a rich world of beauty and culture that I have still only just begun to dip my toes into. To my senseis—Takahashi-sensei; Gima-sensei; Nagami-sensei; Hamasaki-sensei; Walker-sensei; Utsumi-sensei; Saitō-sensei; Kaneko-sensei; Fujimura-sensei; Kumada-sensei; Kan-sensei; Hanazono-sensei; Morita-sensei—ありがとうございました。いろいろお世話になっております。

My friends and loved ones have kept me sane and helped me grow as a person. There are too many of you to name individually. To my friends from school, thank you for sticking around for so long. To my friends from USP, thank you for the opportunity to live and work in such a welcoming and vibrant community. To my friends from JS, thank you for the laughter and tears; for your sleepless companionship on endless nights; for the gifts of bubble tea, *matcha*, and nihilistic memes; it's been quite the ride. To Christine, and your wonderful family, thank you for your love and acceptance. You have truly taught me the meaning of the word 'blessed.'

My professors in the Department of Japanese Studies and USP have been an inspiration to me. I am grateful to all my professors whose classes I have had the privilege to take. In particular, I would like to thank Dr Yew Kong Leong, who taught me that my writing can always be better; A/P Lo Mun Hou, who helped me recognize myself in the mirror; Dr Scot Hislop, who taught me to give myself permission to write a shitty first draft; Dr Thang Leng Leng, who introduced me to *Sakura* and suggested that it might make a good text for my thesis; Dr Chris McMorran, whose infectious enthusiasm for Japanese Studies in AY2014/15 Semester 1's JS1101E influenced me to consider taking it up as my major in the first place; and of course, my supervisor, Dr Timothy Amos, who taught me to lace up my walking boots and stoke the fire in my belly. Thank you for making this journey a relatively smooth one with your incisive comments and your lightning-quick replies.

I apologise to those whose contributions I have neglected to include. Where I have made errors or lapses of judgment in writing this thesis, the fault is solely mine.

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## Introduction

The Japanese Occupation of Singapore is a major milestone in Singapore history. Although it lasted only three and a half years, from 1942 to 1945, it marked the end of British colonial supremacy and paved the way for a new political consciousness that would eventually lead to Singapore's independence. During the Occupation, Singapore was renamed Syonan (昭南)—usually translated as 'Light of the South'<sup>3</sup>—made of up the 'Shō' from Emperor Hirohito's reign name 'Shōwa,' and 'nan,' the character for 'south.' Along with the new name, various policies were implemented with the goal of 'Japanising' the former British colony. For example, the Gregorian calendar was abandoned in favour of the Japanese *kōki* and *nengō* calendar systems based on Japanese emperor reigns, and the time zone was adjusted to adhere to Tokyo Standard Time. The English broadsheet, the *Straits Times*, was also refashioned into a propaganda mouthpiece, the *Syonan Shimbun* (also known as the *Shonan Times* and the *Syonan Times*).<sup>4</sup> In contemporary Singapore, wartime memory of the occupation has been emphasised in national education, and harnessed for the creation of a collective 'Singaporean' identity.<sup>5</sup> While personal narratives such as oral histories and diaries,<sup>6</sup> official documents and artefacts,<sup>7</sup> and the main newspapers such as the *Syonan Shimbun*<sup>8</sup> have received significant scholarly attention, not much has been written on children's media during this period.

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<sup>3</sup> Eunice Thio, "The Syonan Years, 1942–1945," in *A History of Singapore*, eds. Ernest C. T. Chew and Edwin Lee (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 95.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Kevin Blackburn and Karl Hack, *War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), 293–95.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Akashi Yōji and Yoshimura Mako, eds., *New Perspectives on the Japanese Occupation in Malaya and Singapore, 1941–1945* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Lee Geok Boi, *The Syonan Years: Singapore Under Japanese Rule 1942–1945* (Singapore: National Archives of Singapore and Epigram Pte Ltd, 2005).



Stanley Cunningham has characterised propaganda as something that ‘generates belief systems’ and ‘supplies ersatz certainties.’<sup>9</sup> In this thesis, I borrow an understanding of propaganda from Barak Kushner’s pioneering work on Japanese imperial propaganda, *The Thought War*. He distinguishes propaganda from persuasion, education, and advertising by its primary goal of directing action and thought in specific ways as opposed to causing reflection, imparting knowledge (without particular goals), or capitalist profit.<sup>10</sup> Kushner writes that the Japanese government was aware that ‘effective propaganda did not grow out of explicit directives issued from its offices,’ but that good propaganda had to ‘grasp the hearts and minds of the people.’<sup>11</sup> Propaganda, both from above and from below, served to construct a particular ‘social identity within Japanese society during the war.’<sup>12</sup> Although Kushner’s book mainly examines propaganda directed inwards at Japan’s own citizens, and outwards at mainland China, it behoves the reader to consider the ‘belief systems’ and ‘social identities’ that Japanese propagandists elsewhere intended to construct for their disparate subjects.

Examining the ways children’s media was used to stimulate action can reveal interesting trajectories of Japanese wartime ideology towards imperial subjects. Children’s media products were, after all, the creations of contemporary adults with a particular vision for their young audience, who were seen as malleable future subjects of the Japanese empire. The underlying concern of my research is the question of local children’s subjectivities. How did Japanese propagandists imagine local children, and what ideals did they hold? What

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<sup>9</sup> Stanley B. Cunningham, *The Idea of Propaganda: A Reconstruction* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Barak Kushner, *The Thought War: Japanese Imperial Propaganda* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

caused them to alter their strategies? The short- and long-term visions of Japanese propagandists in Singapore can be charted over time to answer this question.

This thesis focuses on *Sakura Katakana Shimbun*, a children's newspaper written primarily in katakana syllabary, which was published in Singapore, and distributed in Malaya and Sumatra during the Japanese Occupation. *Sakura* was also published as *Sakura Kana Shimbun* after it started incorporating hiragana in issue 28, and thereafter as *Sakura Kodomo Shimbun* when it started incorporating kanji in issue 33. *Sakura* exists within a wider context of Japanese imperial propaganda. As I analyse its contents, I take care to consider its roles in relation to Syonan, to Japan, and to children in particular.

An examination of *Sakura* reveals several notable discontinuities in terms of style and content. Between issues 18 and 19, there was a gap of about two months (December 1942 to February 1943) during which *Sakura* ceased publication. When it returned, it was under the direction of a newly upgraded Propaganda Department and featured significant shifts in tone and focus. What can the content of *Sakura* tell us about the ideologies and motivations of its creators, and how they viewed local children in Malaya and Singapore? What significant events of the Japanese Occupation can account for their shifting aims across different issues of *Sakura*? I address these questions through an analysis of historical sources contemporaneous to the period. In a recent lecture titled 'The War as Shown to Children,' Karl Ian Uy Cheng Chua remarked that *Sakura* was distinctive to Singapore and Malaya as a piece of propaganda, as he had not come across any major wartime propaganda material aimed specifically at children in other parts of Southeast Asia.<sup>13</sup> I therefore also attempt to

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<sup>13</sup> Karl Ian Uy Cheng Chua, "The War as Shown to Children," Lecture, National Archives of Singapore, Former Ford Factory, Singapore, March 31, 2018.

contextualise *Sakura* in the thoughtscape of wartime propaganda by drawing comparisons across time and space to children's media in Japan's home front during the Fifteen Years War.

This thesis is divided into three main sections. In Part I, I give an outline of the circumstances that led to the creation of *Sakura*, the people who were responsible for its content, and the deployment of language ideology as a means of constructing identity. The methods and motives of the first half of *Sakura*, issues 1 to 18, are examined in this part. In Part II, I focus on the specific actions that *Sakura* attempted to encourage in its readers. I describe how *Sakura* attempted to create the illusion of propaganda which 'emanated from the bottom of society' —as Kushner puts it<sup>14</sup>—and how it responded to particular events and signals during the second year of the Japanese Occupation. I also discuss the music published in *Sakura*. The second half of *Sakura*, issues 19 to 39 (and one additional unnumbered issue, which I shall call issue X), is examined in this part. In Part III, I adopt a broader view of child-oriented propaganda craft, comparing the functions of *Sakura* (as a whole) with *kamishibai* (visual storytelling using picture panels on paper) in Japan.

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<sup>14</sup> Kushner, *The Thought War*, 9.

## I. Language Ideology: Making *Nippon-jin* out of Natives

In June 1942, four months after the Japanese had taken control of Singapore, the Military Propaganda Squad (*gunsendenhan*) launched a campaign to promote the Japanese language.<sup>15</sup> About 150 members of the Japanese literati (*bunkajin*), including poet Jimbo Kōtarō, author Ibuse Masuji, and literary scholar Nakajima Kenzō, had been drafted and assigned to the Propaganda Squad in Syonan under the 25<sup>th</sup> Army Military Administration (*gunseikambu*).<sup>16</sup> According to Jimbo, a document laying out the objectives of 'Nippon-Go Popularising Week' (as the campaign was called), dated 17 May 1942, listed the following:<sup>17</sup>

1. To promote the study of Japanese during and after Nippon-Go Popularising Week, introduce the Japanese state of affairs in a series of articles, and strengthen the command of conventional Japanese language in the local papers
2. To entreat all Japanese soldiers involved in the 'constructive war' (*kensetsu-sen*) effort to cooperate in teaching correct Japanese to natives
3. To publish a weekly children's katakana newspaper
4. To publish a guidebook on the proper pronunciation of Japanese syllables

The result of the third goal was *Sakura*, the first issue of which was distributed free with the 10 June 1942 edition of the *Syonan Shimbun*.<sup>18</sup> Later issues carried a price tag of 'one *sen*,' implying that *Sakura* was sold as a standalone publication. *Sakura* ran for 39 issues between June 1942 and December 1943, and continued at least until 15 April 1945. In the collection available on microfilm at the National Archives of Singapore, issues 10 and 37 are missing, as are issues 40 onwards to the last known issue X.

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<sup>15</sup> "Your Future Depends Upon a Knowledge of Nippon-Go," *Syonan Shimbun*, June 7, 1942.

<sup>16</sup> Akashi Yōji, "Japanese Cultural Policy in Malaya and Singapore, 1942-45," in *Japanese Cultural Policies in Southeast Asia during World War 2*, ed. Grant K. Goodman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 119.

<sup>17</sup> Jimbo Kōtarō, *Shōnan nippon gakuen* (Tokyo: Ai no Jigyō Sha, 1943), 258.

<sup>18</sup> "Free Copy of Sakura," *Syonan Shimbun*, June 10, 1942.

Jimbo was the main editor of *Sakura* until issue 15, dated 1 November 1942. In this capacity, he collected contributions from ‘well-known’ *bunkajin* who were stationed in Syonan<sup>19</sup> explaining Japan’s military strength and the daily lives of Japanese children,<sup>20</sup> Japan’s major geographical features,<sup>21</sup> and the Japanese word game, *shiritori*.<sup>22</sup> In issues 4–15, Jimbo wrote a personal column titled ‘Uncle Japan’ (*Nippon Ojisan no hanashi*), in which he appeared as a kindly uncle and introduced readers to the ‘four great holidays’ (*yon daisetsu*),<sup>23</sup> Japanese folktales such as *Momotarō*, *Hanasaka Jiisan* and *Shita-kiri Suzume*,<sup>24</sup> and Japanese playing cards (*karuta*) for learning katakana.<sup>25</sup>

The format of *Sakura* under Jimbo followed a relatively consistent pattern. Each issue consisted of four pages, always starting with a song sheet on the front page accompanied by either a photo or a cartoon. Other than Jimbo’s columns, another recurring element was the ‘Easy News’ articles (*Yasashii nyūsu*) which contained watered-down versions of developments in the war, and sometimes messages or announcements from important figures; others were simply ‘informative’ articles about Japan’s previous conquests, war heroes, or Japan’s allies, Italy and Germany. Many issues also included a four-panel manga, a short story, and drawings or short essays submitted by local children. Following Jimbo’s departure, *Sakura* continued to be published for three more issues in a similar format, albeit with less variety and dynamism, before going on a two-month hiatus.

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<sup>19</sup> Jimbo, *Shōnan nippon gakuen*, 133.

<sup>20</sup> *Sakura* Issue 1. National Archives of Singapore.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Issue 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, Issue 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Issues 4–5.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Issues 6–9.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Issues 11–14.

Date (1942)	10/6	20/6	1/7	11/7	21/7	1/8	11/8	21/8	1/9	10	21/9	1/10	11/10	21/10	1/11	11/11	21/11	8/12	
Content	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
Music	Shaded										Shaded				Shaded				
Easy News		Shaded										Shaded							
Uncle Japan			Shaded		Japanese folktales				Shaded										
Stories	Shaded				Japanese folktales				Shaded					Shaded					
Manga	Shaded							Shaded											
Local submissions		Shaded							Shaded			Shaded							

Shaded regions  indicate appearances in the corresponding issue.

Jimbo's departure

Figure 1. Common types of content in the first 18 issues of *Sakura*.

Jimbo's personal philosophy is evident in these early issues of *Sakura*, which parallel his reflections on the school where he was principal, Syonan Nippon Gakuen. He stated that the aim of publishing *Sakura* was to create a supplementary aid for teaching Japanese language which would increase in complexity in tandem with the locals' Japanese ability, and that *Sakura* would strive to be a fun reading experience through the inclusion of a variety of photos, drawings, and text content; in addition to these pragmatic aims, Jimbo also incorporated a nationalistic aspect to *Sakura*, stating that it was important to convey *Nippon seishin* (Japanese spirit) to the public through the use of Japanese characters like katakana.<sup>26</sup> With regard to the school he ran, Jimbo expressed a similar ideology. Jimbo considered 'Japanese' (*Nippon-go*) and 'national language' (*kokugo*), to be synonymous, but he was cognizant of the fact that local Chinese might associate the idea of *kokugo* with Chinese languages instead of Japanese.<sup>27</sup> He decided to name the school Syonan Nippon Gakuen,

<sup>26</sup> Jimbo, *Shōnan nippon gakuen*, 126.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 60–61.

rather than calling it Syonan Nippon-Go Gakuen which would imply that it was strictly a language school, as Jimbo wanted to teach the locals about 'Japan' itself.<sup>28</sup> For Jimbo, learning *Nippon-Go* was an essential gateway to understanding 'Nippon Culture' and the 'heart of the Nippon-zin [Japanese people].'<sup>29</sup>

After the first batch of students graduated from Syonan Nippon Gakuen on 4 August 1942, Jimbo addressed them in a speech, saying:

I would like to take this opportunity in advising you not to treat Nippon-Go as another language you are required to learn. You must show your real and pure feelings and love for Nippon-Go. You cannot master Nippon-Go without love. To love Nippon-Go is no less than to love Nippon. To love Nippon means that you have won the distinction of being a glorious and good Nippon-zin. [...] Furthermore, I hope you will be young, strong and nice Nippon-zin forever!<sup>30</sup>

These sentiments are also strongly shown in *Sakura*, especially towards the end of Jimbo's stint as editor. In issue 14, published two and a half months later, the *karuta* for 'yo' reads 'Please become good Japanese people' — '*Yoi Nippon-jin to narinasai.*' By the time Jimbo's final Uncle Japan column was published in issue 15, the third batch of students had graduated from his school. Three aspects of his farewell column stand out: firstly, he noted that the most important thing that his students learned was the fact that they had come to 'understand the feelings of Japanese people,' even if it was only to a limited degree. Next, he reiterated that the study of Japanese language consisted of 'not only the memorisation of words, but also the planting of the Japanese spirit in one's heart.' Finally, he encouraged the reader to continue

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>29</sup> Jimbo Kōtarō, "Nippon-Go 'Is Vital & Beautiful,'" *Syonan Shimibun*, June 9, 1942.

<sup>30</sup> "Graduation of First Batch of Nippon-Go Students: Impressive Ceremony at Dai Toa Gekizyo," *ibid.*, August 4,, 1942.

diligently studying Japanese language, and he looked forward to the day when they could finally 'become splendid Japanese people' themselves.

As Kawamura Minato points out, however, Jimbo's logic was fundamentally problematic. Conflating language, culture, and nationality might have worked in Japan, but it made no sense in the context of multiracial, multilingual Singapore, which had the effect of making Jimbo's idealistic cultural policy look sanctimonious.<sup>31</sup> Jimbo himself likely saw no such contradiction. His notion of '*Nippon*' encompassed not only the main islands of the 'homeland' (*naichi*) but also the outer reaches of the Japanese empire, including the 'Southern Region' (*Nanpō*).<sup>32</sup> His idea of 'nation-wide' included, naturally, the occupied territories of Korea, Taiwan, and Manchuria.<sup>33</sup> He saw it as the noblesse oblige of every officer and soldier stationed in the 'new territories' to help the native peoples understand and appreciate *Nippon's* national polity (*kokutai*).<sup>34</sup> In the second issue of *Sakura*, an article titled 'Japan Q&A' reflects this encompassing imperial ideology. Jimbo's answers to several questions come as expected, with the exception of:

Q: What is the longest river in Japan?

A: It's the Yalu River, which flows on the border between Korea and Manchuria.

Matsuoka Masakazu argues that Jimbo's nationalistic ideology had a significant influence on educational policy during the Occupation, which 'sought to achieve the Japanisation of local students.'<sup>35</sup> However, whether or not Jimbo's ideology was truly his own is debatable.

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<sup>31</sup> Kawamura Minato, *Umi wo watatta nihongo: Shokuminchi no "kokugo" no jikan* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 1994), 98.

<sup>32</sup> Jimbo, *Shōnan nippon gakuen*, 60.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>35</sup> Matsuoka Masakazu, "Media and Cultural Policy and Japanese Language Education in Japanese-Occupied Singapore, 1942–1945," in *Japanese Language and Soft Power in Asia*, ed. Hashimoto Kayoko (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 99.



According to Odagiri Susumu, Jimbo's pre-war works reflect a romantic and anti-war sentiment in stark contrast to his wartime works, which contain strong anti-Western and ultranationalist ideas.<sup>36</sup> Akashi notes that Jimbo returned once again to 'being an innocent and passive poet' in post-war years, suggesting that his transformation into a mouthpiece of cultural propaganda was the result of his naiveté rather than strong genuine convictions.<sup>37</sup> It is necessary, therefore, to look for the origins of these ideologies elsewhere.

Jimbo's aims were aligned with two prominent figures in the top brass of the *gunseikambu* at this time, one of whom was the commander of the 25<sup>th</sup> Army, Lieutenant General Yamashita Tomoyuki. In his wartime memoir, Shinozaki Mamoru, a Japanese civilian who worked in the municipal government, related an account of Yamashita being moved to tears by local children singing patriotic Japanese songs (*Aikoku Kōshinkyoku* and the national anthem, *Kimigayo*) on the occasion of the first celebration of the Emperor's birthday (*tenchōsetsu*) in Syonan, 29 April 1942:<sup>38</sup>

I looked at the general. There were tears in his eyes. Then the children sang the Japanese national anthem. There was silence for a moment, then they shouted, *Banzai!* three times. Every Japanese, including myself, felt very happy. The general turned to me and whispered, 'Just like Japanese children, aren't they?' He saluted the children several times.

General Yamashita made no attempt to hide his emotion—tears ran down the face of this man they called the Tiger of Malaya.

As Kushner points out, the propaganda value of music had been recognised by prominent scholars in Japan such as Koyama Eizō, who had laid out the operational details of how music

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<sup>36</sup> Odagiri Susumu, *Nippon kindai bungaku daijiten* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1984), 770-71. As cited in Akashi, "Japanese Cultural Policy," 152.

<sup>37</sup> Akashi, "Japanese Cultural Policy," 152-53.

<sup>38</sup> Shinozaki Mamoru, *Syonan, My Story: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore* (Times Books International, 1975), 42-43.

can function as propaganda and expressed the view that propaganda 'should be understood as a way to mould the minds of men.'<sup>39</sup> The efforts that later went into setting up broadcast programmes in schools and on the radio during Nippon-Go Popularising Week indicate a similar strategy being employed in Syonan. Jimbo and fellow propagandist Nakajima wrote that 'the Malay people are good at singing, they will learn [Japanese language] quickly if we use songs.'<sup>40</sup> Indeed, this tactic seems to have been quite effective. Sybil Kathigasu, a Eurasian nurse who lived through the Occupation, recalled that 'Japanese tunes were everywhere to be heard on the lips of young people who a few months earlier had been whistling or singing the latest hit from Hollywood.'<sup>41</sup> Matsuoka argued that music entertainment in general was loaded with propaganda value and furthered the goal of Japanisation in Syonan, not just of children but of adults as well.<sup>42</sup> I discuss the role of music in greater detail in Part II.

After the children's performance, Yamashita made a speech, referring to the local people as having become 'the glorious new Imperial subjects' of Japan.<sup>43</sup> Nakajima, who had written the announcement of Nippon-Go Popularising Week that followed Yamashita's speech, said that in order to guide the local population to become proper imperial subjects, 'we must teach them our language as the *lingua franca* so that it will remove differences in

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<sup>39</sup> Kushner, *The Thought War*, 33.

<sup>40</sup> Nakajima Kenzō and Jimbo Kōtarō, "Tokushū: Marai no nihongo," *Nihongo* 3, no. 5 (1943): 37. As quoted in Matsuoka, "Media and Cultural Policy and Japanese Language Education," 90.

<sup>41</sup> Sybil Kathigasu, *No Dram of Mercy: The Story of a Woman's Courage during the Japanese Occupation of Malaya* (London: Neville Spearman, 1954), 46.

<sup>42</sup> Matsuoka Masakazu, "Goraku ka Nihon-ka kyōiku ka?: Nihon senryō-ka Shingapōru ni okeru ongaku," *Shokuminchi kyōikushi kenkyū nenpō* 17 (2015): 118.

<sup>43</sup> "Our Commander's Message," *Syonan Shimbun*, April 29, 1942.

customs and habits of various ethnic races in Malaya and Sumatra.<sup>44</sup> In an interview with Lim Yoon Lin, Shinozaki recalled the aftermath of Yamashita's speech:<sup>45</sup>

That speech was a great mistake because it had not been approved by Tokyo. He gave the speech on his own. [...] Premier Tojo was surprised I learned. Tokyo had not decided how they were going to treat the local people, as Japanese subjects or otherwise. But General Yamashita had referred to the people as our new subject people. Tokyo was very angry that General Yamashita had spoken like that without their permission.

As it turned out, the possibility for locals to become imperial subjects as declared by Yamashita, or even bona fide *Nippon-jin* as envisioned by Jimbo, had not been officially sanctioned by Tokyo. Jimbo's Japanising ideology, while patriotically-motivated, was essentially maverick in nature. As Gregory Clancey points out, the Japanese government's goals for Southeast Asia were not the same as their goals in Korea, China, and Manchuria, which were akin to Nazi Germany's expansionist *Lebensraum* (living space) policies in Europe.<sup>46</sup> Akashi Yōji notes that the original draft of Japan's *Administrative Principles for the Occupied Regions in the Operations of the Southern Area*, written in 1941, included the following aims:<sup>47</sup>

1. Acquisition of vital materials as rapidly as possible for national defence;
2. Restoration of law and order;
3. Self-sufficiency for troops in occupied territories;
4. Respect for established local organisations and customs; and
5. No hasty statement about the future status of sovereignty

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<sup>44</sup> Akashi, "Japanese Cultural Policy," 121.

<sup>45</sup> Shinozaki Mamoru, interview by Lim Yoon Lin, 1973, 50.

<sup>46</sup> Gregory Clancey, "The Japanese Imperium and South-East Asia: An Overview," in *Southeast Asian Minorities in the Wartime Japanese Empire*, ed. Paul H. Kratoska (Abingdon: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 10.

<sup>47</sup> Akashi and Yoshimura, Introduction to *New Perspectives on the Japanese Occupation*, 3.

The priorities in the south were therefore 'to gain control of its raw materials, and to encircle China.'<sup>48</sup> These objectives ran in total opposition to the assimilationist cultural policies that were implemented by the *gunseikambū*. Yet, it was not an unreasonable assumption for them to have made. As Mark Lincicome shows, imperialisation (*kōminka*) and assimilationist policy (*dōka*) had ample precedent; Sawayanagi Masatarō, a prominent government official and educator in the Meiji Period, supported the assimilation of ethnically non-Japanese imperial subjects such as Ainu, Okinawans, Koreans, and Taiwanese, which implied that 'Japan's colonial subjects could expect to enjoy the same respect, legal rights and civic responsibilities as native Japanese, provided that they shed their own cultural heritage and embraced Japanese culture and a Japanese identity.'<sup>49</sup> Kaionji Ushigorō, another novelist drafted into the Propaganda Squad, wrote that before something like this could be achieved, 'the pride of Asian people in their own cultures' first had to be 'destroyed completely by condemning theirs as being useless in the present age.'<sup>50</sup>

The other major figure whose ideology and language policies aligned with Jimbo's was Colonel Watanabe Wataru, a deputy and close aide of General Yamashita.<sup>51</sup> Watanabe was an ideological hardliner committed to the Japanisation of Syonan. In his notice to the governors, 'Principles for Reforming School Education' dated 6 October 1942, he pushed for the introduction of an 'Oriental moral culture' based on the Emperor system; the total abolition of English and Dutch as languages of public administration or instruction and a

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<sup>48</sup> Clancey, "The Japanese Imperium and South-East Asia," 10.

<sup>49</sup> Mark Lincicome, *Imperial Subjects as Global Citizens: Nationalism, Internationalism, and Education in Japan* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 40.

<sup>50</sup> Akashi, "Japanese Cultural Policy," 124.

<sup>51</sup> Akashi Yōji, "Colonel Watanabe Wataru: The Architect of the Malayan Military Administration, December 1941–March 1943," in *New Perspectives on the Japanese Occupation in Malaya and Singapore, 1941–1945*, eds. Akashi Yōji and Yoshimura Mako (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), 38.

temporary ban on Chinese (leaving only Malay and Japanese); the observation of imperial national holidays; the singing of the Japanese national anthem *Kimigayo*; changing the names of streets, buildings, and major institutions to Japanese names; and the adoption of Tokyo Standard Time and the Japanese calendar system.<sup>52</sup> The most controversial instruction was to switch to Japanese as the official lingua franca and ban English in public almost immediately, which was seen as ‘absurd,’ ‘impracticable,’ and ‘unenforceable’ by the municipal government and its mayor, Ōdachi Shigeo, who refused to comply on the grounds that it would only serve to ‘alienate the people.’<sup>53</sup> Watanabe, who was not popular in the *gunseikambu*, backed down.

Besides Jimbo, there are few known contributors to *Sakura*. In issues 1 and 2, a short story about a race between a turban shell sea snail and a shark (*‘Sazae to Fuka’*) is credited to the novelist Ibuse Masuji. There were also occasional announcements or addresses from important figures such as Mayor Ōdachi, and contributions of essays or drawings from local children that bore their names and ages. Aside from these instances, text contributors were largely anonymous, as *Sakura* featured no bylines for its articles. Illustrations and manga were sometimes signed by their creators, including Kurakane Yoshiyuki, Shimizu Hajime, and Matsushita Kikuo. In later issues, Saitō Shigeru created papercraft toys that could be cut out and folded into planes, tanks, and ships.

Kurakane drew a total of 13 manga between issues 1 and 26, as well as numerous other illustrations. In general, Kurakane’s manga, along with the many cute illustrations and silly stories in the first half of *Sakura*, created an idyllic and carefree atmosphere (see [Appendix A](#)). The first four issues of *Sakura* contained manga by Kurakane featuring a pair of Malay

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 48–49.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 49.

children: a boy named Mā-chan and a girl named Rē-chan (collectively: 'Malay'). Kurakane depicted them enjoying the study of Japanese of their own accord, in line with Jimbo's philosophy of learning Japanese for its own sake. In issue 1, Mā-chan teaches Rē-chan the word for flower, 'hana.' In issue 2, they come across a katakana picture chart for studying Japanese (*manabe Nippon-go*), similar to the one printed in the *Syonan Shimbun* during Nippon-Go Popularising Week. They then return home and begin labelling the furniture, the walls, and the floor with katakana.

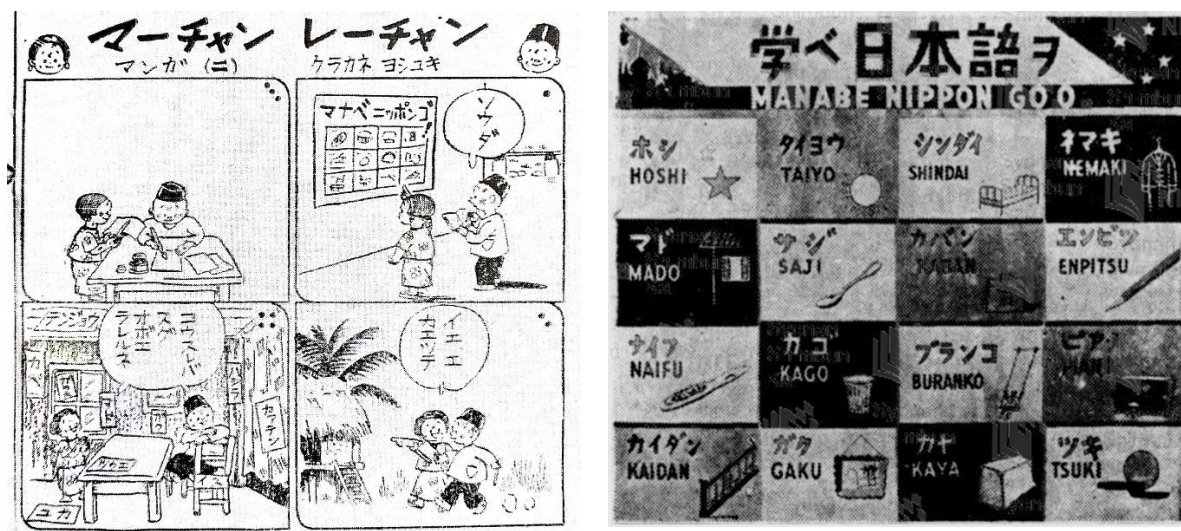


Figure 2. (Left) Kurakane's manga in *Sakura* issue 2. (Right) A katakana chart from *Syonan Shimbun*.<sup>54</sup>

Matsuoka notes that this was fairly typical of propaganda created by the *bunkajin* like Jimbo and Kurakane, who never offered 'any practical reasons for studying Japanese; they simply showcased Japan and the Japanese language and expected the local children to accept and study them.'<sup>55</sup> In reality, students of Japanese language during the Occupation 'had a highly practical motivation: obtaining better jobs under Japanese rule.'<sup>56</sup> Another episode shows Mā-chan and Rē-chan going to the zoo, where they see what they think is a black horse, then a

<sup>54</sup> "Manabe Tukae Nippon-Go," *Syonan Shimbun*, June 3, 1942.

<sup>55</sup> Matsuoka, "Media and Cultural Policy and Japanese Language Education," 91.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.



white horse, before realising that it is a zebra.<sup>57</sup> The pair also appeared in illustrations accompanying various articles such as the one below from issue 7.

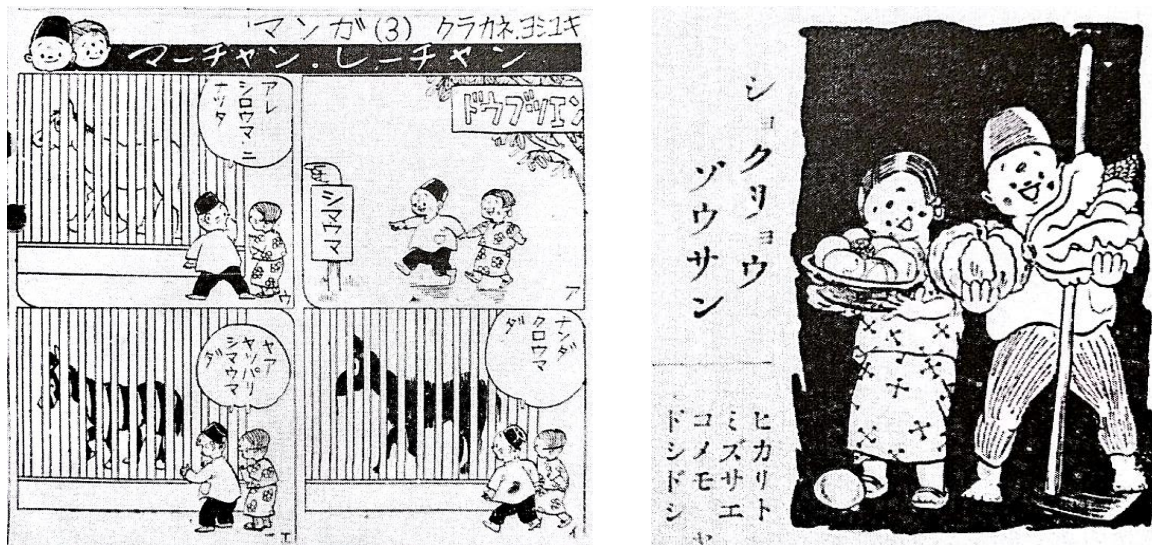


Figure 3. (Left) Kurakane's manga in *Sakura* issue 3. (Right) Cheerful illustration of Mā-chan and Rē-chan accompanying an article titled 'Increase food production.'

Contrary to the children's earnest demeanour and their carefree state in Kurakane's manga, Watanabe's actions showed that Japanese language policy was implemented coercively. Akashi argues that the educational and indoctrination policies of the *gunseikambu* were founded on the doctrines of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and 'the world under one roof' (*hakkō ichiu*) and sought to Japanese Malay society in particular.<sup>58</sup> The conceptual definitions could be found in a pair of documents prepared by the Total War Research Institute (*Sōryokusen Kenkyūjo*).

The first document, *Draft of Basic Plan for Establishment of Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere* (dated 27 January 1942), outlined the moral basis of the establishment of Japanese-led 'Co-Prosperity',<sup>59</sup> a pan-Asianist term for the expansion of Japanese imperial influence. Co-

<sup>57</sup> *Sakura* Issue 3.

<sup>58</sup> Akashi Yōji, "Education and Indoctrination Policy in Malaya and Singapore Under the Japanese Rule, 1942–1945," *Malaysian Journal of Education* 13, no. 1/2 (1976): 2.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

Prosperity is, naturally, a misnomer, as it implies a certain degree of equality between Japan and its colonies. As Sven Saaler points out, the Co-Prosperity Sphere contained 'echoes' of a pre-existing Sinocentric paradigm of international relations, except 'now with Japan at the centre, finally replacing the "Middle Kingdom" China.'<sup>60</sup> The notion that all 'Asiatic people ought to look to Japan as the superior nation and emulate examples of the Japanese way of life' reflected this hierarchy.<sup>61</sup>

The second document, *Establishment of East Asia: Maneuvers for the First Period of Total War* (dated 18 February 1942), outlined specific methods for implementing 'cultural and moral education,' including the propagation of 'all aspects of the Japanese way of life among the native people'; with regard to children, the ultimate aim was to nurture them into 'useful subjects of the Japanese Empire, spiritually and physically fit for any form of military and national services.'<sup>62</sup>

It would seem that the degree of Japanisation envisioned by Watanabe and Jimbo could not be achieved so quickly. While Watanabe tried to legislatively ram Japanisation through society, Jimbo adopted a more nuanced approach. The new subjects of the empire were not yet *Nippon-jin*, but they could 'become' *Nippon-jin* through sincere study. Through his work at Syonan Nippon Gakuen and *Sakura*, he sought to impart some basic cultural competencies such as Japanese language skills, knowledge of Japanese culture and history, and Japanese virtues. He considered these necessary for local children to eventually gain the same status as Japanese people. This long-term focus made sense in view of two points

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<sup>60</sup> Sven Saaler, "Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History: Overcoming the Nation, Creating a Region, Forging an Empire," in *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, Regionalism and Borders*, eds. Sven Saaler and J. Victor Koschmann (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 12.

<sup>61</sup> Akashi, "Education and Indoctrination Policy in Malaya and Singapore," 13.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*



highlighted by Grant Goodman: firstly, pre-war Japan had little knowledge of Southeast Asia compared to China, so any cultural policies to be enacted there (including those devised by *bunkajin*) were ad hoc by necessity; and secondly, the conventional wisdom among Japanese thinkers in the 1930s and 40s was that the future lay with Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy.<sup>63</sup> Though the project of complete Japanisation would eventually prove to be a failure, Jimbo did not stay to see this. He returned to Japan in November 1942,<sup>64</sup> and Watanabe was transferred out of Syonan a few months later, in March 1943.<sup>65</sup> The Propaganda Squad published three more issues of *Sakura* after Jimbo's departure but discontinued it after issue 18, dated 8 December 1942. The last article of issue 18 is attributed to the chief of the Propaganda Squad, Ōkubo Kōichi. He commemorated the first anniversary of the beginning of the war for 'protecting the peace of all of Asia' in which the 'bullying' British and Americans have been 'driven out' of 'Malaya, Philippines, Burma, Sumatra, Java, Borneo, etc.' A year prior, America had declared war against Japan in retaliation for the attack on Pearl Harbour. Ōkubo exhorted the reader to keep calm and continue going to school and learning Nippon-Go, and to keep their bodies healthy. He ended by encouraging everyone to express their gratitude towards Japanese soldiers. Although the techniques changed, more of these ideological aims were manifest in the second half of *Sakura*.

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<sup>63</sup> Grant K. Goodman, Introduction to *Japanese Cultural Policies in Southeast Asia during World War 2* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 2–4.

<sup>64</sup> Jimbo, *Shōnan nippon gakuen*, 133.

<sup>65</sup> Akashi, "Colonel Watanabe Wataru," 56.

## II. Perception Management: Practical Difficulties in Military Occupation

As Kushner has noted, Japanese imperial propaganda in Japan itself was better understood as ‘products of collusion between the civilian society and its leaders’ rather than ‘artifacts of the military and government.’<sup>66</sup> This tactic of trying to garner support through reciprocity—propaganda from below—had worked well at home during Japan’s wars with China, for it made the population feel like they were part of ‘something larger than themselves’ as ‘active participants, not drone-like followers’ in the ‘thought war.’<sup>67</sup> The latter half of *Sakura* appeared to aspire to achieve the same effect in Syonan, though the degree to which this was successful varies.

In this section, I argue that there was an increasing focus on making what Kushner characterises as ‘propaganda that either sprang from society itself or was made to appear that way’ in the second half of *Sakura*.<sup>68</sup> In general, articles began to adopt the use of the plural first-person ‘we’ or ‘us’ (*bokura* and *watakushitachi*) and attempted to manipulate children’s subjectivities by linguistically blurring the boundary between *Sakura* and the reader. By contrast, articles in the first half were usually written from a neutral third-person perspective. Some were presented as dialogues between two parties, usually a child and an adult such as Uncle Japan, in which the latter explained some concept to the former, and announcements were usually addressed to ‘everyone’ (*minasan*). Only one article adopted the inclusive first-person register: a short piece titled ‘Increase Food Production’ in issue 7, which features an illustration of Mā-chan and Rē-chan holding vegetables (see [Figure 3](#)) and says ‘Let’s make our own food! End food shortage by working as hard as we can!’

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<sup>66</sup> Kushner, *The Thought War*, 24.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

There was also a stark increase in the number of essays submitted by local children, particularly on topics related to Japan's imperial ideologies. These came from children all over Malaya as far north as Kota Bharu in Kelantan, close to the present-day border of Malaysia and Thailand.<sup>69</sup> While this could be seen as a successful transition towards a model of propaganda from below, the content of the second half is also more blatantly militaristic and didactic. In the first half, ideal behaviour was often presented more subtly, with articles describing the strength and benevolence of the Japanese empire<sup>70</sup> or the daily lives of Japanese children<sup>71</sup> without explicitly directing behaviour. Kurakane's manga and illustrations encouraged local children to learn Japanese simply because it was fun. By contrast, the second half often contained more directly instructive articles on what to do or how to think. It could be suggested, therefore, that the second half fell short of what the first half tried to achieve: the 'cultivation of cultural values and attitudes that would be held so deeply they would appear innate and not imposed,' as Kushner put it.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Sakura* Issue 38.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, Issue 1.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, Issue 2.

<sup>72</sup> Kushner, *The Thought War*, 25.



Figure 4. A comparison of issue 18 (left) and 19 (right) of *Sakura*.

*Sakura* returned in issue 19 on 15 February 1943, the first anniversary of the Fall of Singapore, its front page emblazoned with a photograph of British soldiers carrying a white flag on their way to surrender. With a new aesthetic and layout, *Sakura* now featured a more militaristic focus. Virtually every single issue from 19 onwards contained at least one image of soldiers, planes, tanks, ships, or battles; aside from depictions of friendly Japanese soldiers, the first half contained no such imagery. Issue 21 even showed a photo of the graves of 'heroic' Japanese war dead who had perished fighting the British and Americans in Malaya and Sumatra, which the reader was encouraged to revere.

A close reading of issue 19's content reveals a new linguistic innovation in *Sakura's* propaganda discourse. An article titled 'Let's hurry and make ourselves useful too' (*Bokura mo hayaku o-yaku ni tachimashō*) adopts the subject perspective of a local child:

Just as the soldiers have been doing, the adults are working hard to create a New Malaya. I think we have to do the same. What would be good for us to do? First of all, let's make ourselves useful by studying, reading, and writing Japanese. There are also many other things we can do such as farming, factory work, trading, and helping our families at home. All right, let's do our best, children of Malaya!

The use of the plural first-person which includes the child reader's subjectivity began to be used more frequently. The Japanese war dead article in issue 21 refers to the soldiers as having fought for 'our happiness' and states that 'we... should revere them.' In the same issue, an illustration titled 'We too will work' (*Bokura mo hataraku*) shows 'good children' working hard at farming and gathering food. In issue 24, an article about local children who were sent to Japan as 'Southern Region Special Exchange Students' (*Nanpō Tokubetsu Ryūgakusei*, or *Nantokusei*) begins in first-person—'Here in Japan, which has given us much happiness...' (*Watakushitachi o shiawase ni shitekudasatta Nippon de*)—before transitioning to third-person to encourage the reader not to lose to these exemplary *Nantokusei*. In issue 31, an article titled 'The defence of Malaya is on us' (*Marai no mamori wa watakushitachi de*) reads: 'In order to protect our Malaya, everyone, all of us men, women, elderly, children, must pledge to guard against the enemy which is always approaching.' These are just some of the numerous examples of *bokura* and *watakushitachi* being deployed as discursive instruments in the second half of *Sakura*.

Along with this increasing use of the plural first-person, there was also a marked increase in essays ostensibly written by local children being featured in later issues.<sup>73</sup> The first half of *Sakura* carried eighteen reader submissions, but only two were essays with the other sixteen being drawings. Excluding issue X, a chronological outlier, the second half carried

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<sup>73</sup> *Sakura* Issues 30–39.

twelve essays and one drawing. While some of the content is mundane ('Coconut trees';<sup>74</sup> 'Rain';<sup>75</sup> 'My House'<sup>76</sup>), others evoke symbols of Japanese nationalism ('Mount Fuji'<sup>77</sup>), imperialism ('Protect Malaya!';<sup>78</sup> 'New Malaya'<sup>79</sup>), or even praise *Sakura* itself ('Sakura Shimbun is Our Friend'<sup>80</sup>). Issue X, dated 15 April 1945, contained three essay submissions on the topics 'His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor,' 'Japanese Airplanes: World Number One,' and 'Our Classroom,' suggesting that, on some level, the tactic was successful and continued to be employed with little adjustment for two years after 1943.

This shift in propaganda strategy may be partly attributable to organisational changes that occurred after December 1942. According to Hata Ikuhiko, the Propaganda Squad was expanded and upgraded to a full department (*bu*) around this time during an organisational restructuring of the *gunseikambu*. Now properly known as the Military Propaganda Department (*gunsendenbu*), it came under the direct control of the *gunseikambu* headquarters and was placed on the same level as other administrative departments like the Departments of Finance (*zaimu*), Industry (*sangyō*), and General Affairs (*sōmu*), whereas previously it had operated as a branch office on the same level as the Bureaus (*kyoku*) of Public Facilities (*kōkyō shisetsu*), Meteorology (*kishō*), and Surveying (*sokuryō*).<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Issue 12.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., Issue 31.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Issue 35.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., Issue 30.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., Issue 34.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., Issue 36.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., Issue 39.

<sup>81</sup> Hata Ikuhiko, ed., *Nanpō gunsei no kikō to kanbu, gunseikan ichiran* (Nanpō gunsei-shi kenkyū fōramu, 1998).

Along with the addition of new personnel, the Propaganda Department's responsibilities changed.<sup>82</sup> Previously, it had been in charge of issuing newspapers such as the *Syonan Shimbun* and *Sakura*. The Ministry of War reassigned this function to Dōmei News Agency in September 1942, which then established the Syonan Shimbun Company in December that year, though the Propaganda Department retained *Sakura*. Many of the *bunkajin* who had been drafted into the original Propaganda Squad, including Jimbo and Ibuse, returned to Japan around this time. Although some remained in Syonan, it is unclear to what extent they continued to be involved in the Propaganda Department.

The military personnel in the new Propaganda Department may have been more aware of the Japanese government's official approach to propaganda as compared to the relatively independent *bunkajin* who were not professional propagandists. Koyama Eizō had published a book in 1942 describing how propaganda played a key role in the 'thought war' between Japan and the west, planting the 'belief in the masses that victory is assured' which 'makes it possible to endure hardships in the meantime' and inciting 'hatred of the enemy.'<sup>83</sup> While there is no evidence to suggest a direct causal link, it is conceivable that the Propaganda Department began to reshape *Sakura* to better match propaganda at home.

In the second half of *Sakura*, songs continued to be published in almost every issue, but had lost their prominent position on the cover and were no longer illustrated. Matsuoka identifies the songs in *Sakura*, which were largely adapted from music textbooks used in Japanese primary schools or traditional children's songs,<sup>84</sup> as a manifestation of 'Japanisation'

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<sup>82</sup> Information in this paragraph was provided by Matsuoka Masakazu, email message to the author, April 6, 2018.

<sup>83</sup> Kushner, *The Thought War*, 34.

<sup>84</sup> Matsuoka, "Media and Cultural Policy and Japanese Language Education," 89–90.

(*Nipponka*) and 'imperialisation' (*kōminka*) as educational goals.<sup>85</sup> Between issues 1 and 39, a total of 56 songs appeared, which were broadcast on the radio several times during the week.<sup>86</sup> The lyrics typically pertained to nature and the changing of seasons and, at least while Jimbo was in charge, only two songs were published that could be considered militaristic in nature: 'Soldiers,' which appeared in issues 1 and 11, and 'Good Friends of Greater East Asia' in issue 13. Even then, the latter only describes youths from the countries 'where lilacs/peonies/coconut trees bloom' (Manchuria, China, and Malaya respectively) getting along.<sup>87</sup>

'Soldiers' appeared twice accompanied by images of local children saluting the silhouettes of marching Japanese soldiers. This might suggest its popularity, or that the goal of endearing soldiers to children was important. The translated lyrics are as follows:<sup>88</sup>

Soldiers bearing guns  
 Keeping in step as they're marching along  
 Left-right, left-right, marching along  
 Soldiers sure are beautiful  
 I love soldiers

Soldiers riding horses  
 Kicking up sand as they come running  
 Clip-clop, clip-clop, as they come running  
 Soldier sure are valiant  
 I love soldiers

Manabe Noriko notes that the Ministry of Education's introduction of 'Soldiers' to the primary school song books between 1932 and 1933 was a 'harbinger of dramatic changes to come'; military marches (*gunka*) had 'proliferated the Japanese soundscape' by 1937 when the Second

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<sup>85</sup> Matsuoka Masakazu, "Nihon gunsei-ka shingapōru ni okeru kodomo-muke ongaku kōsaku," *Ajia kyōiku-shi kenkyū* 18 (2009): 49–51.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 55–57.

<sup>87</sup> *Sakura* Issue 13.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, Issue 11.



Sino-Japanese War began.<sup>89</sup> The Propaganda Department began to publish more overtly militaristic and nationalistic songs, as well as more war-oriented content in general, in the second half of *Sakura*. Out of a total of fourteen such songs—Soldiers is counted twice—ten appear in the second half of *Sakura* (see [Appendix B](#)). One song, the Imperial Rescript Proclamation Day Song, appears in issue 18; after Jimbo left, but before the hiatus.

Earlier songs had been successfully spread among local children but were mostly non-ideological in nature. Perhaps in recognition of this success, the intention could have been to generate the appearance of popular support for the associated ideologies with music as a vehicle. A good number of these songs, including children’s nursery rhymes, were imported directly from the Japanese music syllabus, but other songs had been specifically written or adapted for a Greater East Asia (*Daitōa*) audience instead of simply being repackaged Japanese children’s culture. Rather than positioning local children as simply aspiring *Nippon-jin*, these songs (and other content I will mention later) suggest more attention being paid to a more nuanced way of constructing local children’s identities as members of Greater East Asia (*Daitōa*). One example of a song specific to *Daitōa* is ‘Sports Meet for Asia’s Children’ which conjures up an image of camaraderie among Asians:<sup>90</sup>

〔一〕	〔二〕	〔三〕
1, 2, 3, go!	(4, 5, 6, all right!)	(7, 8, 9, 10!)
Together, let’s run	(fly)	(sing)
Don’t lose, let’s run	(fly)	(sing)
Asia’s children are all strong	(are all lively)	(are one)
We Asians are brothers	(hand in hand)	( <i>banzai!</i> )
Together, let’s run	(fly)	(sing)
Don’t lose, let’s run	(fly)	(sing)

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<sup>89</sup> Manabe Noriko, "Songs of Japanese Schoolchildren during World War II," in *The Oxford Handbook of Children’s Musical Cultures*, eds. Patricia Shehan Campbell and Trevor Wiggins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 98–99.

<sup>90</sup> *Sakura* Issue 34.

Another is the 'Greater East Asia Counting Song,' which was adapted from a Japanese counting song that had itself been co-opted for wartime rhetoric. In the last verse of the 1942 Japanese version of Counting Song, Japanese children sing 'those who bear the burden / of protecting Greater East Asia / are the children of righteous Japan; / they are we.'<sup>91</sup> The *Daitōa* version goes 'those who create / the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere / are us; let us / raise our voices together and sing.'<sup>92</sup> A third song, 'The Power of Asia,' makes reference to the youth, strength, and nobility of Asia.<sup>93</sup>

Beyond their use as tools for language learning or cultural education, the songs also took on a more practical function of priming its audience for war and military service. For example, the 'Divine Soldiers of the Sky Song' published in issue 22 came from a propaganda film about paratroopers which was shown to young local cadets at the Asia Rising Training School (*Kōa Kunrenjo*), a military training facility for future middle-rank staff members who were intended to assist Japanese officials.<sup>94</sup> It was intended to portray the noble Japanese self-sacrificial spirit, patriotism, and diligence, as well as to denounce the evil and weak British. The *Kunrenjo* cadets were inspired by the film and wrote that they had discovered the 'essence of the *Nippon seishin* [Japanese spirit]' and wanted to train as paratroopers and 'die for the defense of *Daitōa*.'<sup>95</sup>

One possible reason for the increasing emphasis on militarism was Japan's worsening war situation; the war effort did not proceed well for Japan and the Axis powers in 1943. The first issue of *Sakura* was published shortly after the Battle of Midway concluded in June 1942.

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<sup>91</sup> Manabe, "Songs of Japanese Schoolchildren," 103.

<sup>92</sup> *Sakura* Issue 36.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, Issue 38.

<sup>94</sup> Akashi, "Japanese Cultural Policy," 133.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

According to Jonathan Parshall and Anthony Tully, a series of operational and strategic blunders resulted in Japan's defeat and the destruction of its four finest aircraft carriers.<sup>96</sup> Prior to that, Japan had enjoyed a decidedly triumphant campaign in the first six months of World War II. In other words, since the time *Sakura* first began to be published, Japan's war situation had been in gradual decline. By the end of January 1943, the 6<sup>th</sup> Army of the Nazi *Wehrmacht*, whose bombing raids and successful advances early in the Battle of Stalingrad had been admiringly described in *Sakura* on 1 September 1942 (the battle had begun in August that year),<sup>97</sup> had been soundly defeated by the Soviet 64<sup>th</sup> Army and had surrendered.<sup>98</sup> Just over half a year later, Italy surrendered unconditionally to the Allies on 3 September 1943.<sup>99</sup> As Clancey notes, 'there was little official Japanese discussion about, let alone encouragement of, a political role for South-East Asians prior to 1943, when the war was beginning to turn and the military sought (too late and too hesitantly, it turned out) to cement relations with local majority elites in the face of an almost certain Allied counter-offensive.'<sup>100</sup> In other words, it became important to respect the political identity of locals and recognise the importance of their support only after Japan's military position came into doubt. Contrary to novelist Kaionji Ushigorō's conviction that 'the pride of Asian people in their own cultures' had to be 'destroyed completely,'<sup>101</sup> *Sakura* even ran *Sang Kancil* stories (Malay folktales) in mid-1943.<sup>102</sup>

This explains the starkly different subjectivities portrayed in the first and second halves of *Sakura*. As the war progressed, it became necessary not only to groom local children

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<sup>96</sup> Jonathan B. Parshall and Anthony P. Tully, *Shattered Sword: The Untold Story of the Battle of Midway* (Washington D. C.: Potomac Books, 2005), xx–xvi.

<sup>97</sup> *Sakura* Issue 9.

<sup>98</sup> Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 383.

<sup>99</sup> Howard McGaw Smyth, "The Armistice of Cassibile," *Military Affairs* 12, no. 1 (1948): 21.

<sup>100</sup> Clancey, "The Japanese Imperium and South-East Asia," 11.

<sup>101</sup> Akashi, "Japanese Cultural Policy," 124.

<sup>102</sup> *Sakura* Issues 28–29.

to become good future subjects of the empire, but also to garner their support for the military and their participation in the project of imperialisation. However, many instances of articles trying to encourage particular actions were hardly subtle; almost every issue in the second half of *Sakura* contained articles ending with an exhortation wrapped in repetitive ‘Let’s’ (*-mashō*) sentences. Some examples include ‘Let’s express our gratitude and respect for the soldiers killed in action who fought for our sakes’ (article titled ‘Yasukuni Shrine’<sup>103</sup>), ‘Let’s offer our thanks and respect from our hearts to the naval soldiers’ (article titled ‘Navy Remembrance Day’<sup>104</sup>), and ‘Keeping the vision of victory firmly in our hearts, let’s definitely destroy our enemies America and Britain this year’ (article about the second anniversary of the beginning of the war<sup>105</sup>). This approach makes many of these articles, to my mind, less effective pieces of propaganda in view of Kushner’s model and likely undermined the benefits of co-opting children’s subjectivities in the first place.

While the Japanese forces were battered overseas, the quality of life for the local population in Syonan was steadily declining as well. Runaway inflation resulted in the skyrocketing prices of basic commodities; eggs which sold for 3 cents apiece before the war rose to \$100 by the end of the Occupation.<sup>106</sup> Food was always in shortage, and strictly rationed in declining quantities; goods sold at shops were strictly price-controlled, but often of dubious quality.<sup>107</sup> The local population was highly encouraged to grow their own food in whatever land was available, and the malnutrition or starvation of children was common, sometimes resulting in child abandonment or death.<sup>108</sup> While poor developments overseas could be

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, Issue 23.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, Issue 25.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, Issue 38.

<sup>106</sup> Lee, *The Syonan Years*, 149.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 153–54.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 155–56.

covered up by news censorship, it was impossible to hide the situation facing the local population daily. *Sakura* thus reflected this reality; articles<sup>109</sup> and comics<sup>110</sup> were published throughout its run entreating children to help out with farming efforts, or depicting it as being part of everyday routine.<sup>111</sup> The *karuta* for 'no' in issue 12 even referred to farming as 'the cornerstone of the nation' — '*Nōgyō wa okuni no ishizue.*'

Kurakane's Mā-chan and Rē-chan made a comeback in issue 19 for a new series titled 'Trip to Malaya'; the pair admire a postcard of Cameron Highlands before going to find Kurakane's avatar and pester him to bring them on a holiday to Malaya. In the next few issues,<sup>112</sup> Kurakane takes the children north to Kuala Lumpur by train where they visit an agricultural *kunrenjo*. There, they meet a Malay man whom they initially mistake for Japanese until he greets them in Malay. They learn some farming tips from Malay youth who are said to be just like 'real soldiers,' and are seen holding armfuls of fresh produce. The soldiers supervising the Malay youth do not memorise their names, and address them by serial number. Afterwards, the children visit some ponds in Perak where they see a man fishing. After coming across a mother with her two children, and a bull and its calf, the children miss their parents and ask to go home. Kurakane declares their trip over. Kurakane's manga and illustrations stopped appearing in *Sakura* after issue 26, when he brings the 'Trip to Malaya' series to a somewhat abrupt end—the children never make it to Cameron Highlands. One might reasonably speculate that Kurakane himself went home to Japan around this time.

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<sup>109</sup> *Sakura* Issue 7.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, Issues 21 and 31.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, Issue 36.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, Issues 20, 21, 24, 26.

Three things are notable about this manga series: firstly, the fictional agricultural *kunrenjo* points to the real *Kōa Kunrenjo* mentioned earlier, one of the few unqualified successes of Japanising policy. Malay youth who had joined up were subject to strict discipline, akin to the treatment received by first-year enlistees in the Japanese military, and were forbidden from speaking English; they also actually learned agricultural skills.<sup>113</sup> The training was well-received by the cadets, who felt their *Nippon seishin* (Japanese spirit) had been strongly cultivated. Secondly, the fixation on food, from the admiration of *kunrenjo* farmers and their bountiful harvest to the Perak fisherman showed how the desired actions encouraged in *Sakura* had shifted from 'study Japanese language volitionally and enthusiastically' in earlier episodes of Mā-chan and Rē-chan to 'grow more food and admire soldiers.' A wider 'Grow more food' campaign was underway, with schoolchildren also being taught gardening in schools.<sup>114</sup> Thirdly, the children's sojourn up north foreshadowed an initiative to relieve the strain on resources in Syonan by moving some of its residents into the Endau (also called New Syonan) and Bahau farming settlements up in Johor and Negeri Sembilan respectively.<sup>115</sup> Whether intentional or not, Kurakane's manga may have served to pique the curiosity of at least some children towards other parts of Malaya, or encouraged them to join the *Kunrenjo*.

As mentioned in Part I, one aspect of the Total War Research Institute's war plan, *Establishment of East Asia*, included the nurturing of locals into viable physically fit future subjects. The encouragement of exercise and strength was present in the first half of *Sakura* (Uncle Japan's *karuta* for 'tsu' reads:<sup>116</sup> 'Grow up strong for the sake of the country' — 'Tsuyoku

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<sup>113</sup> Akashi, "Japanese Cultural Policy," 136–46.

<sup>114</sup> Lee, *The Syonan Years*, 163.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 166–67.

<sup>116</sup> *Sakura* Issue 11.

*sodatte, o-kuni no tame ni*), but became more prominent in the second half and gained an association with the admiration and emulation of Japanese soldiers. There are many instances, but the article that exemplifies this is 'We are Strong' in issue 35 ('*Bokura wa tsuyoi*'); again, using the plural first-person pronoun):

Weak bodies cannot win wars. Let's train our bodies and become strong!

I make a sandcastle at the beach. Then, I make balls of sand and, bit by bit, throw them with all my might.

All right, let's swim. If you become good at swimming, you can cross the sea and land in front of the enemy!

My body and back have been tanned black by the sun. My slender arm has grown swole; behold, my mighty hand!

My body has become strong. I am now a splendid soldier; though it will be tough, watch me destroy our enemies America and Britain!

The article is accompanied by illustrations of a Malay boy growing up to become a Japanese soldier.

Thus it can be seen that in the second half of *Sakura*, there came to be a greater attempt at creating propaganda from below through content that adopted the perspective and positionality of local children, co-opting them into a collective 'we.' The emphasis shifted away from a simplistic form of Japanisation that imagined children as future *Nippon-jin* to a cultivation of an 'Asian' identity. In terms of concrete objectives, the Propaganda Department tried to garner support for the Japanese military by positioning soldiers as admired role models and breeding hatred for Japan's enemies. This may be attributable to the worsening war situation overseas, and thus the need to manage perceptions in the occupied regions of the Japanese empire. In some instances, this included encouraging local children to aspire to become soldiers themselves. In response to the growing problem of food shortage in Syonan, *Sakura* was also used to encourage children to increase food production.

### III. War Games: Propaganda for Children at Home and Abroad

The fact that *Sakura* was distinctive to Malaya within Southeast Asia as a piece of child-oriented propaganda is likely a function of the Japanese government's original objectives for the region, which focused on the acquisition of resources and did not account for the local population or their futures, as Japanese imperial subjects or otherwise.<sup>117</sup> In other words, children's subjectivities were not a priority for most Japanese propagandists in the Southern Region. However, this did not mean that all Japanese propagandists neglected the role of children; as the role of *kamishibai* in Japan during the Fifteen Years War demonstrates, children and youth were very much important propaganda targets. In her comprehensive book on the topic, Sharalyn Orbaugh characterises *kamishibai* as a 'storytelling performance accompanied by illustrated cards' which originated as a form of street entertainment for children.<sup>118</sup> Once purely a medium for entertainment, *kamishibai* started to be deployed towards 'glorifying state projects' from 1932 onwards, becoming commonplace by 1938.<sup>119</sup>

A comparison of the objectives, functions, and forms of propaganda marketed at children in the form of *kamishibai* and *Sakura*, yields interesting insights about differences and similarities between the imagined roles of Japanese children and local children in occupied Southeast Asia. Pre-war *kamishibai* often told serialised stories, pandering to the tastes and preferences of its child audience,<sup>120</sup> and unscripted audience interaction was an important aspect of the performance.<sup>121</sup> Wartime *kamishibai*, however, were mostly self-contained stories,

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<sup>117</sup> Clancey, "The Japanese Imperium and South-East Asia," 10.

<sup>118</sup> Sharalyn Orbaugh, *Propaganda Performed: Kamishibai in Japan's Fifteen-Year War* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 2.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 52–54.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.



and were more strictly regulated, with performers being advised to adhere closely to the script and avoid inviting audience participation.<sup>122</sup> As Kushner suggests, Japan's wartime propaganda at home centred on the goal of 'unifying the battlefield with the home front.'<sup>123</sup> To that end, many *kamishibai* were 'highly affective packages,'<sup>124</sup> aimed at creating sympathy or identification with soldiers on the warfront. By Orbaugh's account, *kamishibai* enjoyed 'phenomenal success' in the 1930s,<sup>125</sup> and contributed to the successful selling of the war effort by playing several important roles in preparing civilians for air raids, encouraging food production, eliciting pathos for women who lost their husbands or sons, and providing entertainment and comfort to children.<sup>126</sup> Kushner suggests that children in Japan probably did not understand 'obscure *kanji*-laden slogans' like *kokutai* (national polity) and *hakkō ichiu* (universal brotherhood) which 'often perplexed adults too.'<sup>127</sup> Children were more receptive to colourful images, fantastic stories, and whimsical characters. He asserts that examining *kamishibai* as an example of propaganda that 'masqueraded as games and entertainment' provides a means of analysing how 'the future soldiers of Japan understood the value and significance of Japan's imperial war.'<sup>128</sup>

Although *Sakura* was often heavy-handed in its application of slogans and ideological concepts (with the second half being especially so), there are also many instances where it achieved similar outcomes to *kamishibai*. Alongside 'informative' articles, *Sakura* is filled with

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 95–96.

<sup>123</sup> Kushner, *The Thought War*, 6.

<sup>124</sup> Orbaugh, *Propaganda Performed*, 3.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 90–91.

<sup>127</sup> Barak Kushner, "Planes, Trains and Games: Selling Japan's War in Asia," in *Looking Modern: East Asian Visual Culture from Treaty Ports to World War II*, eds. Jennifer Purtle and Hans Bjarne Thomsen (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2009), 244–45.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

songs, cartoons, manga, stories, folktales, games, toys, and quizzes. When Jimbo created *Sakura*, he had intended it as a supplementary educational aid, but its functions outside the institutions of formal education are also important. Making its consumption compulsory would have doomed its effectiveness as propaganda; the act of reading *Sakura* was volitional (especially when it went on sale), so its content had to be made fun and appealing rather than coercive to secure its readership.

Like many popular pre-war *kamishibai*, *Sakura* featured stories and manga that were serialised across issues, incentivising the reader to continue reading. Its emphasis on visual content such as cartoons and photographs mirrored *kamishibai*'s focus on visual storytelling. Although they were static and curated, the publication of local submissions also encouraged a kind of audience participation, and allowed the reader to feel connected with the creation of *Sakura*. Stories about children flying airplanes<sup>129</sup> or embarking on submarine adventures<sup>130</sup> and articles like 'We are Strong' (as I described toward the end of Part II) are similar in many ways to *kamishibai* that attempted to prime young Japanese children for military aspirations and the 'inevitable battles they would face at home or abroad,'<sup>131</sup> Saitō Shigeru's cut-and-fold models of planes, ships, tanks, and scenes of naval battles (see [Appendix C](#)) also provided children with the necessary props for play-acting war.<sup>132</sup> Just as food and farming were recurring themes in many *kamishibai*,<sup>133</sup> *Sakura* constantly encouraged its reader to increase food production. *Kamishibai* was not restricted to Japan, but 'proliferated in the colonies' such

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<sup>129</sup> *Sakura* 34.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>131</sup> Kushner, "Planes, Trains and Games."

<sup>132</sup> *Sakura* Issues 23, 26, 28, 38.

<sup>133</sup> Orbaugh, *Propaganda Performed*, 90.

as Taiwan and Manchuria,<sup>134</sup> Java,<sup>135</sup> and even Syonan.<sup>136</sup> In December 1943, the Propaganda Department sponsored a *kamishibai* contest, inviting locals to submit *kamishibai* creations that dealt with 'defence, anti-espionage or increased production.'<sup>137</sup> All this suggests that many propaganda aims and concerns of Japan's home front were similar to those in occupied Malaya. Children in both cases were mobilized towards productive ends as present workers and future soldiers.

One significant issue that Japan did not face at home is the question of race, which thus did not feature in any capacity in Japan's *kamishibai*. The content of *Sakura* and the associated cultural policies that were implemented by the *gunseikambu* were partly innovations of their own, built out of their vague understandings of sometimes ill-defined ideologies like 'Asia for Asians' and 'Co-Prosperity.' These interpretations vied for influence with the often contradictory notion of hegemonic Japanese racial superiority and homogeneity which had been moulded by 19<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals to 'overcome deep regional, class and caste divisions,'<sup>138</sup> as Clancey puts it. The Japanese occupiers, therefore, did not come to Southeast Asia with a nuanced understanding of its rich racial and cultural diversity.

*Sakura's* treatment of race against the backdrop of egalitarian pan-Asian ideals and the ways policy was enforced reveal some inherent conceptual contradictions. The Japanese saw pre-existing racial hierarchies in Southeast Asia and, in attempting to eradicate them, instead

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<sup>134</sup> Kushner, "Planes, Trains and Games," 258.

<sup>135</sup> Kurasawa Aika, "Films as Propaganda Media on Java under the Japanese, 1942-45," in *Japanese Cultural Policies in Southeast Asia during World War 2*, ed. Grant K. Goodman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 36.

<sup>136</sup> "Mobile Kamishibai Unit To Boost Food Production," *Syonan Shimbun*, May 17, 1944.

<sup>137</sup> "Senden-bu Sponsors Kamishibai Contest," *Syonan Shimbun*, December 28, 1943.

<sup>138</sup> Clancey, "The Japanese Imperium and South-East Asia," 7.

reinforced the boundaries of difference between Malays, Indians, and Chinese people. An article in the *Syonan Shimbun* extolling the virtues of Universal Brotherhood (a concept also called 'the world under one roof,' or *hakkō ichiu*) describes the Malays as 'the most neglected and the most backward of all the races of Malayans' at the time of the Fall of Singapore.<sup>139</sup> As such, the Malays needed 'the help and co-operation of all other races in Malaya' in order to achieve the ideal of *hakkō ichiu*: 'All the peoples of Malaya, irrespective of their races or creeds, are now one people—Malayans, and under the aegis of *Nippon*, can move forward together.'<sup>140</sup> In reality, the Japanese had treated each racial group very differently. Europeans and Eurasians who were in Singapore when it fell, including thousands of civilians, were largely interned in prisoner of war (POW) camps immediately.<sup>141</sup>

The Chinese, even those who admitted to growing enamoured with concepts like *Nippon seishin* (Japanese spirit), *gambari seishin* (enduring spirit) and 'Asia for Asians,'<sup>142</sup> were terrorised by the massacre of tens of thousands of civilians (known in Chinese as Sook Ching—'purge and cleansing,') mostly Chinese men, in the early weeks of the Occupation.<sup>143</sup> The death toll has been estimated to be between 20,000 and 50,000.<sup>144</sup> Blackburn and Hack characterise this as a result of the view that the war in Malaya was in some ways a 'continuation of the war against China,'<sup>145</sup> where some prominent commanders like Watanabe had previously served.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> "Hakko Itiu For Malayans," *Syonan Shimbun*, November 5, 1942.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore*, 54.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 136–40.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 40, 139.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>146</sup> Akashi, "Colonel Watanabe Wataru," 33.

Chinese matters in several early issues of *Sakura* were generally treated insensitively. One news article described the Japanese forces that invaded and occupied China as ‘the strongest soldiers in the world’ who are ‘fighting for justice.’<sup>147</sup> Another article commemorated the ‘China Incident’ (also known as the Marco Polo Bridge Incident) of 1937, which started the Second Sino-Japanese War, which was cheerfully retold as one of Japan’s attempts to ‘save’ China from the ‘evil’ Chiang Kai-shek and the influence of Britain and America.<sup>148</sup> Chiang, who was admired by local Chinese children, was disparaged as a tool of the West on more than one occasion.<sup>149</sup>

Indians were generally treated better. Japan had been supporting the Indian Independence League and the Indian Nationalist Army (INA), which was composed of former British Indian Army soldiers captured as POWs in Malaya and Singapore, in their attempt to wrestle power away from the British colonisers.<sup>150</sup> In 1943, Subhas Chandra Bose was brought to Singapore to assume command of the INA, and his celebrity was fully taken advantage of in his speech at the Cathay Building to stoke nationalism and anti-Westernism in the Indian locals in the crowd.<sup>151</sup> *Sakura* made several mentions of Indian independence, emphasising the righteous struggle to liberate India from British control.<sup>152</sup> One political cartoon showed India breaking free and casting off the greedy British, with a little help from a Japanese blade:

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<sup>147</sup> *Sakura* Issue 2.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, Issue 3.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, Issue 4.

<sup>150</sup> Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore*, 174.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>152</sup> *Sakura* Issue 8.

アジヤ十オクミンゾクノ  
イキチオスツテキタ 悪魔

米・英オ亡サズシテ  
東亞ノ生存ワナイ

カナシンブン  
サクラ

センデンプ  
ハッコウ

このひょうごわ、一あめり  
か・いきりす「おほろぼす  
まで、どこどこまでもた  
たかいぬく、けっしん  
あわわしたものです。

ナガイナガイ、アイダ、アジヤ  
十オクノ、ミンゾクガ、「セカ  
イオワガモノ」ニシヨウトス  
ル、アメリカ・イギリスノ  
メ、ドンナニシイタゲクルシ  
メラレテ、キタカワ、イマサラ  
ユウマデモ、アリマセン。

カレラワ、ジブンタチダケガ  
一バン、エライニンゲンデ、ア  
ジアジンオ、マルデ「ドレイ  
ノ、ヨウニ、カンガエ、ケイ  
ツ、シテオッタノデス。タトエ  
バ、コノ、マライデモ、イギリ  
スジン、ダケガ、ツカッテ、

ナガイナガイ、アイダ、アジヤ  
十オクノ、ミンゾクガ、「セカ  
イオワガモノ」ニシヨウトス  
ル、アメリカ・イギリスノ  
メ、ドンナニシイタゲクルシ  
メラレテ、キタカワ、イマサラ  
ユウマデモ、アリマセン。

ナガイナガイ、アイダ、アジヤ  
十オクノ、ミンゾクガ、「セカ  
イオワガモノ」ニシヨウトス  
ル、アメリカ・イギリスノ  
メ、ドンナニシイタゲクルシ  
メラレテ、キタカワ、イマサラ  
ユウマデモ、アリマセン。

Figure 5. Political cartoon from *Sakura* issue 29. Article titled 'The devils who sucked the lifeblood of a billion Asians: East Asia cannot survive without the destruction of Britain and America.'

Malays were seen as the indigenous people, and though perceived as being 'the most backward of all the races of Malayans,'<sup>153</sup> they were shown considerable favouritism. Malay schools were the first to be reopened on 12 April 1942, followed by Indian schools on 15 April, and lastly Chinese schools on 27 April.<sup>154</sup> Chinese schools had originally been ordered to be abolished entirely, and were only reopened after mounting pressure on the municipal government.<sup>155</sup> By June 1943, only 34 out of 1,566 private Chinese schools that had operated

<sup>153</sup> "Hakko Itiu For Malayans," *Syonan Shimbun*, November 5, 1942.

<sup>154</sup> *The Good Citizen's Guide*, (Syonan: The Syonan Shimbun, 1943), 52, 57, 66.

<sup>155</sup> Harold E. Wilson, *Social Engineering in Singapore: Educational Policies and Social Change 1819–1972* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1978), 90–92.



before the war had been allowed to reopen, much lower than percentage of private Indian schools at 620 out of 888.<sup>156</sup>

Many Malay children 'took readily to Japanese education,' according to Blackburn and Hack.<sup>157</sup> Accordingly, most of the depictions of 'locals' in *Sakura* tended to feature Malay people (wearing *songkok* caps or *kebaya*). Some instances of Indian people appeared as well (with turbans as a racial marker), but there were disproportionately few depictions of Chinese people. When they did appear, it was usually as part of a politically correct assembly of various races.

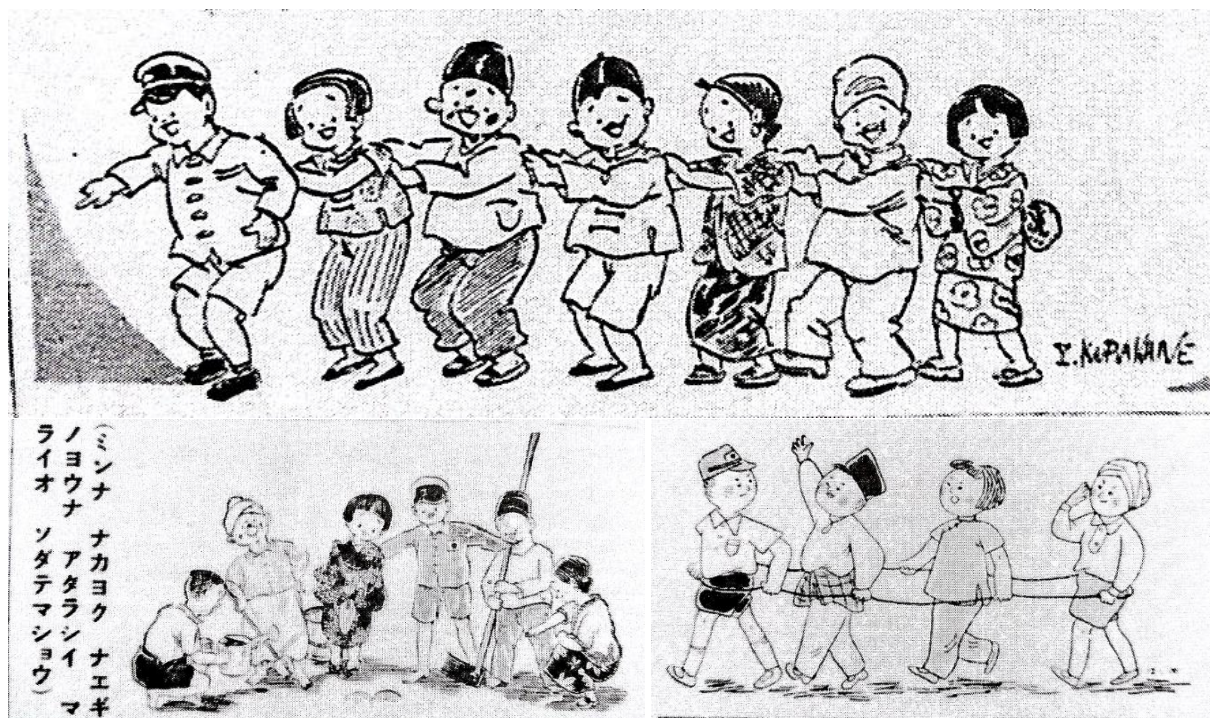


Figure 6. Illustrations showing the various races getting along. See also: cover of issue 18 in [Figure 4](#). (Top) Accompaniment to lyrics of *Good Friends of Greater East Asia*, issue 13. (Bottom left) Accompaniment to 'New Malaya and Our Resolution,' issue 19. (Bottom right) Accompaniment to 'Playing trains: Fun games,' issue 33.

As Clancey has argued, the assimilation of Koreans into a 'special, lower caste' of Japanese in occupied Korea bore a resemblance to the attempt to assimilate Malays in

<sup>156</sup> Akashi, "Education and Indoctrination Policy in Malaya and Singapore," 5.

<sup>157</sup> Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore*, 207.

Southeast Asia; the claim that ‘Koreans and Japanese (or Malays and Japanese) were actually the same “race” [...] were seen as better facilitating outright annexation of Korea (or Malaya or the East Indies) and the suppression of indigenous nationalist feeling.’<sup>158</sup>

In addition to their strong participation in the *Kunrenjo* training school and the *Nantokusei* special exchange programme, Malays also composed the overwhelming majority in paramilitary volunteer forces such as the *Heiho* (Auxiliary Forces), *Giyūgun* (Volunteer Army), and *Giyūtai* (Volunteer Corps) which were formed in mid-to-late 1943.<sup>159</sup> A memorandum from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dated 20 February 1945, revealed that the *gunseikambu* had mistakenly considered Malays to be the ‘main race in Malaya’ by population in the early stages of the Occupation and had implemented policies ‘emphasizing the position of Malays.’<sup>160</sup> One article in *Sakura* titled ‘Playing trains: Fun games’ subtly reflected this ‘superior’ status of Malays over Chinese and Indians. Alongside an image of four children (including one Japanese boy) play-acting as a train (see [Figure 6](#), bottom right), the Malay boy, who is standing behind the Japanese boy, says ‘You’ll be the driver, I’ll be the conductor. The other two will be passengers’; the article implies that Malays should take responsibility for keeping Chinese and Indians in check, and that under the stewardship of the Japanese, Malaya would enjoy a smooth ride to progress (‘The driver is capable, the train is fast’).<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Clancey, "The Japanese Imperium and South-East Asia," 16.

<sup>159</sup> Cheah Boon Kheng, "The Social Impact of the Japanese Occupation of Malaya (1942–1925)," in *Southeast Asia Under Japanese Occupation*, ed. Alfred W. McCoy (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1980), 104.

<sup>160</sup> Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star Over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict During and After the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941–46*, 4th ed. (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), 302.

<sup>161</sup> *Sakura* Issue 33.



Japan's propaganda goals for children in the occupied regions were fundamentally similar to those back home, but the challenges facing propagandists varied. In particular, the complex racial makeup of Malaya led to different strategies of dealing with individual races. While trying to create an egalitarian pan-Asian society in Malaya, Japan only managed to entrench racial divisions even further. This led to post-war racial clashes, especially between anti-Japanese Chinese and pro-Japanese Malays.<sup>162</sup> This is perhaps emblematic of its greatest failure in both its administration and propaganda efforts in Malaya.

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<sup>162</sup> Lee, *The Syonan Years*, 287, 302.

## Conclusion

Japanese imperial propaganda, whether at home or abroad, was fundamentally used to create and mould particular social identities in the target population. When the 25<sup>th</sup> Army captured Singapore, they sought to Japanese it not only by making formal changes to its systems, institutions, and name but also by transforming the minds of the people under their control. For military leaders like Yamashita and Watanabe, as well as conscripted literati like Jimbo and Nakajima, this meant implementing a strong Japanese language policy. *Sakura* was one such tool used to educate the local children in both Japanese language and cultural knowledge. The use of music and visually attractive illustrations in *Sakura* created a pleasant aesthetic and made it a relatively successful example of Kushner's definition of effective propaganda.

However, as Japan's success in the war began to falter, a strategy of manipulating children's subjectivities emerged in the second half of *Sakura*, with propagandists attempting to instil in local children a sense of collective will. They started to encourage a pan-Asian identification, with more content catered specifically to the local context as compared to previous efforts which were mostly direct importations of Japanese children's culture. They also began to view local children, especially Malay boys, as potentially useful future soldiers, and thus increasingly encouraged physical fitness as a virtue. However, more blatant applications of propaganda slogans and imperialist ideology may have made the second half less effective overall.

Many similarities exist between *Sakura* and the dominant form of child-oriented propaganda in Japan, *kamishibai*. However, the prevailing puzzle of racial subjectivities, which

was not a major concern in the homeland, presented a difficulty for Japanese propagandists in Malaya.

In this thesis, I have identified the major threads of propaganda discourse that ran through *Sakura*, and mapped them to changes in Japan's war situation between 1942 and 1943. With the benefit of hindsight, we know that Japan's hold over the 'Southern Region' would prove to be relatively short-lived, and what few strides they had made in propagating cultural indoctrination would be reverted almost immediately following Japan's defeat and the return of the British. By all accounts, the project of replacing the local culture with Japan's own hegemonic ideals and values was 'implemented too hastily and too crudely and clumsily' — as Akashi put it—and ultimately proved to be a failure.<sup>163</sup>

Japanese propagandists had grand visions for the children of Southeast Asia. While some were undoubtedly cynical executors of the *gunseikambu's* orders, others put genuine care into their mission of moulding Asian children into perfect subjects of Japan, fluent in its language and knowledgeable about its culture. If they only knew that many Singapore youths would one day be enthusiastic consumers of Japanese manga, animation, and popular music, one wonders if those of them who had harboured a passion for Japanese culture and desired to promote it—irrespective of their imperialist motivations—would have been proud.

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<sup>163</sup> Akashi, "Japanese Cultural Policy," 147.







Soldiers, rarely seen in the first half of *Sakura*, tended to be portrayed as friendly or admirable.

(Left) Uncle Japan's karuta for 'su': 'Advancing Japan protects Asia!' — 'Susumu Nippon Ajia o mamoru.'<sup>164</sup>

(Middle) Karuta for 'se': 'The Captain's Matroos pipe.' — 'Senchō-san no madorusu paipu.'<sup>165</sup>

(Right) Karuta for 'he': 'The soldiers are coming along.' — 'Heitai-san ga yattokuru.'<sup>166</sup>



Kurakane sometimes 'borrowed' inspiration from E. H. Shepard's illustrations in *Winnie-the-Pooh* books by A. A. Milne (Bottom) to create a whimsical atmosphere. Note the kangaroo, piglet, bear, and rabbit characters.

(Top left) Easy News illustration from issue 4. (Top right) Easy News illustration from issue 15.

<sup>164</sup> *Sakura* Issue 11.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, Issue 12.

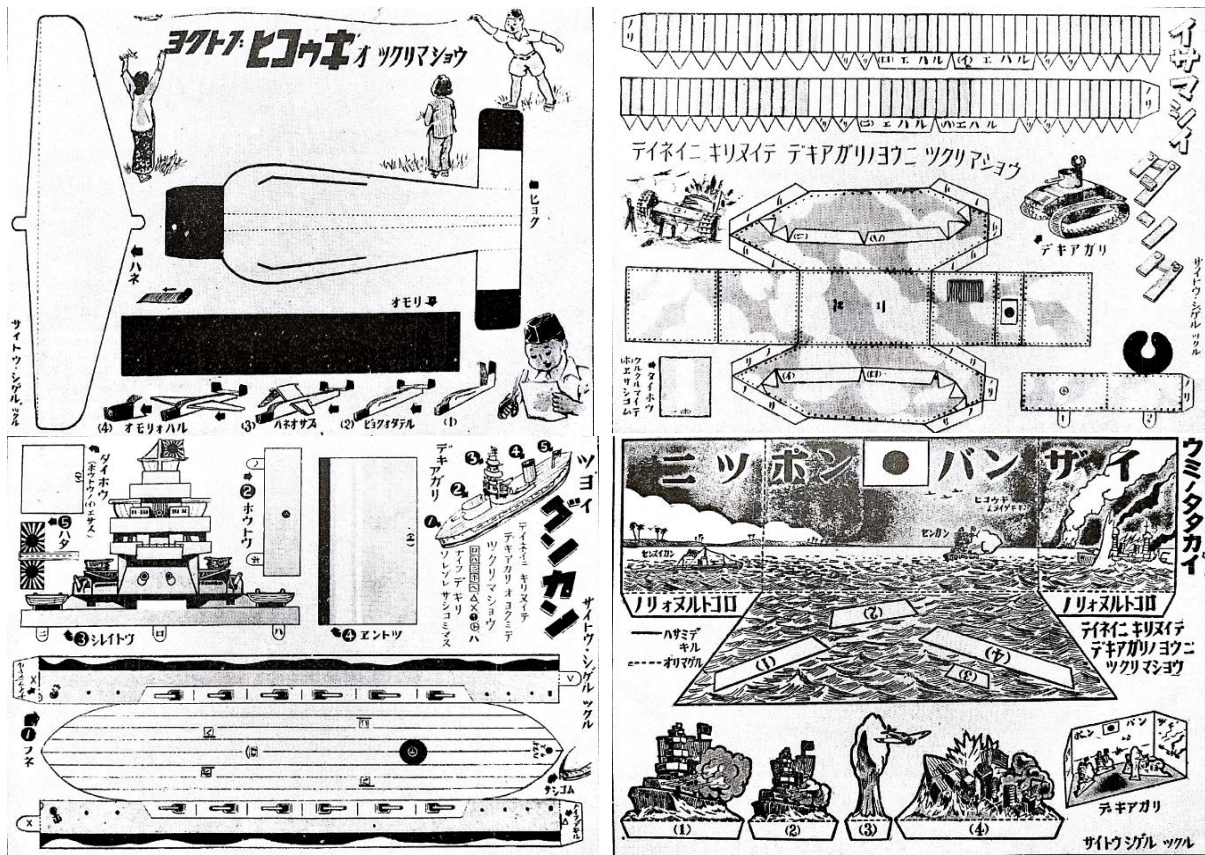
## Appendix B

Date	Iss.	Song Title	Date	Iss.	Song Title
10.6.42	1	<b>Soldiers</b>	27.3.43	22	<b>Divine Soldiers of the Sky Song</b>
20.6.42	2	The Sea	15.4.43	24	<b>Emperor's Festival Song</b>
1.7.42	3	The Moon	1.5.43	25	<b>The Battle of Tsushima Song</b>
11.7.42	4	My Doll	1.5.43	25	<b>Flower of Patriotism Song</b>
11.7.42	4	Rain	15.5.43	26	Momotarō's Song
21.7.42	5	Mt. Fuji	15.5.43	26	Water Wheel
1.8.42	6	Snail	1.6.43	27	The Sun Rises
1.8.42	6	Sunset Glow	1.6.43	27	Goldfish
11.8.42	7	Sparrow Dance	15.6.43	28	Mother Bird, Baby Bird
21.8.42	8	Rabbit's Dance	15.6.43	28	The Sea
21.8.42	8	That Town, This Town	1.7.43	29	Cool Evening
1.9.42	9	A Ship 'Chappuron'	1.7.43	29	Tanabata Song
21.9.42	11	<b>Soldiers</b>	15.7.43	30	Mountain King
21.9.42	11	Mr Moon, You...	15.7.43	30	Rainfall
1.10.42	12	Tea Harvest	1.8.43	31	That Wind...
1.10.42	12	Fishing Boat	1.8.43	31	I am a Child of the Sea
11.10.42	13	Dog	15.8.43	32	Dairy Farm Morning
11.10.42	13	<b>Good Friends of Greater East Asia</b>	15.8.43	32	<b>Playing Soldiers</b>
21.10.42	14	Train	1.9.43	33	Setting Sun
21.10.42	14	Baby Chick Soldiers	1.9.43	33	Lotus Pond
21.10.42	14	Scarab Beetle	15.9.43	34	<b>Sports Meet for Asia's Children</b>
		Jimbo's departure	15.9.43	34	Fruitful Autumn
11.11.42	16	Baby Chicks	1.10.43	35	Tanuki Belly-Drumming at Shōjō Temple
11.11.42	16	The Wind's Tale	1.10.43	35	Plover Bird
21.11.42	17	Pond Carp	15.10.43	36	Moon Rabbit
8.12.42	18	<b>Imperial Rescript Proclamation Day Song</b>	15.10.43	36	<b>Greater East Asia Counting Song</b>
		Hiatus; <i>sendenbu</i> takes over publication	1.12.43	38	<b>The Power of Asia</b>
15.2.43	19	<b>National Foundation Day Song</b>	15.12.43	39	New Year Song
1.3.43	20	Hinamatsuri Song	15.4.45	X	Rain in the Four Seasons
15.3.43	21	<b>Hinomaru Flag-Raising Song</b>	15.4.45	X	Baby Chicks

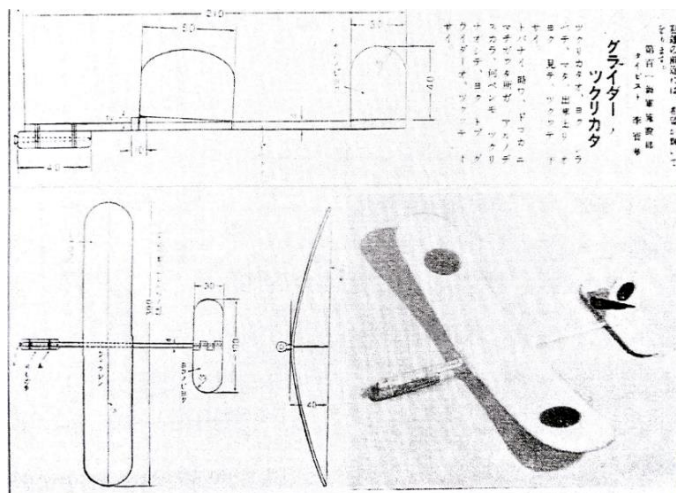
An overview of the music that was published in *Sakura*. Titles in bold reflect songs with lyrics that pertain to militarism or Japanese imperial nationalism.



Appendix C



Saitō Shigeru's papercraft models of war technologies.  
 (Top left) 'Let's make an airplane that flies well'<sup>167</sup>  
 (Top right) 'Gallant Tank'<sup>168</sup>  
 (Bottom left) 'Strong Battleship'<sup>169</sup>  
 (Bottom right) 'Japan Banzai! Naval Battle'<sup>170</sup>



Unknown artist. Plans for a glider plane made from cardboard and a pen.<sup>171</sup>

167 Ibid., Issue 23.  
 168 Ibid., Issue 26.  
 169 Ibid., Issue 28.  
 170 Ibid., Issue 38.  
 171 Ibid., Issue 39.

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