

Japan's Carnival War

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

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Mass Culture on the Home Front, 1937–1945

Benjamin Uchiyama

University of Southern California



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Contents

	<i>List of Figures</i>	page vii
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	x
	Introduction	1
	The Circus Freak	1
	Writing a History of Total War	5
	Cultural Practice versus Cultural Ideology	14
	The Idea of Carnival	16
	Carnival War	17
	The Five Kings of Carnival War	20
1	The Reporter	23
	The Censor Becomes the “Effeminate Bookworm”	27
	The Reporter Becomes the “War Correspondent”	31
	The Thrills of Total War and the Crowning of the “Thrill Hunter”	36
	The Speed of Total War	40
	Thrills and Kills	45
	“’Tis the Season for the Fall of Nanjing!”	54
	Wild Dancing in Ginza	61
	The Decrowning of the “Thrill Hunter”	62
2	The Munitions Worker	67
	Early Wartime Mobilization and Its Consequences	70
	The Profile of the Munitions Worker	77
	The Munitions Worker in Disguise	81
	The Munitions Worker Becomes the Industrial Warrior	89
	Conclusion	101
3	The Soldier	105
	The Soldier Speeds Up	106
	The Military God Becomes a Sentimental Soldier	109
	The “Humanity” of the Wakizaka Unit	117
	“Heartfelt Comforts” from the Home Front	121
	The “Comforts” of the Warfront	131
	The Crowning of the Returned Soldier	136
	The Returned Soldier as Soldier-Freak	144
	The Rage of the Returned Soldier	147

vi	Contents	
	The Sorrow of the Returned Soldier	150
	The Guardians of the Returned Soldier	152
	Decrowning the Soldier	160
4	The Movie Star	162
	Controlling the Movie Star: The Road to the Film Law	165
	The Film Law and the Registration System	170
	The Movie Star in the New Film Order	176
	The Case of Mito Mitsuko	178
	The Limits of Mobilizing Movie Stars	181
	Conclusion	198
5	The Youth Aviator	202
	The Tragic Kamikaze Pilot	204
	The Foundations of Aviation Culture	207
	The Crowning of the Youth Aviator	209
	The Youth Aviator as Consumer-Fan	225
	The Youth Aviator Becomes the Kamikaze Pilot	240
	The Kamikaze Pilot Listened to Jazz Before Killing Americans	249
	Conclusion	253
	Gendering Carnival War	255
	Global Echoes of Carnival War	258
	The Circus Freak Next to the Policeman	261
	<i>Bibliography</i>	263
	<i>Index</i>	277

Figures

- | | | |
|-----|---|---------|
| 1.1 | Two war correspondents as depicted in Tōhō Theater's December 1937 "reportage drama" (<i>repo dorama</i>), "Shanghai." Source: "Yasumi Toshio saku, repo dorama Shanhai: Tōhō gekijō shiwasu kōgyō," <i>Sunday Mainichi</i> (December 12, 1937): 35. | page 35 |
| 1.2 | "Erotic Grotesque: Notes on Chinese Lewdness." Source: Inoue Kōbai, "Ero guro: Shina kōshoku sōshi," <i>Chūō Kōron</i> (October 1937): 350. Courtesy of Chūō Kōronsha. | 50 |
| 1.3 | Final installment of the "Hundred Man Killing Contest." Source: "Hyakunin giri 'chō kiroku'," <i>Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun</i> (December 13, 1937). | 60 |
| 1.4 | "Warfront Romance: The Hundred Man Killing Sublieutenants." Source: Kobayashi Hidetsune (art), Satō Hachirō (text), "Shi gashū zoku: Sensen romansu," <i>Fujin Kurabu</i> (February 1938): 33. | 65 |
| 2.1 | The Factory Youth. Source: Cover, <i>Shōnen Kurabu</i> (March 1940). | 71 |
| 2.2 | Yanagiya pomade advertisement. Source: <i>Asahi Shinbun</i> (January 6, 1943). Courtesy of Yanagiya Honten. | 80 |
| 2.3 | Ginza Yutaka Barbershop advertisement. Source: <i>Sutā: Eiga to Rebyū</i> (August 1939, <i>gejungō</i>). Courtesy of Waseda University Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum. | 88 |
| 2.4 | A labor recruitment poster created by the Welfare Ministry and the Employment Association from the early 1940s. The slogan, alluding to the idealized industrial warrior, reads, "Labor Mobilization: Go! To the warfront of the home front. To heavy industry." Courtesy of Nagano Prefecture, Shimoina District, Achi Village Office, Community Activities Promotion Section. | 91 |
| 2.5 | Yanagiya pomade advertisement. Source: <i>Asahi Shinbun</i> (February 8, 1944). Courtesy of Yanagiya Honten. | 100 |

viii List of Figures

- 2.6 The Munitions Worker. Source: Hayase Rōji (artist), in Katō Etsurō, ed., *Zōsan manga shū: Zen Nippon seinen mangaka kyōkai daiichi sakuhin shū* (Tokyo: Shinkigensha, 1944), 23. 102
- 2.7 The Industrial Warrior. Source: Miyoshi Noboru (artist), in Katō Etsurō, ed., *Zōsan manga shū: Zen Nippon seinen mangaka kyōkai daiichi sakuhin shū* (Tokyo: Shinkigensha, 1944), 32. 103
- 3.1 Okada Sōji, “Hōdanka no Shanhai: Sento Shanhai tsūshin, dai isshin,” *Kaizō* (October 1937): 372. Courtesy of the University of Tokyo Economics Library. 110
- 3.2 “The Legend of Tank Commander Nishizumi,” starring Uehara Ken. Source: “Nishizumi senshachō den,” *Kinema Junpō* 732 (November 1, 1940): n.p. Courtesy of Waseda University Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum. 115
- 3.3 The cover of the 1939 Army Ministry pamphlet, “For the Sake of the Glorious Returned Soldiers” (*kagayaku kikanhei no tame ni*). Source: Rikugunshō jōhōbu, ed., *Kagayaku kikanhei no tame ni* (Tokyo: Rikugunshō Jōhōbu, 1939). Courtesy of the National Diet Library. 137
- 3.4 Self-portraits by Japanese soldiers stationed in South China, sent to *Heitai* magazine, 1939. Source: “Shijō hyōshi e tenrankai,” *Heitai* 7 (August 20, 1939). Courtesy of Tōsui Shobō. 155
- 3.5 Self-portraits by Japanese soldiers stationed in South China, sent to *Heitai* magazine, 1939. Source: “Shijō hyōshi e tenrankai,” *Heitai* 7 (August 20, 1939). Courtesy of Tōsui Shobō. 156
- 4.1 Before and after photos of the “Old Order” and the “New Order” for movies. Source: “Satsueijo no shintaisei,” *Eiga no Tomo* (March 1941): n.p. Courtesy of Waseda University Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum. 177
- 4.2 Mito Mitsuko. Source: advertisement, *Eiga no Tomo* (September 1941): n.p. Courtesy of Waseda University Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum. 185
- 4.3 A visit to a Kyoto acting school run by Nikkatsu, Shinkō, and Shōchiku studios. The school became one of the prototypes for a national Japan Film School. Source: “Haiyū gakkō wo tazunete,” *Eiga no Tomo* (August 1941): n.p. Courtesy of Waseda University Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum. 194
- 5.1 Movie still from “You’re the Next Wild Eagle,” 1944. Source: “Kimi koso, tsugi no arawashi da,” *Shin Eiga* (September 1944): n.p. Courtesy of Waseda University Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum. 203

List of Figures	ix
5.2 “Flight Uniform of Navy Aviators.” Source: “Hikōshi no fukusō no hanashi 2,” <i>Kōkū Shōnen</i> (November 1942): 83.	217
5.3 “Latest Planes of the American Enemy.” Source: “Teki Amerika no saishin eiki,” <i>Kōkū Shōnen</i> (August 1943): n.p.	228
5.4 Aviation badges and model “enemy planes.” Source: advertisement, <i>Kōkū Shōnen</i> (November 1943): n.p.	231
5.5 Cover of <i>Mokei</i> , March 1943. Courtesy of Japan Aeronautic Association Aviation Library.	233
5.6 “Dreams of Young Engineers.” Source: “Shōnen gishi no yume,” <i>Kōkū Shōnen</i> (July 1943): 66–67.	236
5.7 Captain Seki, leader of one of the first kamikaze units, is decked out in full aviator regalia complete with chronograph watch, fur-lined cap, and goggles resting on forehead. Source: <i>Shashin Shūhō</i> 347 (November 15, 1944): cover. Courtesy of the National Archives of Japan.	244
5.8 The kamikaze pilot on the cover of <i>Asahi Gurafu</i> (June 25, 1945). Courtesy of University of Tokyo, Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies Library.	249

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