JAPANESE PERFORMATIVE SCHOOLGIRLHOOD DURING WORLD WAR II

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INTRODUCTION

In 1943, during World War II, a boarding school for Manchurian girls from Northeast Asia, called Joran Juku 如蘭塾, opened in Takeo City, Saga Prefecture, Japan. The school was the first of its kind in Japan. It was founded by Nonaka Chuta 野中忠太 (1986–1947), a businessman who had made his fortune in Manchuria, to promote goodwill between Japan and Manchukuo, the Japanese puppet state of Manchuria established in 1932. The school was designed for middle-class girls from Manchukuo to learn to be respectable female Japanese subjects during one year of boarding school and one year of staying in a Japanese home. It was a short-lived educational institution that operated only for two years with a small number of students. The school disappeared into the shadows of history when Japan lost Manchuria in 1945, following the Soviet invasion of Manchuria two days after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6th and Japan's subsequent defeat in the Second World War.

This little-known school warrants critical attention, not because it tried to inculcate Japanese womanhood in the Manchurian girls by teaching them their gender roles of being "good wives and wise mothers," but because it allowed them while attending school to wear modern girls' school uniforms specifically designed for Joran Juku—not kimono or *monpe* (wartime pants for women) as we might typically assume—thereby allowing them to experience Japanese schoolgirlhood. The school uniform consisted of a dark blue jumper dress with a pleated skirt, ties, and a classic-collared blouse. Theoretically, this newly designed school uniform was against the national wartime policy, which prescribed what girls should wear at school, such as the *hyōjun fuku* 標準服 or the functional *monpe* made by reusing or recycling kimonos owing to wartime material shortages and the mobilization of students for production labor during the war.[2]

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[2] The standard uniform was established by the Ministry of Education in 1941. The uniform was designed with a small round collar instead of a sailor collar and a skirt without folds instead of a skirt with folds, with a view to saving cloth. The Ministry of Education notified girls' schools to use this design for new uniforms.

I argue that, despite or because of the war, a transnational modern schoolgirlhood emerged from the interactions of the Manchurian students and girls' school uniform fashions. This transnational modern schoolgirlhood was a crucial factor in the assimilation of the Manchu girls across geographical boundaries into the Empire of Japan as Japanese schoolgirls. Through the analysis of the school-related materials in the Seikō Scholarship Society (the successor educational association of *Joran Juku* in Saga Prefecture) and interviews with the people involved, I show that in the end, Japanese schoolgirlhood can be redefined as a performative rather than a status-based identity.

HISTORY OF BOTTOMS: WHAT SHOULD SCHOOLGIRLS WEAR?

In the prewar Japanese schoolgirl uniforms, the garment worn below the waist changed four times. Schoolgirls first wore men's *hakama*, then women's hakama, and then Western pleated skirts. Finally, during the war, they wore *monpe*, the war-time work pants adapted from the garments used by peasant women.

This shift was informed and determined by the nation's educational ideologies and strategies centered on the schoolgirl's female body and the state's changing expectations of that body. With the establishment of girls' schools in Japan in the early 1870s, schoolgirls were required to commute to school every day. In particular, the act of walking in public to and from school brought about a change in the way the schoolgirls dressed. In the early days of girls' high schools, like other women in society, the students wore kimonos. However, kimonos make walking difficult. When walking with a large stride, the inside of the leg was visible, disturbing public order and morals.[3] Hence, the male *hakama* or loose-fitting trousers, which had separate sections for each leg, were adopted as school uniforms for female students.[4] Schoolgirls began to walk in hakama, which was traditionally the male bottom-wear worn by the samurai. Wearing a man's hakama was a deviation from gender norms and sometimes the subject of satire, although it functioned to protect girls' legs from the public gaze.

This choice of school uniforms for girls became a national issue in 1899, with the enactment of the Women's School Ordinance, an order that

[3] Yokokawa Kimiko, "Josei to hakama 1: otoko-bakama no juyō [Women and Hakama 1: How accepted Hakama-wearing Schoolgirls]," *Kinran tanki daigaku kenkyūshi* 23 (1992): 1–5.

[4] Hasuike Yoshiharu, "Kindai kyōiku shijō kara mita jogakusei no fukusō no hensen 1 [Vicissitudes of Girl's Costume in Modern Education 1]," *Kōbe gakuin joshi tandai kiyō* 10 (1978).

spurred the spread of girls' educational institutions. According to historian Yokokawa Kimiko, educators demanded that girls' dress allow for greater mobility and follow gender norms; as a result, the *onna-bakama* 女袴 or women's *hakama*, which was a long-pleated skirt, began to be popular among girls' schools across the country in 1899.[5] This choice underwent yet another change in two decades. The late 1920s saw the emergence of light Western-style school clothing, comprising white blouses with dark blue skirts or jumper dresses. Yamawaki Girls School 山脇高等女学校 was one of the first to introduce a Western school uniform.[6] Initially, the uniform was not accepted by students and teachers as it looked strange, but soon, the students began to wear the uniform because it gave them relatively unrestricted mobility and was similar to the teachers' Westernized dress.[7] In 1925, the women's magazine, *Fujin kōron* 婦人公論 (Women's Public Opinion) featured photographs of schoolgirls wearing Western-style jumper dresses as school uniforms (Fig. 1).[8] Such a

Fig. 1. Schoolgirls wearing Western-style jumper dresses

[5] Yokokawa Kimiko, *Fukushoku o ikiru: bunka no kontekusuto* [Living with Fashion: Context of the Culture] (Kyoto: Kagaku dōjin, 1999): 140–141.
[6] According to *Gakuen no ayumi: sōritsu gojūshūnen kinen* [History of the Yamawaki School 50th anniversary] (1953), jumper dress uniforms were introduced into girls' school life from the winter of 1919.
[7] Yamawaki, *Gakuen no ayumi: sōritsu gojūshūnen kinen* (1953): 40–41.
[8] *Fujin kōron* [Women's Public Opinion] May 1925, 19.

Western-style school uniform was well suited to the purpose that the nation sought to accomplish: improving the health of young females to bear and rear children in the future. The Ministry of Education (Monbushō 文部省) thus vigorously promoted gymnastics classes and similar school activities which were performed in light Western clothing. On the surface, the fashion of schoolgirlhood seemed to have shifted away from the *onna-bakama* style to Western skirts and sailor blouses. However, the difference between the *onna-bakama* and the Western skirt is not clear-cut because the long, pleated *onna-bakama* was similar to a skirt in design. In fact, in a poem describing schoolgirls in the March 1915 issue of *Girls' Pictorial,* the hakama is described as a "skirt."[9]

When Japan was bogged down in the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) and then in World War II in the Pacific theater, the government aimed to unify national clothing because of a severe shortage of supplies. According to researcher Tanaka Yōko, from 1937, strict controls on clothing were imposed step by step, rationing manufacture and consumption.[10] The control of public-school girls' uniforms began in January 1941, when the regulations were established in a Ministry of Education circular titled "Matters Concerning Control of School Students' Uniforms."[11] The uniform consisted of a jumper skirt without pleats and a blouse with a round collar (Fig. 2). At this time, two incongruous garments were added to schoolgirls' clothing by the government: the *hyōjun fuku* (normalized national uniform) and the *monpe*. The *hyōjun fuku,* worn by schoolgirls, was a western jumper skirt with less decorative elements. The *monpe* had been worn by women doing farm work. From the 1920s to early 1940s, Japanese schoolgirls' sailor uniforms and pleated skirts was increasingly replaced by the sailor uniforms.

The *monpe* is often depicted as loose-fitting trousers; however, such a depiction is misleading. *Monpe* and trousers are entirely different things in Japan in terms of class and gender affiliation. In the Japanese historical context, trousers, which had been brought from the West to Japan after the Meiji Restoration, were considered upper-class men's clothing. Hence, Japanese schoolgirls wearing trousers was considered a deviation from femininity. In contrast, *monpe* were work garments of women working in farms in Japan. Modern Japanese schoolgirls wore the *hakama*, which was

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[9] *Shōjo gahō* [Girls' Pictorial], Mar. 1915.

[10] Tanaka Yōko, "1937-nen kara 1945-nen made no senjika ni okeru hifuku tōsei to kyōkyū jijō [The Clothing Control and the State of Supply during the wartime (1937–1945)]," *Nihon kateika kyōiku gakkaishi* 52, no.3 (2009): 210.

[11] *Monbushō reiki ruisan* [Collection of rules and regulations compiled by the Ministry of Education] (Tokyo: Monbushō, 1941), 30–40.

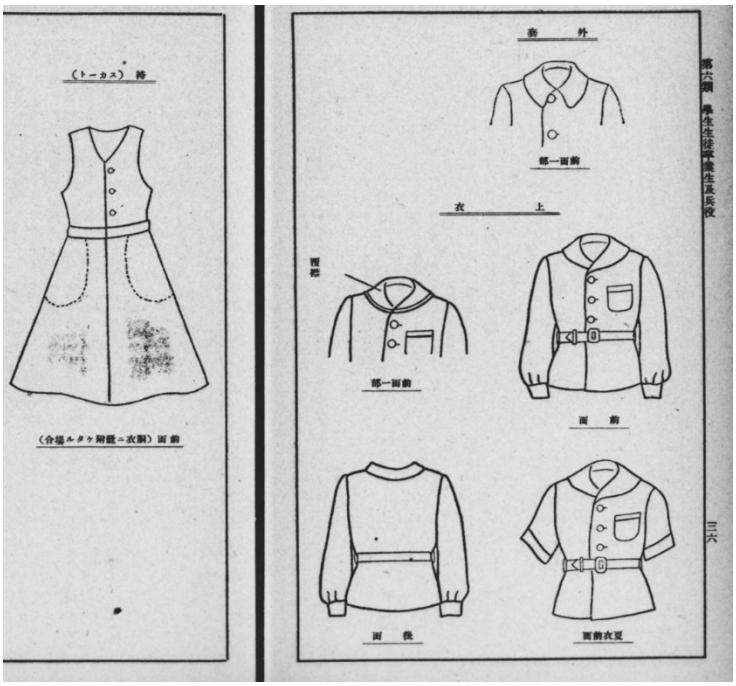

Fig. 2. Public-school girls' uniforms, 1941. *Monbushō reiki ruisan* (Tokyo: Monbushō, 1941), 36–37.

formerly a male garment worn by the Japanese aristocracy. Hakama was intended for Western and Westernized women. Based on analyses of alumni documents of girls' schools across the country, historian Osakabe (2019) observes that girls did not fancy trousers.[12] Eventually, the *monpe* was increasingly associated with the war, which did not allow girls to attend school as they were mobilized into the labor force. Against this backdrop, I consider Joran Juku (founded during the war as a private school for Manchurian girls) and its school uniforms.

TRANSNATIONAL GIRLHOOD AND SCHOOL UNIFORMS

Joran Juku accepted Manchurian girls aged between 16 and 20. The curriculum included subjects such as housework, sewing, music, flower

[12] Osakabe Yoshinori, *Sērāfuku no tanjō: joshikō seifuku no kindai shi* [The Birth of the Sailor Uniform: A Modern History of Girls' School Uniforms] (Tokyo: Hōsei University Press, 2021).

arrangement, tea ceremony, agriculture, and gymnastics.[13] In an interview in the *Saga gōdō shinbun* 佐賀合同新聞 (Saga Local Newspaper) of March 1943, a school matron of Joran Juku stated that the Manchurian girls were brought up with tender care, had never left the country before coming to Japan, and had never seen the sea or mountains before.[14] These Manchurian girls had apparently decided to come to Japan during the war because they believed that their experience of studying in Japan would have a positive impact on their future careers. Some students had even turned down marriage proposals and had instead chosen to study abroad in Japan, while other students had come to Japan despite opposition from their parents. In March 1943, thirty girls accepted as students arrived in Japan. As mentioned previously, during the first year they stayed in a boarding house, and in the second year they stayed with a Japanese family who trained them to become future female leaders in Manchuria. According to an article in the *Saga gōdō shinbun* of April 1945, Joran Juku students woke up at 6 am, cleaned their rooms, had breakfast, studied sewing and Japanese, spent the afternoon and evening with their host families, and wrote letters to their parents back home. In a newspaper interview, a maidservant of a host family states that the student was a very nice person and that she would like to live with her forever, indicating that the Manchurian girl was received favorably.[15]

During its short existence, Joran Juku served only fifty-two students. Ultimately, it was a small private school in a small town. However, photographs and documents provide important insights into the performative nature of schoolgirlhood. The girls were provided with uniforms for free. In spite of the wartime shortages, their school uniforms comprised a jumper dress with a pleated skirt, trousers, a blouse with a tie, and leather shoes. The uniforms were noteworthy given the historical context: the skirts were distributed to the Manchurian students at a time when others refrained from wearing skirts owing to wartime national policy.

Specifically, at that time, Japanese girls were encouraged to wear the normalized national uniform and to refrain from wearing new pleated skirts. However, the Manchurian girls entered Japan in 1943 wearing dark-blue uniforms and skirts, consisting of a dark blue jumper dress with a pleated skirt, ties, and a classic-collared blouse.[16]

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[13] *Saga gōdō shinbun* 28 Mar. 1943.
[14] *Saga gōdō shinbun* 30 Mar. 1943.
[15] *Saga gōdō shinbun* 30 Mar. 1943.
[16] See the photographs reproduced in Seikō Shōgakkai, *Shashin de miru joran juku no hachijūnen*, 14–16.

The girls were not criticized for wearing these uniforms in public when Japanese schoolgirls increasingly began to wear the normalized national uniform and *monpe* made of reused kimonos. The newspapers reported positively about the students of Joran Juku. This was because these girls were viewed as promoting Imperial Japan's education abroad. Like the police or military uniforms worn by men, the tailored school uniforms worn by the students of Joran Juku functioned as a symbol of Imperial Japan's orderliness and controlled governance. The Manchurian girls experienced the Imperial Japanese schoolgirlhood and then returned to Manchukuo, another East Asian empire ruled by China's last emperor Pu Yi, as sisters of the Empire of Japan.

In the early 1940s, the Japanese government attempted to associate the *monpe* style with the image of an ideal Japanese schoolgirl. An illustration of a schoolgirl printed in the magazine *Shōjo kurabu* 少女倶楽部 (Girls' Club) in 1944 tells the girl readers about the importance of preparing for an air attack (Fig. 3). The ideal girl shown in the illustration wears the *monpe*, sweeps the air-raid shelter, and pours water into the fire-extinguishing equipment.[17] Wearing the *monpe* meant being a patriotic girl who met national expectations to be a subject, if not a citizen, of the empire.

Fig. 3 Girl in *monpe* working on fire prevention.

[17] *Shōjo kurabu*, May 1944.

The government also promoted the wearing of the crotched *monpe* as a national female dress for its ease of movement and cost-effectiveness: it gave the wearer greater mobility than the skirt and could be made by recycling kimonos. The *monpe* had matched Japan's policy of expansionism to the continent, *Kōa* 興亜 (raising Asia) because it was easy-to-move labor clothes that did not require new cloth during a shortage of supplies.

However, Joran Juku distributed jumper dresses with pleated skirts, ties, and classic-collared blouses. The school deliberately designed its uniform for Manchurian girls as a uniform that Japanese girls would have been willing to wear if the war had not occurred and if the war had not required them to work. Joran Juku's uniform signaled that girls were schoolgirls and not laboring bodies.

CONCLUSION

Recently, *Joran Juku*'s original school uniforms were restored. The restored uniforms were well-received, and the designs were perceived as *kawaii* and not outdated. The author visited Saga Prefecture to observe the restored uniforms. The staff of the Seiko Scholarship Society involved in the uniform restoration project emphatically told the author that even present-day Japanese schoolgirls find Joran Juku's school uniform design appealing. Joran Juku's Western-style uniform—light clothing comprising blouses with skirts or jumper dresses—was a powerful dress code that survived the Pacific War (when anti-Western sentiment spread throughout Japan) and has resiliently persisted as a style used even today in uniforms for Japanese school girls.

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