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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Fashioning Female Fascism:
Shimada Yoshiko's Artistic Explorations of Japanese Womanhood, Nationalism, and War
Responsibility through Clothing

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in Art History

by

Arina Lurie

Thesis Committee:
Professor Bert Winther-Tamaki, Chair
Associate Professor Roberta Wue
Associate Professor David Fedman

2022

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Figures	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract of the Thesis	v
Introduction	1
Section 1: Relationships of Relinquishment: The Emperor System and Sacrifice	5
Section 2: Situating the <i>Kappōgi</i> : Fashioning the Role of Japanese Women in Wartime	7
Section 3: The Asia Pacific War and the ‘Comfort Women Issue’	15
Section 4: Why Comfort Women?	18
Section 5: The Etchings of Ignorance: <i>White Aprons</i> and <i>Shooting Lesson</i>	20
Section 6: Jumping off the Page: Shimada’s Usage of the <i>Kappōgi</i> in Physical Spaces	25
Section 7: Inconspicuous Propaganda: Clothing and Nationalism	30
Section 8: From the Past to the Present: Using the Kimono	33
Conclusion	40
Bibliography	43

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Shimada Yoshiko, <i>A Picture to be Burnt</i> , 1993.....	3
Figure 2. Women wearing banners for the Greater Japan Women’s National Defense Association. <i>The Chainstore Research</i> cover, 1931.....	13
Figure 3: A member of the Greater Japan Women’s Defense Association serves tea to hospitalized soldiers. Image from “Warmth of the Motherland” (Atatakaki bokoku no tsuchi), <i>Weekly Photographic Journal (Shashin Shūhō)</i> , 1938.....	14
Figure 4: Shimada Yoshiko, <i>Shooting Lesson</i> , 1993.....	20
Figure 5: Shimada Yoshiko, <i>White Aprons</i> , 1993.....	23
Figure 6: Shimada Yoshiko, <i>Look at Me, Look at You</i> , 1995.....	25
Figure 7: Shimada Yoshiko, <i>Tied to Apron Strings</i> , 1993.....	28
Figure 8: Shimada Yoshiko, <i>Becoming a Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman</i> , London, 2012.....	33
Figure 9: Kim Seo-kyung and Kim Eun-sung, <i>Frontal View of Statue of Peace</i> , 2011.....	34
Figure 10: Shimada Yoshiko, <i>Becoming a Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman</i> , Glendale, 2018.....	36

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Fashioning Female Fascism:

Shimada Yoshiko's Artistic Explorations of Japanese Womanhood, Nationalism, and War

Responsibility through Clothing

by

Arina Lurie

Master of Arts in Art History

University of California, Irvine 2022

Professor Bert Winther-Tamaki, Chair

During the Asia-Pacific War, Japan mobilized women in support of the Japanese Empire by capitalizing upon decades of patriarchal and nationalist ideas that had been embedded within society and these women. Japanese women were drafted into volunteering for women's defense organizations, most prominently the Greater Japan National Defense Women's Association (*Dai Nihon Kokubo-fujin*) in the 1940s, and they were tasked with being mothers not only to the families they were supposed to form and grow but to the nation as a whole. The role of Japanese women in the war was rarely focused upon in traditional discussions of the war until Japanese feminist artist Shimada Yoshiko decided to probe into the unique manipulation and mobilization of Japanese women into enthusiastic fascists. Her artistic oeuvre includes etchings, installations, collage, and performance works, all of which focus on some aspect of the Asia Pacific War as related to Japanese women and most often Korean 'comfort women'. A key component of many of her artworks is the usage of politically charged clothing to illustrate the banalities of everyday nationalism. This thesis focuses upon her usage of the Japanese *kappōgi*, a white apron that

became conflated with motherhood, and the iconic kimono in an analysis of how clothing was positioned as a (false) liberator for Japanese women while other Asian women suffered at the hands of the Japanese Imperial Army. Dealing with positionality and memory, Shimada's artworks illustrate how the Japanese state and society capitalized upon the seemingly innocent nature of clothing to construct and enforce nationalist divisions between Japanese women and other Asian women and appeal to Japanese women's desire for a larger sense of freedom and importance within the Japanese Empire.

Introduction

A woman sits on a public sidewalk, covered head to toe in bronze paint, with her mouth duct taped shut and an empty chair next to her. Clenching her fists, she sits silently for an hour as people walk by and go about their days. The only clue to her identity is the pink kimono she wears. As will be discussed later, this woman is named Shimada Yoshiko and she is a Japanese feminist artist performing her work *Becoming a Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman*. Now again based in Japan, after spending years in America and Germany, her artistic practice is grounded in questioning preconceived notions about the relationship between women and Japanese nationalism and violence during the Asia Pacific War. Within the Japanese state, especially during the Meiji era of 1868-1912 and the Shōwa era of 1926-1989, womanhood, specifically conceptions of motherhood, was weaponized to manipulate and mobilize Japanese women into wholeheartedly and enthusiastically supporting the war effort and the larger expansionist project of the Japanese Empire. While Japanese women were serving in wartime women's associations, fulfilling their 'motherly duties' for the entire nation, the lives of other Asian women were being irrevocably changed as the Japanese Imperial Army worked to conquer and colonize the lands of China, Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Netherlands and most prominently Korea. The army took part in numerous heinous actions during the Asia-Pacific War but the war crime that is most well-known, and contested, is the 'comfort women issue.' This 'issue' involves the state sponsored opening and continuation of military brothels in which women and girls, usually anywhere from eleven to twenty years old, were systemically kidnapped, raped, tortured, and held hostage for the soldiers of the Japanese Imperial Army's desires. The 'comfort women' system was calculated in its creation and the

enforcement of misogynistic ideas for the purpose of protecting and bolstering the interests of the Japanese state and the patriarchal emperor system. It also was responsible for the enforcement of the binary of ‘sacred mother’ versus ‘prostitute’ amongst Japanese and other Asian women which deeply affected the consciousness of Japanese women and their decisions during wartime. While the army mobilized female dichotomies to fit its purposes on the battlefield, Japanese women on home soil, and sometimes the soils of Korea, China, and Taiwan, became deeply invested in the war effort and acting out their assigned roles as “mothers for the nation.”

These crimes and complexities are just some of what Japanese feminist artist Shimada Yoshiko explores in her confrontational and explicit art. Born in 1959 in Tachikawa, Tokyo, Shimada was awakening artistically in the late 1980s and early 1990s. She attended Scripps College in Claremont for her BA, which is where she began studying printmaking and creating more surrealistic art, but her art did not become political until the late 1980s. When I asked her about her feminist awakening, she pointed to her experience at Scripps College as showing her what Japan was missing regarding feminism. She became interested in modern women’s liberation movements, identifying her specific alignment with 1970s era feminist thought saying “I prefer [the] 1970s women’s liberation movement that’s liberation for women [and] for everyone else. They [were] trying to change the whole system.”¹ This broad spectrum approach shows in her artistic analyses of the multiple oppressive systems at play before and during Japanese wartime mobilization.

The specific watershed event that sparked her interest in Japanese militarism, fascism, and womanhood was the death of Emperor Shōwa, or Hirohito (1901-1989) as he is known in the West, as well as the public testimony of 66-year-old Kim Hak-Soon. The death of Emperor

¹ I am grateful to have had the opportunity to conduct an interview with Shimada Yoshiko over Zoom. Being able to hear her speak greatly influenced my views on her art and her artistic praxis. Shimada Yoshiko, interview by author, Zoom, February 17, 2022.

Shōwa in 1989 disturbed Shimada, because she saw the unbridled nostalgia her fellow Japanese citizens held for him and the regime that controlled and mobilized Japan for purposes of nationalism and complete power. Two years later, on August 14th, 1991, almost forty six years after the end of the Asia-Pacific War, Kim Hak-Soon became the first woman from Korea to publicly reveal the torture she suffered at the hands of the Imperial Japanese Army during the war. Her testimony was brutal and damning to the army and the government and citizenry that earnestly followed the ideas and desires of the Shōwa era.

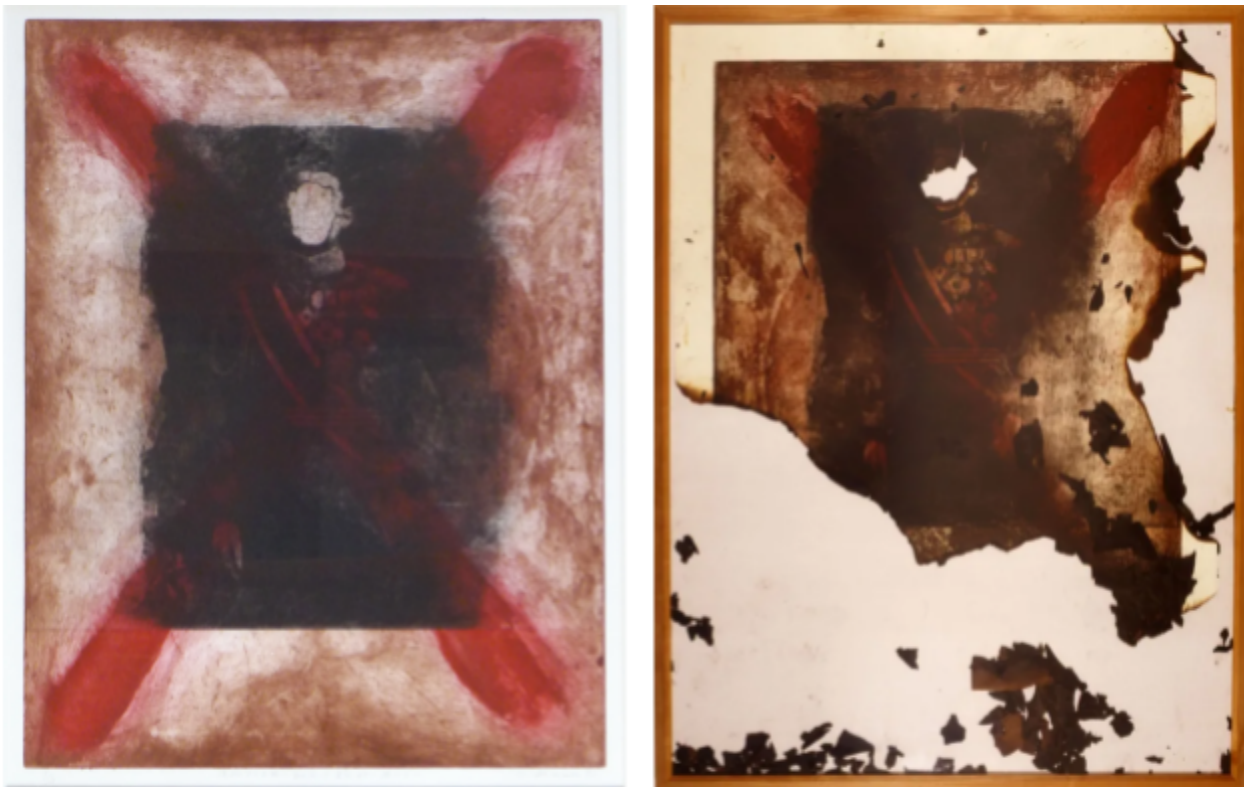


Figure 1: Shimada Yoshiko, *A Picture To Be Burnt*, etching, 1993

It was because of Kim Hak-Soon's testimony that Shimada began to explore the myths that were constructed about the Asia Pacific War. She works to expose the realities of enthusiastic fascist support amongst citizens, specifically Japanese women, whose devoted actions and feelings towards the emperor and his wishes have been underlooked by traditional

scholarship and war memory amongst Japanese citizens. While numerous other artists (such as Yukinori Yanagi, Tomiyama Taeko, Koizumi Meiro, and Oura Nobuyuki), critique Japan's role in the Asia Pacific War and Japanese nationalism, the protests against Japanese ignorance and historical silence created by Shimada, in her art, are like no other. Formally, she engages with taboo topics through methods of subversion that have brought her criticism and censorship: her usage of real archival photographs in her etchings, her public performances, her explicit references to sexual violence and her infamous burning of an image of Emperor Shōwa in *A Picture to Be Burnt* (Figure 1).²

Being Japanese herself, her focus on Japanese history and actions is ironically radical. She critiques the way many other (male) Japanese artists do not look at their own histories and refuse to label themselves as political: “[they create] socially engaged art [that is] research based so they get included in various exhibitions in Japan and abroad but still their position is they distance themselves...they do research and pick up other people's opinions, experiences, and testimonies...They don't want to make their positions very clear...it is just that they are artists as if ‘artist’ is totally neutral.”³

Shimada also grapples with the complexities of positionality and memory as she acknowledges that she is creating art about the actions and feelings of Japanese women born about half a century before her as well as the ways in which modern Japanese women can either continue cycles of ignorance or look critically at themselves and their heritage. Shimada aims to break the perpetuation of Japanese negligence and unconsciousness about the war, something that she acknowledges is difficult but necessary. It was her time in the United States that taught

² This work doesn't deal deeply with clothing but is important to mention because it is one of her most well known public subversions and critiques, one that brought her immense pressure and discussion, particularly amongst Japanese nationalists.

³ Shimada Yoshiko, interview by author, Zoom, February 17, 2022.

her the most about Japan, she said, as she had two housemates from Korea and Malaysia during her college years and the recent histories of the Asia Pacific War were not really taught to her in her Japanese middle school or high school.⁴

Within her oeuvre of etchings, collages, installations, and performances, a common thread is the motif of clothing Japanese women wore during wartime, most specifically the *kappōgi*, a white apron that transformed into a political symbol during wartime, and kimono, an iconic cultural garment of Japan that has greatly influenced the view of what a Japanese woman is and should be all around the world. While much of the scholarly research on Shimada highlights the history of the Japanese *kappōgi*, I have come across few writings that specifically focus on her usage of clothing. Her focus on textiles is significant because it calls attention to the ways in which fascism and nationalism are manifested in everyday life and the ways they manipulate the world around them, even in things that seem innocuous like clothing. Shimada uses this garment in many of her pieces because of its loaded attachment to female mobilization and support of the war. In her analysis of the Asia Pacific War, Shimada Yoshiko's prominent focus on Japanese women's clothing, specifically the Japanese *kappōgi* and kimono, illustrates a focus on Japanese identity in which it is clearly demonstrated that nationalism and war became a (mythic) liberator for Japanese women and constructed divider between Japanese women and other Asian women during the war.

Relationships of Relinquishment: The Emperor System and Sacrifice

The relationship between the Japanese citizenry and the state cannot be discussed without a look at the Emperor System (*tennōsei*), especially during wartime. Put briefly, *Tennōsei* is a state system in which the emperor acts as the head of the state. However, it is important to note that it does not have an equivalent term in English that encompasses it completely. The historian

⁴ Ibid.

Hagiwara Hiroko argues that *tennōsei* is not “just an ideology or the politics of expansionism, national supremacism or hegemonic domination...but of a monarchy embodied in a divine persona, the emperor.”⁵ This idea of the emperor as being a deity or deity-like is echoed in anthropologist Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney’s essay entitled “The Emperor of Japan as Deity” where she discusses the religious and shamanistic qualities assigned to the emperor prior to the Meiji Restoration and how, during the Meiji Restoration, “the emperor became, at least nominally, the Manifest Deity, a bona fide deity.”⁶ It was during this period that he was afforded military power and it was heavily stipulated that the Japanese people were his subjects, seen by the way in which “the Manual of the Imperial Household adopted the “one label for the reign of each emperor” policy so as to establish the identity of the people with the reigning emperor.”⁷ The emphasis on Japan as a family-state was heavily enforced during this period as the emperor took on the dual nature of being akin to a Supreme Being and destined ruler of Japan while also displaying a parental sentimental feeling for the Japanese people. The relationships constructed between the emperor and the Japanese citizen were often focused on complete dedication and sacrifice, especially as Japan increased their military involvement around Asia. This relationship, as well as other deeply rooted sentiments about Japanese history and national identity, has led to a division between Japan and the rest of Asia in which Japanese people often do not view themselves as Asians but rather as Japanese only.

The idea of sacrifice in war in Japan is one that is not specific to Japanese men alone.

While most prominently displayed by *kamikaze* and the idea of *seppuku*, a belief amongst many men in Japan, usually Shintō nationalists, was that “the ultimate purpose of the individual...was

⁵ Griselda Pollock and Hagiwara Hiroko, “Comfort Women/Women of Conformity: The Work of Shimada Yoshiko,” in *Generations & Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London, UK: Routledge, 1996), 264.

⁶ Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, “The Emperor of Japan as Deity (Kami),” *Ethnology* 30, no. 3 (1991): 199–215, 210.

⁷ As the author notes, this is seen in the ways in which Japanese people “using the year of birth, refer to themselves as well as to others as, for example, “the Meiji person (*Meiji no nigen*),” “Taisho person,” “Showa person,” or, “I am a first digit Showa,” subdividing an era” Ibid, 205.

to die for the emperor, the act through which one's own being would merge into the mystical body of the emperor, thus closing the gap between one's existential being and one's essential being.”⁸ However, sacrifice was not viewed through an equal lens; Shimada herself articulated the difference between Japanese male sacrifice and Japanese female sacrifice, saying “the men's sacrifice was at least rewarded with heroic stories, respect, and (most importantly) soldier's pension, which is still paid to the deceased's families. Women's sacrifice is a norm, in both peace and war time, and it is expected to be gratis.”⁹

Situating the *Kappōgi* : Fashioning the Role of Japanese Women in Wartime

In order to fully explore the significance of the attire that Shimada is utilizing, a history of the Japanese *kappōgi* and the establishment of ideas about the roles of Japanese mothers for the state must be discussed. Visually and practically, the *kappōgi* is akin to an apron; designed to be worn over a kimono to protect it from stains and mess, it is traditionally white and features wide open sleeves with cuffs that end just below the elbow with a long torso that comes down to the knees and strips of cloth that tie at the back of the waist and at the neck. While it eventually became a symbol of Japanese motherhood in the early 20th century, the creation is thought to be inspired by the West. In the 1870s, Mori Arinori, the first Japanese ambassador to the United States who created Japan's modern educational system, encountered it upon a visit to the United Kingdom as an apron used by British nannies. He found it very effective for his vision of Japanese women: “he wanted Japanese women to be modern mothers who can [run the] household and educate children more scientifically and efficiently.”¹⁰ While it would not be a direct copy of the British nanny apron, differing in its focus on the protection of the kimono, it is

⁸ Walter Skya. *Japan's Holy War; The Ideology of Radical Shintō Ultrationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 310.

⁹ Arina Lurie, email to Shimada Yoshiko, April 30, 2022.

¹⁰ Arina Lurie, email to Shimada Yoshiko, March 20, 2022.

a garment based within the kitchen (the term translates to ‘cooking wear’) and it became a symbol of middle class female modernity and later a uniting force between Japanese women of all classes for the war. It was always paired with the kimono because it served to protect the garment which had been staple in Japanese women’s clothing attire.

The significance of the ideas surrounding the *kappōgi* and its association with motherhood and femininity can be found within the Meiji period and its elaboration on the status of women in Japan. It was during the Meiji Restoration era that the institutions that made up Japan as a nation-state were first implemented (parliamentary system, educational institutions) and thus women’s newfound access to some of these institutions shaped generations to come. A significant idea that shaped the Japanese view of womanhood, coined in 1875 by Professor Nakamura Masanao, a Confucian scholar who then converted to Christianity, was *Ryōsai Kenbo*.¹¹ Translated as “Good Wife, Wise Mother”, this phrase became the basis for the modern woman’s role leading into the 20th century. *Ryōsai Kenbo* was integrated into education just as discussions were occurring about the validities of educating women. In the words of historian Koyama Shizuko, “*Ryōsai Kenbo* ideology was, arguably, indispensable for the formation of the modern nation-state, and a key concept in the assimilation of women into the state as citizens.”¹² The status of Japanese women as valuable citizens was directly correlated to their position as wife and then mother: “women were integrated into the nation’s educational system through the expectation that they would become mothers and were linked to the nation through their identity as mothers.”¹³ When one of the very first ideas allowed to be taught to women in schooling is all about the woman as an entity for the state, this pervades the psyche for generations to come.

¹¹ Koyama Shizuko, *Ryōsai Kenbo: The Educational Ideal of “Good Wife, Wise Mother” in Modern Japan*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

¹² *Ibid*, 50.

¹³ *Ibid*, 53.

This was most prevalent during wartime and can be seen with the formation of different women's organizations. Female mobilization began in 1901 with the Patriotic Women's Association (Aikoku Fujinkai). This organization was created "as a relief movement for bereaved families and disabled soldiers, most of whom lived in poverty" and was founded by Okumura Ihoko (1845-1907), "an avid supporter of Japan's militarism and colonialism in Asia" raised by her father to be devoted to the emperor.¹⁴ With the support and connections of Ogasawara Naganari, an admiral in the Imperial Navy who was a divisional officer during the First Sino-Japanese War, this organization was most active during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 and is "the first example of women's organized patriotism in Japan's modern wars."¹⁵

The most prominent and far reaching women's association, and the implementer of the *kappōgi* into wartime, was the Greater Japan National Defense Women's Association (Dai Nihon Kokubō Fujinkai, 1932). Officially established in October 1932, growing out of the concentrated National Defense Women's Association of Osaka (Osaka Kokubō Fujinkai), this organization began with Japan's invasion of China. In 1931, the Japanese Imperial Army invaded Manchuria, in the northeast of China, and established the puppet state of Manchukuo, which would remain until the end of World War II in 1945, hoping to capitalize on resources and further their imperialist missions. It was because of these invasions that the women's defense organizations formed. They were created to mobilize women in support of the war efforts in direct correlation with the idea of motherhood being the ultimate service to the state. Hagiwara Hiroko specifies the fact that "the cult of motherhood was a part of the nationalist ideology, which would sustain that illusory unity, the steadfast and foremost family-state, Japan."¹⁶ The tasks undertaken by

¹⁴ Ryoko Okamura, "Making Patriotic Mothers: Images of Motherhood and the Role of Government-Sponsored Women's Organizations in Japan's Home Front / 愛国の母をつくる: 銃後の護りにおける母性像と官製婦人団体の役割." *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* 55 (2019): 55-79, 59. doi:10.1353/jwj.2019.0006.

¹⁵Ibid, 60.

¹⁶ Hagiwara Hiroko, "Comfort Women/Women of Conformity: The Work of Shimada Yoshiko", 258.

these women included celebratory send-offs for the army, the construction and disbursement of comfort bags (*imon-bukuro*), which included toiletries, letters of encouragement, and non-perishable foods to be sent to members of the army, the care of the injured and sick as well as tea rituals for the soldiers, all of which “constructed women’s service to the state as an outgrowth of their primary role within the domestic sphere.”¹⁷ The mobilization of women was complex in that it presented a freedom from the domestic sphere and a sense of undertaking roles that gave the women national importance. However, in reality, this mobilization was still heavily linked to the domestic sphere. The patriarchal system needed to maintain the connection with domesticity, via the aprons and the roles women would take on being motherly, to cancel out the contradictions inherent in mobilizing these women while also advocating for women to stay at home and take care of the family.

There were also significant class implications seen in the enrollment of Japanese women into these defense organizations. The early Patriotic Women’s Association was classist, finding economic relief by “[visiting] noblewomen and members of the bourgeoisie and asked them to make contributions” and “[granting] administrative positions to major donors, [ranking] members according to payments, and [excluding] women who could not afford the expensive fees.”¹⁸ In contrast, the Greater Japan National Defense Women’s Association of the 1930s and 1940s appealed to Japanese women of all classes.¹⁹ The motto for the Greater Japan National Defense Women's Association proclaimed “National Defense Starts from the Kitchen” (*kokubō wa daidokoro kara*).²⁰ With the *kappōgi* being for women who worked in their own kitchens and homes, as opposed to those who employed servants, the decision to integrate the *kappōgi* into the

¹⁷ Julia C. Bullock, Ayako Kano, and James Welker. “Introduction.” In *Rethinking Japanese Feminisms*, edited by Julia C. Bullock, Ayako Kano, and James Welker, University of Hawai’i Press, 2018, 1-12, 5.

¹⁸ Okamura, “Making Patriotic Mothers,” 59.

¹⁹ The membership went from 2 million women in 1935 to around 9 million women by 1941.

²⁰ Okamura, “Making Patriotic Mothers,” 64.

larger workforce, for the war, created a sense of inclusion amongst different levels of Japanese women. It was especially significant because the more exclusionary Patriotic Women's Association (Aikoku Fujinkai) also wore kimono, “the style of which would indicate a member’s class background.”²¹

After the *kappōgi* was adopted as the uniform of the Greater Japan National Defense Women’s Association, “participation of lower and lower-middle class women [in the war effort] jumped up.”²² This created a false sense of equality between Japanese women of different class statuses and economic situations, which was directly connected to their service to the state and the emperor, especially considering that there was an inexpensive membership fee for this defense organization. There was a mutually reinforced connection between the mobilization of women in the Greater Japan National Defense Women’s Association and the ideas enforced by the patriarchal emperor system in that membership grew so high because of “the strategy of integrating women whose morals were considered questionable, such as prostitutes and waitresses”.²³ The patriarchal and sexist notions that deemed prostitution and waitressing immoral, and created the material conditions for these ‘immoral’ fields of work, were re-utilized to include these women in the mission of the state. These organizations capitalized on classism and sexism in order to entice women into donning the *kappōgi* and dedicating themselves to wartime service. Japanese women’s expansion of their rights within the state was directly linked to patriarchal and imperialist ideas about the purpose of womanhood being motherhood and their position as patriotic and sacrificial mothers of the nation.

²¹ Jane Mitchell, “Women, The State, and National Mobilization in Prewar Japan,” Honours Degree in History and Asian Studies, University of Adelaide, Australia, 1986, 23.

²² Shimada Yoshiko, Artist Statement, 1993.

²³ Sabine Frühstück, “The Spirit to Take Up a Gun: Militarizing Gender in the Imperial Army,” In *Gender, Nation and State in Modern Japan* (ASAA Women in Asia Series), ed. Andrea Germer, Vera Mackie and Ulrike Wöhr. London: Routledge Curzon, 2014, 163-179, 171.

Images of *kappōgi* clad women were disseminated throughout Japan in an effort to valorize and mobilize more women into the cause. Both government organizations and corporate businesses capitalized on the visual approachability of the *kappōgi* in crafting images of Japanese female national unity. Japanese cosmetics brand Shiseido, founded in 1872, distributed a publication entitled *The Chainstore Research* that “communicated practical product and promotional information to chain store affiliates.”²⁴ Their December 1937 cover (Figure 2), distributed as the Japanese Imperial Army began their attacks on Nanjing, features a sea of Japanese women enrobed in their *kappōgi*. Two women's faces are visible as they turn around but most of them do not face the camera; only their *kappōgi* clad backs with their *tasuki* sashes hanging are visible. They are there to embody an image of Japanese femininity upon which this cosmetics company can capitalize, especially since Shiseido’s products were commonly found in those ‘comfort bags’ packed for the soldiers.

²⁴ Gennifer Weisenfeld, “Luxury and Thrift in Wartime” in *Selling Shiseido: Cosmetics Advertising & Design in Early 20th Century Japan* (Massachusetts Information of Technology, Visualizing Cultures, Online Platform, 2010)



Figure 2: Women wear banners for the Greater Japan Women's National Defense Association. *The Chainstore Research* 30 cover, December 1937



Figure 3 (Left): A member of the Greater Japan Women’s Defense Association serves tea to hospitalized soldiers. Image from “Warmth of the Motherland” (*Atatakaki bokoku no tsuchi*), *Weekly Photographic Journal (Shashin Shūhō)*, February 23, 1938

Government propaganda also utilized the image of the Japanese woman in her *kappōgi*. This is most obvious with the *Shashin Shūhō* (Photographic Weekly Report), a publication established by the Cabinet Intelligence Department in February 1938 that “[focused] on providing a clear-cut explanation of national policy and ingraining a strong awareness of the state of affairs through the extensive use of photographs.”²⁵ The first issue proclaimed that “If *Shūhō* is the pamphlet of national policy, then *Shashin Shūhō* is the pictograph of national policy.”²⁶ Images of Japanese women in their *kappōgi* happily serving soldiers are scattered throughout issues; within the second issue on February 23, 1938, (Figure 3), a woman with the

²⁵ “About Shashin Shūhō”, A Window into the Early Showa Period (Tokyo: Japan Center for Asian Historical Records, National Archives of Japan) [About Shashin Shūhō - A Window into the Early Showa Period \(jacar.go.jp\)](http://jacar.go.jp)

²⁶ Ibid.

Greater Japan National Women's Defense Association serves tea to recovering soldiers, wide smiles overtaking the men's faces and the slightly visible profile view of hers. The white of her *kappōgi* almost blends in with the white of their hospital robes but her sash and plate mark her as 'other' and delegate her position as being of service to them.

The Asia Pacific War and the 'Comfort Women Issue'

By 1931, Japan, in its quest to establish itself as a world power, had acquired Korea, Formosa, parts of Manchuria, and had expressed interest in China in the midst of their desire to expand and conquer more territories. Decades of war and imperialistic missions in the name of the Emperor had established Japan as a strong power and threat to Western imperialism at the expense of other Asian nations. The actions taken on this path of expansion are thought to have spurred the beginning of the Asia Pacific War, which would later expand into World War II.²⁷ It must be noted that the official start date of the Asia Pacific War is still debated between scholars. The three periods brought up the most in this discussion are 1931 (the invasion of Manchuria), 1937 (the 2nd Sino-Japanese War) and 1941 (Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor). Regardless of the official start date, the imperialist quest of Japan and the numerous violent outbreaks since the Meiji Restoration spurred Japan towards this descent into total war. One of the wartime actions that the Japanese Imperial Army undertook during the Asia Pacific War was the systemic luring, kidnapping, raping and torturing of women throughout East and Southeast Asia, primarily Korea but also Taiwan, the Phillipines, Thailand, the Dutch East Indies, Indonesia, Malaysia, China and Japan as well. It is estimated that around 100,000-200,000 women were mobilized in a system of wartime sexual enslavement for use by the Japanese Imperial Army.²⁸ These women were most

²⁷ 'Asia-Pacific War' is a term generally meant to encompass the suffering and violence that encompassed parts of Asia before the official start of World War II.

²⁸ This estimate is provided by the ICJ from 1994 and most estimates I find are in this range. Numbers are still debated and unconfirmed as many women did not come forward until decades after the war and many more never came forward about their experiences. This number is also unclear as to if it includes Japanese women as there are still ongoing debates about what constitutes a 'Japanese comfort woman'.

often euphemistically called ‘comfort women’ (*ianfu*) and they were a result of an imperialistic patriarchal army, and larger emperor system, which viewed sex and the bodies and lives of these women as tools provided to them for the war.²⁹ With the first documented ‘comfort station’ military brothel established in Shanghai in 1932, the system of military brothels developed for reasons of publicity, reward, and the control of disease. Believing that soldiers needed sex to perform well during the war, the military leaders wanted to avoid the bad publicity that would come with the soldiers raping local women, especially so soon after the Nanjing Massacre in 1937. Despite the fact that even with the ‘comfort stations’ soldiers still raped local women “with at least the tacit permission of their superior officers”, it was established that with the ‘comfort stations’, “soldiers would be less likely to catch a sexually transmitted disease from women under their direct control than from prostitutes who operated outside of the military system.”³⁰

Korea was the primary site from which these women were abducted and assaulted; because of the Japan–Korea Treaty of 1910, Korea was a colony of Japan at this time, making it easily accessible and, in Japanese thought, the property of Japan and its military. Misogynistic ideas about womanhood and sex were replicated in the specific focus on Korean women as the best possible ‘rewards’ for these soldiers. As articulated by sociocultural anthropologist Chunghee Sarah Soh, there existed a specific cult of female virginity within Korea “which enforced premarital virginity so strictly that the same word, *chonyo*, was used to mean both a young unmarried woman and a virgin.”³¹ It follows that in 1938, when Japanese gynecologist

Ustinia Dolgopool and Snehal Paranjape, “Comfort Women: An Unfinished Ordeal,” Report. International Commission of Jurists (Geneva, Switzerland, 1994).

²⁹ The term ‘comfort woman’ is loaded and reflects the Japanese view of the purpose of these women. Many survivors protest this word but it is the most common and well known identifier of these survivors of sexual slavery. For this reason, all instances of ‘comfort woman’ or ‘comfort station’ being used will be in single quotation marks.

³⁰ Laura Hein, ‘Savage Irony: The Imaginative Power of the “Military Comfort Women” in the 1990s’, *Gender & History*, Vol.11 No.2 July 1999, 336–372, 338.

³¹ Sarah Soh, “From Imperial Gifts to Sex Slaves: Theorizing Symbolic Representations of the ‘Comfort Women’”, *Social Science Japan Journal* 3, no. 1 (2000): 59–76, 70 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30209278>.

Aso Tetsuo, in his inspections of the ‘comfort women,’ saw that Japanese women from Kyushu mobilized to these camps were older and more likely to have venereal diseases, because of their previous history of sex work, he concluded that “it would cause a great harm to the soldiers if those [Japanese] women who were potentially eroding the country were to be sent to the battlefield.”³² He then came to the conclusion that “unmarried Korean women would be more appropriate than Japanese prostitutes as ‘gifts for the Emperor’s warriors.’”³³ The ‘comfort women’ system was a predatory system at its core, focusing on lower class women; “for almost all the Korean survivors, low social class and/or unhappy family life were factors in their recruitment as comfort women.”³⁴

Professor of Korean Studies Yonson Ahn conducted interviews with Korean comfort women survivors and some members of the Japanese Imperial Army and the mindsets revealed by the former soldiers points to a culture that fostered beliefs that women, and sex, were rewards for the men, often seen by the soldiers as doing their duty for Japan. When interviewed by Ahn in 1996, former high level officer Miyamoto Shizuo, who was stationed in Indonesia, revealed his view that “the programme [‘comfort women’ system] was really wonderful...the women were among the most important in Japanese forces. And owing to them, military governing of the population could go on smoothly. So, I would like to thank the women very much.”³⁵ It is clear that “the ‘comfort women’ were effectively vessels for the release of soldiers’ stress before and after combat.”³⁶

³² Ibid, 70.

³³ “Aso Tetsuo, a military doctor. Excerpts from his memoir, *A Consideration of Women in the Frontline* (1957, 1983),” Women’s Human Rights Institute of Korea (Seoul, Republic of Korea).

³⁴ Chunghee Sarah Soh, “From Imperial Gifts to Sex Slaves”, 65.

³⁵ Yonson Ahn, *Whose Comfort?: Body, Sexuality and Identity of Korean Comfort Women and Japanese Soldiers During WWII*, (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co, 2019), 66.

³⁶ Ibid, 75.

Why Comfort Women?

Shimada's decision to engage with the subject of the comfort women, as a reference point and comparison for Japanese womanhood and ignorance, can be connected to the fact that the existence of the military brothels, and the larger system, and the systemic raping of women is the most fiercely contested war crime that the Japanese undertook during the war. The comfort women 'issue,' *ianfu mondai* as it began to be called in 1991, became the subject of intense scrutiny, debate, and denial by many Japanese in an attempt to save face in the 1990s when journalist Yoshimi Yoshiaki published documents that revealed that these military brothels were indeed state regulated and sanctioned. There was, and still is, intense denialism and lack of understanding and/or accountability amongst many in Japan, including government officials and politicians, the education system through their textbooks, as well as the citizenry, most often those who align themselves with right wing nationalist views. However, as has been pointed out by Shimada herself and by many publications, it was not as if no one in Japan knew about the horrors committed against these women until Kim Hak-Soon publicly came forth in 1991. Books on comfort women, like Senda Kakō's *Military Comfort Women* (1973), Kim Il-myon's *Emperor's Military and Korean Comfort Women* (1976) and Yoshida Seiji's *Korean Comfort women and Japanese People* (1977) and *My War Crimes* (1983), were published over a decade prior and testimonies of women like Pae Pong-gi, whose account of her time in Okinawa as a comfort woman was published in Korean newspaper *Choson Sinbo* in 1977, were ignored and buried under political conflicts of the 1970s and 1980s.³⁷ In Japan, and South Korea alike, patriarchy has significantly affected the lives of the comfort women' survivors in that deeply

³⁷ Eika Tai, "History of the Comfort Women Movement," In *Comfort Women Activism: Critical Voices from the Perpetrator State*, 1st ed., 13–48, 13-14. Hong Kong University Press, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv18b5c1t.6>.

rooted patriarchal ideas about womanhood and sexuality kept them silenced. There are multiple reasons why these women did not come out about their experiences, largely, until the 1990s; if they were still alive, there was no space to deal with the trauma that had been inflicted upon them. In the decades after the war, rape and sexual violence were incredibly taboo topics with many patriarchal ideas about a woman's purity leading to fears amongst these women about how they would be seen within society. As mentioned, when women did come out and speak before Kim Hak-Soon, the issue was not seen as important enough or was explicitly ignored, setting an example for all the other survivors that speaking out was not in their interest. In addition, the Japanese government denied all wrongdoing and responsibility for the 'comfort women stations' in 1990 and that cast a formidable shadow on these women as it was their word against an entire government. It was due to the bravery of Kim Hak-Soon that more women gained the courage to speak out and share their harrowing experiences, with many lawsuits being filed against the Japanese government in which the main restitution sought was a full and complete admittal of responsibility and apology from the Japanese government. That request is something that, in many people's view, even today has not been delivered adequately. Shimada's critiques of Japanese ignorance and generational lack of accountability are well suited to such an issue.

The Etchings of Ignorance: *White Aprons* and *Shooting Lesson*



Figure 4: Shimada Yoshiko, *Shooting Lesson*, 1992, etching

Shimada's 1992 etching *Shooting Lesson* (Figure 4 and 1993 etching *White Aprons* (Figure 5) mark the beginning of her usage of the *kappōgi* as a method for confronting the participatory and often enthusiastic role of Japanese women in the war. The rusty red *Shooting Lesson* juxtaposes an image of Japanese women with an image of a Korean 'comfort woman.' The photograph etched onto the surface is from the 1930s, found by Shimada during her research in a city library in Kokubunji, Tokyo, and features four Japanese wives of military policemen on

a military base, most likely in Korea, one hand raised with a pistol as they learn how to shoot for the purposes of ‘self defense,’ despite the fact that they are the ones occupying Korean land. Their husbands are behind them, watching and instructing, and the faces of their children can be gleaned if one looks close enough. Many Japanese went to Manchukuo, Korea, and Taiwan and settled there as local farmers’ lands were confiscated by the military. Such actions brought waves of anti-Japanese sentiment amongst the populations and subsequently the Japanese that were occupying these spaces were taught to protect themselves from these ‘local barbarian’ anti-Japanese guerrillas.

The corners of the work feature an etching of an image of a Korean ‘comfort woman,’ her body highly visible as she stands clad in white underwear. The inclusion of the image of the Korean woman in every corner feels like a weight holding down the work, grounding it in the reality of Korean women suffering at the hands of colonizers who believe that they are the ones in danger. The juxtaposition created by the clothing is a striking recollection/symbol of Japanese nationalism. In 1999, Shimada detailed how she felt when she first came across the photo:

If the Japanese women were wearing military uniforms I would not have been so shocked, but I did not expect that the women would be wearing white aprons - symbols of maternal love and care. In this image, what I had previously thought were two opposite entities, motherhood and imperialism, seemed to merge together in, what for me, was a surprising image of the Japanese Imperial System.³⁸

The Japanese wives are front and center, clad in their *kappōgi*, actively completing their duties not only as wives to these military policemen but as Japanese women. They are the embodiment of *ryōsai kenbo*, their *kappōgi* blowing in the breeze and providing them with the literal coverage

³⁸ Shimada Yoshiko, “Sleeping with Your Enemy: Japanese Women and Power in Recent History,” Presentation given at the 1999 College Art Association Conference in Los Angeles, California, on February 13, 1999.

of their body as well as symbolic protection by marking them as women of Japan. This protection is not afforded to the Korean girl. She is nearly naked and on display, having to pose for a photograph of her body which is essentially the property of the Japanese Imperial Army to do with whatever they please.

However, while the *kappōgi* symbolically and literally covers the Japanese woman, there is an uncomfortable feeling inherent in the inappropriateness of the garment in this scene. The women are performing motherhood, figuratively as they don their *kappōgi* and literally as their children stand behind them. As Shimada noted above, the white aprons are jarring. The male figures are donning their traditional military uniforms while the women, preparing for the possibility of having to both face violence and commit violence themselves, are starkly vulnerable in their lightweight *kappōgi*. Art historian Rebecca Jennison points out that [these women] “are there on the condition that they wear and remain inscribed within the patriarchal codes symbolized by the white apron.”³⁹ These uniforms were meant to protect from grease stains in the kitchen, not blood stains on the battlefield. Historian Hagiwara Hiroko has remarked that “the aprons were needed as a sign to cover up a gap between femininity and armed action” in this photograph but also in the mobilization of women into the war in general.⁴⁰ This inappropriateness provides the knowledge to the viewer that Japanese women were victims in certain aspects too. They were acting under the guise of societal equality between Japanese men and women, in which a patriarchal system deluded them into thinking liberation existed within this mobilization.

³⁹ Rebecca Jennison, “‘Postcolonial’ Feminist Locations: The Art of Tomiyama Taeko and Shimada Yoshiko,” *U.S.-Japan Women’s Journal. English Supplement*, no. 12 (1997): 84–108, 96.

⁴⁰ Hagiwara Hiroko, “Comfort Women/Women of Conformity,” 256.



Figure 5: Shimada Yoshiko, *White Aprons*, 1993, etching

The 1993 etching *White Aprons* focuses exclusively on the brutality of the war and the enthusiasm of Japanese women, again using the *kappōgi*. Shimada uses the same image from *Shooting Lesson* but places it into a triptych this time. The usage of these images incorporated into a triptych is significant; it places them all in a direct relationship together as opposed to allowing degrees of separation. The left image sees a Japanese woman preparing tea, a ritual that was again heavily linked to the image of the Japanese woman as a motherly figure. Tea preparation and serving was one of the foremost duties of the women in these defense organizations, effectively enforcing the idea of the woman as a mother for every soldier. The roles assigned to Japanese women bring to mind ideas of reproductive labor, a concept coming from Marxist traditions that became articulately coined in the 1970s to describe women's unpaid

domestic labor—including but not limited to housework, child rearing, and emotional labor. Social Reproduction theorists argued, in the 1980s, that social reproduction within the capitalist system includes “various kinds of work—mental, manual, and emotional—aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined care necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation.”⁴¹ The mobilization of the men, women, and children of Japan for the country and the emperor, and the continuance of generational teachings about sacrifice for the emperor, would not have been possible without the reproductive labor of women. This is why the state capitalizing on their ability to mobilize women en masse for the war effort was so effective and important.

The middle features the middle figure from *Shooting Lesson*, her *kappogi* still visible as she holds the weapon with focus and determination. The right image sees a group of Japanese women, holding their babies, with white sashes, called *tasuki*, across their bodies that read “Women’s Association for National Defense in Manchuria.” As discussed earlier, these women were a part of Greater Japan National Women’s Defense Association (Dai Nihon Kokubo-fujinkai). When women would don their *kappōgi*, it seemingly transformed their role in Japanese society from simple housewife to crucially important mother of the nation. The uniting factor behind each of the women pictured is that *kappōgi*. The triptych embodies every idea of what a Japanese woman should be doing in the midst of the war: preparing tea and cooking for the family, committing herself and her children to the war effort and showing dedication to the emperor, and starkly and shockingly placed in the middle, larger than the other two images, preparing to shoot to kill, and possibly die, for her country, even on land that is not hers.

⁴¹ Mignon Duffy. “Doing the Dirty Work: Gender, Race, and Reproductive Labor in Historical Perspective”, *Gender and Society* 21, no. 3 (2007): 313–36, 315-316. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27640972>.

Jumping off the Page: Shimada's Usage of the *Kappōgi* in Physical Spaces

Much of Shimada's early works are etchings; however, the mid-1990s brought a shift in her usage of the *kappōgi* in that she began to use the garment in physical spaces. This decision deepened the connection of the *kappōgi*, and everything that Shimada was exploring, to the current generations who could view the garment in their own spaces rather than looking at a manipulation of images from the past. The *kappōgi* as a symbol of false liberation and the differing experiences of Japanese women and Korean women are explored within Shimada's installation work entitled *Look at Me, Look at You* (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Shimada Yoshiko, *Look at Me, Look at You*, 1995, installation exhibited at Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo, Japan

Exhibited first at Ota Fine Arts in Tokyo in 1995, the piece was centered on a juxtaposition between a wedding dress with a *kappōgi* and a Korean *chima jeogori*, a form of *hanbok*, or Korean traditional dress, that features a *chima* skirt and a *jeogori* top. The wedding dress and the *kappōgi* again call to mind that focus on “good wife, wise mother” with each garment being directly connected to the constructions of wife (the wedding dress) and mother (the *kappōgi*). With the wedding dress, the woman is bound as a wife for the husband and with the *kappōgi* - she is bound as a mother for the children as well as a metaphorical mother for the nation-state. The wedding dress was in pristine condition, as if it was on a mannequin, with delicate lace detailing and tulle ruffling making up its layers with the stark white *kappōgi* tied delicately around it. The uniformity of the wedding dress and its rigid positioning creates a stark contrast with the *chima jeogori* that defies conventions. The *chima jeogori* hangs with an air of drama to it, given by the positioned hanging arms of the soiled *yukata*, a Japanese garment which Korean ‘comfort women’ would have to wear. The section of the floor around the *chima jeogori* is littered with condoms, an obvious reference to the daily rapes that Korean women would endure at the hands of Japanese army soldiers. Situated between the two garments is a one way mirror, only reflecting the Japanese side. Positionality is a key concern for Shimada throughout her oeuvre but especially in this work; the Japanese representation can only see itself, a visual signifier of Japanese ignorance, while the Korean garment looks directly through to that lavish wedding dress and sees their oppositional relationship.

The color juxtapositions that Shimada creates are significant. Both the Korean and the Japanese sides utilize only the colors white and red; however, the effects of what Shimada does with those colors are vastly different. The clean and bright white of the wedding dress and the *kappōgi* contrasts with the dark red that hangs neatly and directly from the wedding dress while

on the Korean side, the white of the *chima jeogori* and the *yukata* is mangled by the red fabric spilling from the middle of the outfit. Shimada described how both red strings represent ‘blood’ of some form; the Japanese red string represents the family lineage, the blood ties structured and holding everything together, whereas the Korean red string represents the physical blood and violence that came with being a ‘comfort woman’ subjected to daily instances of sexual and physical torture and violence.⁴² The usage of the same red in both sides but in different ways creates a conversation between the two sides. These two sides are connected, despite their differences, even as one side cannot see the other.

Shimada is careful to avoid an oversimplification of the work as solely being sympathetic to the experiences of comfort women; she specifies “it was about us, the Japanese women who turned a blind eye to the issue for a half a century after the war.”⁴³ As much as it references the invisibility and suffering of the Korean women, this work focuses more on the realities of the Japanese women who lived their lives and reaped the benefits of a strong unified Japan led by the Imperial Army. It also focuses on the patriarchal juxtaposition of the positions a woman can occupy: the sacred mother or the ‘prostitute.’⁴⁴ Both sides of the work focus on the bodies of the women and the ways in which they were both co-opted and taken advantage of, albeit in very different ways, for state and national purposes; yet, the Japanese side cannot see this relationship through her ignorance. As articulated by art historian Choi Suhyun, “Shimada sharply critiques the inability to see—and at the same time makes visible—the connection between Japanese mothers and Korean “comfort women,” who did not merely exist on the opposite ends of

⁴²Shimada Yoshiko, interview by author, Zoom, February 17, 2022.

⁴³ Shimada Yoshiko and ed. Jennifer Chan, “Art, Feminism, and Activism” in *Another Japan Is Possible: New Social Movements and Global Citizenship Education* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 245.

⁴⁴ The Japanese euphemism for comfort women, *ianfu*, translates to ‘prostitute’ and there has been much debate within Japan, often specifically within right wing factions, that these women were not kidnapped and forced into sexual slavery but instead were prostitutes. The usage of the word prostitute is in quotations because while there are some nuances regarding comfort women such as the fact that many Japanese women were originally working as sex workers, the women that Shimada is discussing are not prostitutes.

womanhood but constituted each other.”⁴⁵ There could not be the ideal and ‘good’ sacred mother without the immoral and ‘bad’ ‘prostitute.’



Figure 7: Shimada Yoshiko, *Tied to Apron Strings*, 1993, installation

⁴⁵ Choi Suhyun, “Dressing Difference: Gender, Ethnicity, and Subjectivity in Representations of Chima Chogori in Japan,” (Masters Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2019), 40-41, 10.14288/1.0380547

Shimada's 1993 piece *Tied to Apron Strings* (Figure 7) demonstrates the tangible results of *ryōsai kenbo* ideology upon women and their kin, specifically the sons who would grow up to fight in the war. The title is taken from a well known idiom 'tied to your mother's apron strings'; an expression suggesting one is "still controlled by one's mother."⁴⁶ Visually, the focus of the piece is a sea of hanging *kappōgi*, held up by wire hangers with no other garments on them. They float with an otherworldly and ghostly aura; the only thing that is grounding the piece, literally, are long pieces of cloth fabric, varying in color from that bright red, often seen in Shimada's works with *kappōgi*, to ties with blue and gold colored patternings. Tied to the end of each piece of fabric is, most often, a toy gun, a pistol. Some of the ties feature photographs, one of which Shimada says is "[her] uncle who died on the way to Okinawa when his ship was bombed." A handbook for the Japanese Army lays on the ground.⁴⁷ The fabric is kimono fabric, an inclusion that brings to mind ideas of tradition and identity. The colors of the fabrics create associations with the body; Shimada specified that blue is meant to invoke veins and red the umbilical cord.⁴⁸ The tether of family and the continuation of violence throughout generational devotion to nationalist ideology is the focal point of the work; from the inclusion of Shimada's own grandfather bound to the bright red string that hangs from the *kappōgi*, there is no escaping the physical and emotional tethers that bind the mother to her son and to the nation and the sacrifices that come with this connection. The connection of family and motherhood is significant when the mission of those who wore the *kappōgi* is remembered: mothers not only of their own family but mothers of the nation as a whole.

⁴⁶ Other definitions also say the term can apply to 'wife' in place of 'mother'. Merriam Webster, s.v. "Tied to One's Apron Strings (*idiom*)," accessed May 11, 2022

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tied%20to%20one%27s%20mother%27s%20apron%20strings>

⁴⁷ Arina Lurie, email to Shimada Yoshiko, April 15, 2022.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Inconspicuous Propaganda: Clothing and Nationalism

Clothing is a particularly effective way of mobilizing, dividing, and uniting citizenry. Uniformity, as a concept and in literal visual practice, provides an opportunity for the state to enforce unity amongst citizens. There is uniformity ingrained in the cultural dresses within different cultures and places, Japan included. Despite the fact that clothing is linked to class and gender, and those are obviously linked to national and cultural identity, as historian Alexander Maxwell noted in his study of nationalized clothing, “existing theoretical guides to clothing have mostly neglected nationality as a variable, and fashion theorists have somewhat neglected nationalism.”⁴⁹ Actual national uniforms were attempted in Japan in the early 1940s, seen in a *Shashin Shūhō* issue, with the government expressing displeasure with the new modern Japanese style, which was a mix of Japanese and Western styles, calling this fusion a “clothing museum” that lacked Japanese autonomy and exposed people “to unnecessary confusion and burdensome choices.”⁵⁰ Why were national uniforms for women so unsuccessful while the *kappōgi* was not? Explicit mobilization connecting to serving the emperor is one possible explanation. Banal nationalism, as described by theorist Michael Billig, is applicable to the *kappōgi*. While his original analysis was focused on things like the waving of national flags or the references to America on US dollars, he articulates banal nationalism as a condition in which “daily, the nation is indicated, or ‘flagged,’ in the lives of its citizenry. Nationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nations, is the endemic condition.”⁵¹ He aims to highlight the inconspicuous and routine ways in which nationalism is reproduced on a daily basis; it differs from extremist nationalism in its explicitness and overt intensity but that difference does not mean it is weak or

⁴⁹ Alexander Maxwell. “Analyzing Nationalized Clothing: Nationalism Theory meets Fashion Studies” in *National Identities* (Volume 23, Issue 1, 2021), 1.

⁵⁰ “Clothes” in Topics - A Window into the Early Showa Period (Tokyo: Japan Center for Asian Historical Records, National Archives of Japan) [Topics - A Window into the Early Showa Period \(jacar.go.jp\)](http://jacar.go.jp)

⁵¹ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, (London, UK: SAGE Publishing, August 1995), 8.

less dangerous. Rather, it is a stepping stone of sorts in that “banal nationalism can be mobilized and turned into frenzied nationalism.”⁵² The *kappōgi* being adopted as the indicator of the proper way to be a Japanese citizen, as a woman, is a fine example of banal nationalism at play. The garment transformed the lives of Japanese women in that it both allowed them outside of their homes for the purpose of contributing to the war effort as well as allowed them a position of significance and importance in mainstream Japanese society. It was a symbol that signaled ideas about the Japanese state and the role of the woman within it; Billig writes that “the signal, if it is to be effective, must pass into the conscious awareness of its recipients. However, the symbol need not have a direct emotional impact...[some symbols] are merely there as symbols...as such they are given hardly a second glance from day to day.”⁵³ The unassuming nature of this kitchen garment was mobilized as a uniting force amongst Japanese women and it became transformed into a symbol of Japanese motherhood and dedication to the state that involved women being complicit and often enthusiastic in acts of violence, racism, and misogyny.

The *kappōgi* was particularly effective in bolstering nationalist identities in that it was a symbol of uniformity that bolstered the status of the woman wearing it and became normalized because of the effective recruiting strategies of Dai Nippon Kokoku Fujinkai. Once a woman chose to wear the *kappōgi* and *tasuki* sash over her kimono, she joined the ranks of Japanese women embodying their roles as female citizens most ideally for the nation. It became a symbol of liberation and pride of these women. However, this liberation was deliberately constructed in a manipulative way and proved to be ultimately false. Beyond the fact that while women undertook male dominated jobs during the war effort, despite the contradictory ideas set forth about women and *ryōsai kenbo*, with little to no fundamental change in their rights post-Asia

⁵² Lisa Wade, “Banal Nationalism.” *Contexts* 10, no. 3 (August 2011): 80–81, 81.

⁵³ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 40.

Pacific War, these women still faced the same ideas that oppressed them in the first place. While the *kappōgi* allowed the women to escape the confines of the domestic sphere, the ideas that kept them there followed them outside the home. Vera Mackie describes how the *kappōgi* was a symbol that “metaphorically took the kitchen with [the women], thus defusing the anxieties caused by women in public space.”⁵⁴ The space the Japanese woman inhabited did not matter as she was always bound by the rules and obligations set forth by patriarchy. These rules and obligations were not always seen as oppressive by the Japanese women however. There was an eagerness and willingness to engage with these systems and their allocated roles within them. The complexities that exist in creating art about people within your nationality and culture who acted in extreme circumstances decades before you were born is not lost on Shimada; “when I talk about art and activism, I do not make art from the viewpoint of the oppressed or the victimized. I make art to make the oppressors think of what they do from where they are. But there is no clear borderline between the oppressors and the oppressed anymore.”⁵⁵

From the Past to the Present: Using the Kimono

⁵⁴ Vera Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment, and Sexuality* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 104.

⁵⁵ Shimada Yoshiko, ed. Jennifer Chan, “Art, Feminism, and Activism” in *Another Japan is Possible*, 244.



Figure 8: Shimada Yoshiko, *Becoming a Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman*, 2012, performance at the Embassy of Japan in London, UK



Figure 9: Kim Seo-kyung and Kim Eun-sung, Frontal View of *Statue of Peace*, Completed December 14 2011, Bronze

Shimada's most recent piece, *Becoming a Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman* (Figure 8), features the artist referencing a Korean statue in her critique of the Japanese government and the ignorance exhibited within Japan. The work referenced is by Korean artists Kim Seo-kyung and Kim Eun-sung entitled *A Statue of Peace (Pyeonghwau sonyeosang)* (Figure 9). First erected in Seoul, South Korea, in 2011, the bronze statue depicts a young girl, her hair short and her small hands clenched in her lap, dressed in a *chima jeogori* with an empty chair beside her, representing the many other stories, spoken and unspoken, from 'comfort women.' Funded by

private donations and crowdfunding, placed where it is, the statue pointedly sits staring at the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, an obvious commentary on the inadequacies of the Japanese governmental response to the ‘comfort women.’ Shimada remarked how the performance was her protesting “specifically the Japanese government’s demand to remove the so-called ‘Statue of Peace.’”⁵⁶

Her site-specific performance again uses Japanese cultural clothing, this time the kimono, in politically subversive ways. The performance, first started in 2012 and taking place in various locations over the years with potential to reprise it eventually, showcases Shimada, dressed in a light pink kimono, with heavy bronze paint on various parts of her outfit and body. She sits on a simple wooden chair with another empty chair next to her, representing the statue she is referencing as well as other ‘comfort women’ survivors, and her mouth covered with masking tape. Bringing in positionality again, different performances would take place in different politically charged arenas, with the first taking place in front of the Japanese Embassy in London where she silently sat for an hour.⁵⁷ Other locations include the Yasukuni Shrine (a deeply complicated and contentious location due to the fact that it enshrines the souls of all who died for Japan in battle from 1868-1954, including war criminals) the National Diet (the political legislature of Japan), as well as at a comfort women memorial site at Glendale Central Park in Los Angeles.

⁵⁶ Shimada Yoshiko, “Japan’s Feminist Reckoning” in *International Politics and Society* (The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung), March 8, 2022.

⁵⁷ A video of her preparing for and performing this piece reveals that she placed a printed out image of the *Statue of Peace* on the empty chair next to her.



Figure 10: Shimada Yoshiko, *Becoming a Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman*, 2018, performance in Glendale, California with Tomorrow Girls Troop

It is her performances with the Tomorrow Girls Troop (Figure 10), a worldwide anonymous feminist art collective focused on issues in East Asia especially Japan, that she marks as especially significant because it was “crucial in order to place the performance within a transnational feminist framework.”⁵⁸ These performances were the only collaborative ones Shimada has performed as this statue; in Glendale, “eight performers including three TGT members recited a statement for solidarity, handed sunflowers to the girl statue, and gave hugs to Shimada during the performance. TGT members held placards that [said] “Apology, too much to ask?” “Against forgetting” and “I’m with her”.”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Shimada Yoshiko, “Japan’s Feminist Reckoning”

⁵⁹ “Against Forgetting,” Tomorrow Girls Troop, 2018, [明日少女隊](#) ⚡ [Tomorrow Girls Troop](#) ⚡ [내일소녀단](#)

Within this work, Shimada is commenting on the silences and ignorances that exist around ‘comfort women’ affecting Japanese women as well, saying that “it is a gesture to remember their existence.”⁶⁰ The fact that the work is a performance is significant because it connects every one who walks by with the piece and involves them in the stories of these women as well as highlights the fact that a permanent ‘comfort women’ memorial statue could not exist in Japan. While it is estimated that up to eighty percent of ‘comfort women’ were Korean, Japanese women, most often those who were impoverished, were also drafted into forced sexual servitude.⁶¹ The debates regarding Japanese women as ‘comfort women’ are complicated by the fact that many Japanese women did participate in state-regulated prostitution (*kōshō seido*), which existed in Japan until 1957, and many use that as an argument that the ‘comfort women’ were merely sex workers rather than women kidnapped and forced into servitude (sexual, emotional, and physical) for the army.⁶² While prostitution did exist, the ‘comfort women’ were not prostitutes and there existed lines that blurred between the lives of the sex workers thought to be paid for their services and the women forced into this servitude. Japanese women who participated in state regulated prostitution were often stuck within “a system of indentured sexual labor rooted in an intricate network of brothel businesses, brokers, and other sex contractors who made their living by buying and selling young women” and their lives were complicated by issues of debt repayment and familial responsibility. This contributed to debates regarding the possibility of consent when it is remembered that many of these prostitutes were young women sold by their families to pay off debts.⁶³ In addition, historian Onozawa Akane shows how state

⁶⁰ Bahk Eun-ji, “Japanese artist remembers war time sexual slavery” in *Korea Times* (Donghwa Company: Seoul, South Korea), September 20, 2019.

⁶¹ It is estimated that 10% of ‘comfort women’ were Japanese.

⁶² I elaborate on the servitude beyond the sexual aspect here because while the rapes of these women are significant, they were also forced to care for these men emotionally and physically in the form of manual, emotional and domestic labor. Onowaza Akane. “The Comfort Women and State Prostitution,” in *The Asia-Pacific Journal* (Volume 16, Issue 10, Number 1, May 10, 2018), 9.

⁶³ Ibid.

regulated Japanese sex workers -*shōgi*, *geisha*, and *shakufu*- were recruited under usually false or intensely pressured pretenses to join the military brothels because “the army and navy relied directly or indirectly on the trafficking networks of licensed brothels in Japan to meet comfort station staffing quotas overseas.”⁶⁴

As she acts as a Japanese ‘comfort woman’, Shimada is pointing out the fact that the stories of these Japanese women are either ignored or manipulated, turning them into fodder for Japanese nationalists to claim that the ‘comfort women’ system was actually staffed by willing Japanese prostitutes. The *Statue of Peace* Shimada draws from is still often fiercely contested in Japan, even when the statue is not in the country. In 2012, a smaller version of the statue was exhibited at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art but was removed four days later for violating certain exhibition rules. In 2020, a public statue, again looking like the Statue of Peace, was unveiled in Berlin, Germany and the Japanese government released a statement of outrage, declaring that it upset them and demanding it be removed for the purposes of being able to build and maintain strong ties with South Korea.⁶⁵ This protest was approved by the German government but an emergency appeal submitted by Korea Verband, supported by the Coalition for the Statue of Peace in Germany, resulted in the allowance of the statue to remain temporarily, much to the chagrin and upset of many in Japan.⁶⁶ While Japan argues and contests the recognition of the Korean ‘comfort women’, Shimada’s performance demonstrates that that contention applies to Japanese survivors as well, leading to questions about Japanese governmental nationalism, the myth of the family-state, and the weight it holds over the

⁶⁴ Ibid, 11.

⁶⁵ This statue was funded by the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan.

⁶⁶ Insa Eschebach and Regina Mühlhäuser. “Contested Memory. The ‘Comfort Women’ Statue in Berlin and Dealing with Sexual Violence in War,” [Contested Memory. The ‘Comfort Women’ Statue in Berlin and Dealing... = Geschichte der Gegenwart](#)

experiences of citizens. Once again, we can look to the emperor system and the patriarchal standards it enforced; “the subordination of women to the state and the emperor under the state patriarchal system in imperial Japan became the ideological foundation for the establishment of military brothels to “comfort” Japan.”⁶⁷ Shimada has suggested the existence of Japanese ‘comfort women’ demonstrates the “structures of oppression within Japan – as well as in its colonies – wherein those most vulnerable in terms of gender and class were violated and abused to the advantage of the colonial order.”⁶⁸

The Japanese kimono, like Korea’s *hanbok*, is a long lasting cultural icon. Unlike the *kappōgi*, the kimono is often a work of art that is immediately recognizable not only to people in Japan but worldwide. The kimono is a characteristic of that quintessential Japanese archetype all around the world. The garment invokes the beautiful Japanese girl (*bijin*), the geisha, and all the stereotypes of Japanese femininity and implicit subservience. It is a garment that often comes with a projection of Western misogyny and racism, an embodiment of the sexualized ideal and docile yet highly visible *bijin*, but also of Japanese manipulation and strategization. The image of the kimono-clad *bijin* has been used to shape and mold the view of the Japanese since the late nineteenth century, especially in Europe and America where japonisme swept across France. This association of the kimono with this ideal Japanese beauty was also true in Japan and was capitalized upon; “most forms of visual advertising designed to attract both domestic and foreign tourists will feature a woman wrapped in a kimono somewhere in its footage.”⁶⁹ It is significant that Shimada chooses to wear a garment so heavily linked to the constructions of Japanese feminine beauty as well as Japanese identity within the country, and beyond, for her protest of

⁶⁷ Pyong Gap Min. “Korean ‘Comfort Women’: The Intersection of Colonial Power, Gender, and Class.” *Gender and Society* 17, no. 6 (2003): 938–57, 947.

⁶⁸ Shimada Yoshiko, “Japan’s Feminist Reckoning”.

⁶⁹ Julie Valk, “Research Note: The ‘Kimono Wednesday’ Protests: Identity Politics and How the Kimono Became More Than Japanese,” *Asian Ethnology* 74, no. 2 (2015): 379–99, 280.

the dehumanization and disrespecting of Japanese women by the state. This decision to use the well known garment takes the piece and, as she noted about the performance with Tomorrow Girls Troop, places it in a transnational sphere, implicating not only Japan but the world in her sentiment.

Conclusion

Curator of the first feminist art exhibition in Japan entitled *Gender Beyond Memory: The Works of Contemporary Women Artists*, which included Shimada's art, Kasahara Michiko described Shimada as demonstrating "a resistance to forgetfulness, an active will to remember."⁷⁰ Shimada Yoshiko's continuous usage of clothing in her confrontation of Japanese imperial mindsets and patriarchy demonstrates the power of simple everyday action in constructing a nationalist state. Her etchings, *White Aprons* and *Shooting Lesson*, turn propagandistic images of Japanese female violence and wartime devotion on their heads as she directly juxtaposes the different situations in which the kappogi was worn and the violence inherent in the garment and the power it gives the Japanese woman while taking away the autonomy of other Asian women like the Korean 'comfort woman.' The decision to weave the *kappōgi* into much of her critiques demonstrates an awareness of the subtleties of fascist mobilization and the development of a Japanese consciousness to which all other countries are threats. The *kappōgi* looks like a simple kitchen apron and at some point, maybe that is all it was. However, as Japan sought to expand its sphere of influence over Asia, and the world, that simple apron became a manipulative connecting force for Japanese women of all classes to see a commonality amongst themselves in their devotion to the emperor and the desires of the Japanese Empire. Shimada's installations *Look At Me, Look At You* and *Tied to Apron Strings* utilize the physical garment as she juxtaposes

⁷⁰ Kasahara Michiko, *Gender Beyond Memory: The Work of Contemporary Women Artists* (Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography) 1996, 163.

the lives and mentalities of Japanese women to their Korean counterparts as well as the tether of family and motherhood in the midst of war. Within *Look at Me, Look at You*, Shimada demonstrates the power and ignorance of the Japanese gaze through her juxtaposition of a beautiful and polished Japanese silhouette, clad in a lavish wedding dress and a *kappōgi*, against the Korean silhouette of a traditional *chima jeogori*, tattered and on display, partially hidden from view by the soiled fabric of a Japanese *yukata*, a garment that came into the lives of Korean women only through subjection and violence. Only a one way mirror divides the two garments as the Japanese garments reflect onto themselves and the Korean garments through the mirror onto the wedding dress and *kappogi*, their identities existing simultaneously and connectedly through the patriarchal positions afforded to them. *Tied to Apron Strings* places the *kappōgi* in an earthly and haunting arena, their white fabric contours hanging like ghosts, only connected to the ground and the tangible physical space through their ties to weapons and the deaths of Japanese men for the sake of the emperor. Her ongoing performances of *Becoming a Japanese Comfort Woman* abandon the *kappogi* for the Japanese kimono, a work of art loaded with aesthetic and cultural terms of significance for Japan and the enforcement of the female beauty of Japan, the *bijin* clad in her kimono, in Western and Japanese eyes. Her forced silence echoes the voluntary silences of many Japanese or the loudness of others voices, specifically right wing nationalists, that drown out the real horrors that even Japanese women, who were supposed to be members of a ‘family-state’ and function as representations of the ideal beauty of Japan as a nation, were subjected to by the Imperial Army. Shimada Yoshiko’s art grapples with the legacies of colonialism, nationalism, and patriarchy that pervade Japanese thought decades after the loss of the Japanese in the Asia Pacific War. Her usage of textiles “fashions female fascism” brings to

mind the dangers of everyday nationalism and fascism and the continual perpetuation of ignorance as she interconnects the wartime uniform with modern Japanese thought and memory.

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