

Abstract

This report analyzes the portrayal of Japan's Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) disaster relief activities. It clarifies how interrelationships between militarism and masculinity manifest in the JSDF's public image building on arguments surrounding military masculinities within post-modern militaries. The JSDF is a unique military organization under Japan's Constitution, Article 9, which declares no possession of any regular armed forces. As the JSDF is legally unstable and discussing military affairs has been avoided in post-war Japanese society where "remorse for Japan's wartime actions" is the starting point. The JSDF put a huge effort into maintaining a relationship with Japanese citizens; the JSDF is relatively reluctant to show their image as related to war and combat. The Japanese citizens are not interested in or reject militarized aspects of the organization, unlike the case of the Imperial Army and the US military.

Its disaster relief activities have played an important role in legitimizing the existence of the JSDF. The Ministry of Defense and the JSDF have tried to gain the popularity and trust of the general public by promoting disaster relief activities. Most existing literature on the JSDF's disaster relief activities argues that it played a major role in constructing its positive image in post-war Japanese society due to it having non-combat status.

However, it raises the following question: How is the JSDF's military masculinity constructed through disaster relief activities? As existing research on the gender of the JSDF points out, it is a male-centered organization. Whereas masculinity is at the core of their identity, military masculinity has been theorized as valorizing combat. Non-violence and armlessness are devalued as feminine; therefore, the masculinized use of force is considered desirable.

Building on the argument above of military masculinity, feminine activities such as caring for the earthquake victims may be praised. Alternatively, the connection between combat and masculinity is somehow constructed in the eyes of Japanese citizens. This is

contrary to previous research on the JSDF's disaster relief activities. I answer this question by analyzing magazine articles on the Great East Japan Earthquake.

I draw on the concept of military masculinity within the post-modern military to analyze militarized masculinity within a non-combat mission. Postmodern military theory describes a shift in the situation surrounding militaries. The end of the Cold War resulted in several changes, and there are two main points regarding the gendered aspects of militaries. Firstly, more women are integrated into militaries as soldiers. This trend can be attributed to gender mainstreaming in security as reflected in The Women, Peace, and Security Agenda, represented by Security Council Resolution 1325. On the other hand, the issue of labor shortages caused by the shift towards an all-volunteer system. Secondly, militaries are becoming more involved in non-combat missions. Today, military operations have to deal with not only combat but also non-combat missions. These missions include peacekeeping operations, where the use of weapons is heavily restricted and teamwork with local residents in stationed areas is crucial to complete the mission. Consequently, so-called war-fighting masculinity is less valued. Feminized characteristics or activities such as being compassionate for the suffering of the local people and taking care of them within the postmodern militaries is higher valued. That is to say, soldiers are required to gain different skills from those they are traditionally trained to embody. Taking these shifts into account, some argue that military masculinity that avoids war is now ideal.

Building on the argument surrounding post-modern military masculinity, I use a three-dimensional framework to describe the JSDF's position (see page 15). The X axis represents whether soldiers are male or female. The Y axis represents whether militaries themselves or their activities are masculinized or feminized. The Z axis represents whether the military is described as an organization for combat or non-combat missions.

Information was gathered from magazine articles that focus on disaster relief activities during the Great East Japan Earthquake. The portrayals of disaster relief

operations of the Great Hanshin Earthquake, often considered a major turning point, were not chosen as a case study due to the limited gendered portrayals of the event, resulting in insufficient data. The magazine articles were collected in the following process: Firstly, I put 'Higashi nihon daishinsai AND jieitai (the Great East Japan Earthquake AND the JSDF)' in the search engine of the Web-OYA database. Magazine articles issued from March 11, 2011, to March 11, 2021, were collected since the number of articles dropped dramatically after 2012, and there is no big difference in terms of content between articles issued before 2022 and those issued after 2021. Therefore, I excluded all articles from 2022 to 2023. Secondly, I selected articles that included any of the following portrayals of JSDF members: One is the image of JSDF members who are compassionate with earthquake victims' suffering and make them feel at ease. This can be interpreted as post-modern military masculinity. The other is the image of those who are going to 'the front line' at the risk of their lives and 'defend their country.' This can be interpreted as a traditional idea of military masculinity.

By analyzing the portrayal of JSDF members in disaster relief activities, I found that there is a lot of variation in their gendered depictions and post-modern military masculinity was observed in the articles. The point here is that the acts of caring for earthquake victims by male JSDF members are masculinized, whereas those of female members are feminized. Surprisingly, war-fighting masculinity was observed, contrary to the arguments of existing research.

Both male and female members' act of having empathy with earthquake victims' suffering and reducing their anxiety was observed; but the former is masculinized, with the term 'heroes' for example, while the latter is feminized. Even female members who join the 'masculine' missions such as searching for a body are described as feminine by emphasizing their 'lady-like consideration.' The depiction of 'compassionate male members' can be explained by postmodern military masculinity. Although women and femininity are often devalued in a male-dominated society, what is surprising is that

female members' 'feminine' activities are described as positive in the magazine articles. It should be noted that caregiving, which is traditionally a feminized activity, is also featured as a female member's activity during a disaster relief mission.

The most interesting finding is some articles utilize a metaphor of contingency and such portrayals are more masculinized than those mentioned earlier 'compassionate male JSDF members.' Previous research on JSDF's disaster relief activities takes for granted that the nature of the missions is 'non-militaristic' and argues that as disaster relief activities are non-combat missions, they play a significant role in gaining support from the general public in post-war Japanese society, where military affairs are considered taboo. However, as shown in this report, there is a view that associates the JSDF, combat, and masculinity as ideal. In addition, the writers of these articles assumed that the actors were male JSDF members. Considering that female members are associated with non-combat missions, such as caregiving, there is a traditional militaristic distinction between men and women; the former is associated with combat, and the latter is related to non-combat in the eyes of the general public.

We are in the ongoing great transformation of Japan's security policy; this means that it becomes urgent to take the issue of militarism seriously and discuss what we want the JSDF to be like. To achieve this, it seems time to reflect on whether we grasp the reality of JSDF and what role the organization should have. Although post-war Japanese society is often described as merely 'patriotic,' as discussed in the report, still there is a stereotype that associates female members with caregivers and detaches them from combat missions, while considering combat missions are for the male members. We need to start from this reality and stay critical, and now it is time for open discussion.