

# “Dainty hands do useful work”: Depicting Filipino women in Japanese wartime propaganda

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## Abstract

This article analyzes the visual depiction of women in the *Tribune*, the main propaganda newspaper of Japan in the Philippines during the Pacific War. Japanese wartime propaganda painted an image of a productive and cooperative Filipina, respectable and modest like her Japanese counterpart. The analysis reveals three motivations for depicting women in said light: to show a semblance of normalcy despite the turbulent war, to entice women to serve Japan’s aims, and to disprove the Japanese women’s image as subservient wives or entertainers while asserting the connection between the two countries. Analyzing the depiction of women in Japanese propaganda contributes to the understanding of war as a gendered phenomenon. Beyond seeing women as symbols of the private obligations for which men fight or as surrogate objects of sexual desire, the image of women was perceived to be instrumental in showcasing Japan’s New Order.

Keywords: Pacific War, Philippines, Japanese propaganda, *Tribune*, Women

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## Introduction

The Japanese occupation of the Philippines was a short but decisive period in Philippine history. Lasting only for almost three and a half years, the Japanese did whatever they could to win the Filipino over their Asian neighbors, as evidenced by numerous propaganda campaign materials used during the war (Soriano, 1954). These materials were produced through an elaborate cultural propaganda program led by the Japanese Propaganda Corps, a group of Japanese civilians tasked to manage the media outlets taken over by the Japanese (Terami-Wada, 1990). Media was of particular importance for the Japanese. Earlier, they have noted that Filipinos were “cultured, but read very little” (Terami-Wada, 1990), and preferred listening to the radio or watching movies, “accepting whatever they see or hear” (p. 283). This observation is reflected in the variety of propaganda materials released by the Propaganda Corps, primarily through newspapers such as the *Tribune*, the central organ of Japanese propaganda during the war. The pages of the *Tribune*, and its special weekly issue, the *Sunday Tribune Magazine*, published many feature articles accompanied by photographs, illustrations, cartoons, and comic strips, even a pictorial section. It could be argued that this attention to visual materials indicates that the Japanese desired to engage readers and non-readers alike. The resulting propaganda materials could be another means of determining what the Japanese wanted the Filipinos to understand about the war and the Japanese occupation of the country.

In this article, I interrogate a major theme apparent in Japanese propaganda: the discourse on womanhood and Filipino women. The *Tribune* during the war was replete with photographs, cartoons, and comic strips that depicted women and their role in society during the time of war. This article’s core questions ask: How were women portrayed in Japanese propaganda? What were the reasons behind such depictions, and how different were these to how women were portrayed in earlier periods? What did the Japanese seek to achieve in representing women in such a fashion?

To answer these questions, I analyzed 1,004 issues of the *Tribune* from 1942 to 1945, which yielded 3,267 photographs, 264 illustrations such as cartoons and drawings, and 248 comic strips. Using qualitative visual content analysis, an empirical, observational, and objective procedure for quantifying recorded visual representation using reliable, explicitly defined categories (Bell, 2001), I generated descriptors for the visual materials that enabled classifying them into categories, which were later on organized according to themes. These categories were militarism and masculinity, modernity and modern technology, and representation of women’s qualities and roles in society. Zooming in on the theme of women’s portrayal, I

identified the different representations made and further categorized them. These categories are discussed in this article. I must note that as the war waged on, the inclusion of feature articles, photographs, cartoons, and comic strips in the *Tribune* dwindled by late 1944 until the end of the war. Thus, majority of the images presented in this article are from 1942 to 1943, when the Japanese Military Administration of the Philippines and the propaganda campaign were at their most stable.

Many scholars have analyzed Japanese propaganda's more manifest themes such as Pan-Asianism, militarism, anticolonialism, and self-sufficiency. Unpacking the way women were depicted with these manifest themes as backdrop enables the revelation of potential latent meanings gleaned from visual propaganda. In turn, these meanings could contribute to understanding different facets of a short but decisive event in the country's past, as well as structural issues rooted in the past that continue to the present.

This article is organized as follows. The first section provides a brief background on the depiction of women before the war. The second section discusses the *Tribune* as Japanese propaganda and establishes it as the study's main data source. Sections three, four, and five elaborate on the three themes of women portrayal identified from the visual content analysis: women as indicators of normalcy, women at work, and the juxtaposition of Filipino and Japanese women. The article ends with a conclusion that also outlines the implications of this research.

## **The Filipina in History**

Before the colonial period, the Filipino woman has been portrayed as enjoying enormous rights and privileges, and early Philippine society has largely treated women favorably (Torres, 1987; Mananzan, 1991). In a review of women studies in the Philippines, Amaryllis Torres (1987) observed that the earliest scholarly pursuits of Filipino women in the twentieth century sought to explore women's power and prestige in the precolonial period and how women's roles changed in the advent of colonialism. Filipina historians Paz Mendoza-Guazon (1928) and Encarnacion Alzona (1934) highlighted several roles and rights that women held before the advent of colonialism: they headed barangays, led and fought battles, and served as priestesses or spiritual leaders; they had full and productive participation in the economic life of the community, retained their names after marriage, and either one in the couple could dissolve a problematic relationship. Thus, women were equal to men, something Western colonizers in the sixteenth century found bizarre.

In particular, women's spiritual role as *babaylan* in the Visayas or *catalonan* in Luzon is of particular interest, especially for the Spanish colonizers. Antonio Pigafetta (1525/1903–1907), the Italian chronicler of the Magellan voyage, described in awe and amazement how an *una vieja* (old woman) sang, danced, and performed rituals in 1521. Later, a Spanish colonist Miguel de Loarca characterized the *babaylan* he encountered as a priestess who invoked the demon and foamed at the mouth but was the one tasked to heal the sick and lead sacrificial rituals before going to war (Loarca, 1582/1903–1907). Early Filipino society recognized the *babaylan* as a pillar of the *barangay*, together with the *datu*, the political leader; the *panday*, who takes care of weapons, agricultural implements, and boats; and the *bagani*, who served as warriors and protectors (Mangahas, 2019). The early accounts of awe and amazement by the Spaniards foreshadowed the societal relegation that women will experience in the advent of colonization.

The subjugation of women and Spanish colonialism went hand in hand. Nay, it could even be argued that colonialism required altering the woman's place in society. The Catholicism imposed on the islands repressed women's bodies, limited the places where they could be active, and dissolved the prestige they held in society, especially the *babaylan* (Gaborro, 2009). In an essay on the politics of gender during the Spanish colonial period, Herminia Meñez (1996) suggested that the precolonial *babaylanes* were associated with the *aswang*, or viscera suckers, in an effort by the Spaniards to remove their power and privilege in society. According to Meñez (1996), the friars viewed the *babaylanes* as their religious rivals, and since they were females, they held "sexual powers" that needed "to be subjugated under male authority—Spanish or native" (p. 88). Meñez (1996) argued that the *aswang's* narratives stressed inversions of the roles of the *babaylan*; its proclivity for human fetuses and internal organs was based on the *babaylan's* role as healers and midwives; the *aswang's* horrid smell was an inversion of the *babaylan's* use of different herbal scents; and so on. Interestingly, what protected Filipinos from *aswangs* are holy water, the crucifix, praying, and other religious activities, which dovetailed neatly into the friars' goals of converting the natives to Christianity, where women were to remain quiet, docile, and modest.

The political life was the domain of men. Delia Aguilar (1989), writing on the social construction of the Filipino woman, noted that the woman's spheres were reduced to the home and the church, as the educational opportunities afforded them were only enough to read, write, learn the Christian doctrine, and do a lot of needlework, so much so that it was common for a woman to aspire to be teachers, nuns, or spinsters. Paz Mendoza-Guazon (1928) and Encarnacion Alzona (1934) asserted that

Spanish colonialism destroyed the privileges women used to enjoy, such as the right to divorce, to have children regardless of marital status, property rights, freedom to contract business arrangements, retention of maiden name, and the central role in religious practices.

Another manifestation of women's repression in the colonial period is the traditional women's attire. Reconstructing the clothing culture of nineteenth century Philippines, Stéphanie Marie R. Coo (2014) described the colonized Filipina as usually donning the *tapis* and *saya*, long skirts that covered their legs and feet; the *camisa* or the *baro*, long-sleeved blouses worn over undershirts; and the *pañuelo* or *alampay* draped over the shoulders for even more added modesty. Coo added that in the late nineteenth century, the *baro's saya* evolved into the *traje de mestiza*, which would also be referred to as the Filipino dress or *traje del país*, or much later as the Maria Clara dress. Coincidentally, Maria Clara, the female protagonist in Jose Rizal's novels, embodied the ideal woman of the Spanish period: docile, submissive, virginal, meek, and required the protection of the men in her life.

In the late nineteenth century, a sizable number of women worked outside their homes. According to Maria Luisa T. Camagay (1995), these women were gainfully employed as *maestra* (teachers), *criadas* (female domestic workers), *cigarreras* (tobacco factory workers), *matronas titulares* (midwives), *tenderas* and *vendadoras* (store owners and vendors), and *mujeres publicas* (prostitutes), among others. Camagay (1995) emphasized that women received lower pay than their male counterparts and were sexually harassed by their male *amos* or even the *frailes*.

The Filipina position was modified during the Philippine Revolution against Spain (1896–1898) and the Philippine-American War (1899–1913). Camagay (1998) asserted that women's contributions in the revolution spanned different facets, from logistical, intellectual, to physical, and identified these contributions. For example, the *Asociacion Filantropica dela Cruz Roja*, or more popularly known as the *Junta de la Cruz Roja*, was established by Emilio Aguinaldo in 1899 and was led by his wife, Hilaria del Rosario. These organizations mushroomed in Central Luzon, and its members, coming from the ranks of elite families, collected material contributions to sustain the revolution. Camagay also heralded the work of women poets in revolutionary publications such as *El Heraldo de la Revolucion* and *La Independencia*, and the continued participation of women as many joined the war against the United States, such as Aguada Kahabagan of Laguna, Trinidad Tecson of Bulacan, and Teresa Magbanua of Iloilo. Nonetheless, it would be fallacious to assume that just because women joined the revolution, they were no longer vulnerable or subjected

to abuse (Hega et al., 2017) or that the revolution itself has espoused gender equality.

The arrival of the United States as the new colonial masters brought with them conquest and colonial programs. The biggest of these programs was public education, and the change that occurred in the formal education of women was hailed as a game changer (Mendoza-Guazon, 1928; Alzona, 1934; Guerrero-Nakpil, 1952). Once implanted in the Philippines, the progressive educational philosophy of the United States opened the doors for women to access tertiary education and become professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and nurses. The twentieth century also gave rise to women's organizations such as the *Asociacion Feminista Filipina* (which later became *La Gota de Leche*), the *Women's Club of Manila*, the *National Federation of Women's Clubs*, and the *Liga Nacional de Damas Filipinas* (Camagay, 1998). As the Filipina engaged in civic activities, she was drawn "away from home, children, and husband and swept into situations wherein she was encouraged to take an interest in public and political affairs and to use her talents and education for the country's welfare" (Torres, 1987, p. 312). At this time, the benefits of women's suffrage were being fleshed out, and in 1919, moves to give women the right to vote were endorsed in the Philippine legislature. In 1937, a plebiscite approved women's suffrage (Quindoza-Santiago, 1996) a historical milestone for women in the Philippines.

The US occupation of the Philippines has been painted as a welcome opening for women to slowly inch out of the box where the Spaniards have trapped them. However, it must be noted that only a privileged few, mostly the elite, had access to the well-being resulting from the US occupation. As Aguilar (1989) argued, the Filipino elite has not merely yielded to but surpassed the imperialist discourse when they claim that the women gained their rightful place in society due to the arrival of the United States since the social revolution in women's rights seem to have only affected women from the elite class. The portrayal of women and women's role in society remained stuck to the same mold for most Filipinas, alluding to a problem more structural than superficial. While the right to suffrage for Filipino women is a positive move, it was achieved by a woman's movement at its infancy in the early twentieth century. The same ideas were explored in an article by Fernan Talamayan (2013). In his analysis of 1930s advertisements sanctioned by the National Economic Protectionism Association (NEPA), Talamayan argued that while the women's movement was setting foot, the discourse of the family, the kitchen, and the household as the woman's rightful domain continued and bound Filipinas to these domestic roles.

By the end of the 1930s, the scent of war hung thick in the air. In a July 1941 issue of the popular magazine *Graphic*, women in khakis graced the cover, with the words “Dressed for Evacuation.” While rumors of the possibility of war reaching Philippine shores spread far and wide, the magazine asked women, “How will you be dressed come evacuation time? How will you bundle yourself off with neatness and dispatch to safety?” (“Dressing for evacuation,” 1941, p. 8). As Genevieve Clutario (2020) noted, this article illustrated how the promotion of American khaki to transform women’s wear to help them survive a pending war was an indication that the Filipino woman was already caught between the two empires of the United States and Japan. The rapid shifts in the Philippines’ relations with these two empires had a tremendous impact in the crafting of the Filipina’s femininity, or what Denise Cruz (2012) refers to as “transpacific femininity.” The “remaking of the Filipina” (p. 151) was also a way to negotiate the changing status of the Philippines in Asia and the Pacific. Thus, in understanding the perception of women in Philippine history, we must consider how the gender discourse of Japanese wartime propaganda attempted to influence and shape Filipino women.

### **The *Tribune* under the Japanese Propaganda Corps**

Motoe Terami-Wada (1990) studied the activities and movement of the Japanese Propaganda Corps, since the arrival of its members attached to the Fourteenth Imperial Japanese a couple of weeks after the war broke out in December 1941. Terami-Wada (1990) notes that they were civilians engaged in cultural work that were drafted into the army barely a month before, the Japanese military’s first attempt to recruit civilians for propaganda work. Upon settling in the newly occupied city of Manila, Terami-Wada (1990) listed their immediate mandate: (1) seize newspaper companies and reopen them as soon as possible so that Japan’s motives could be propagated; (2) seize radio stations and repair broadcasting equipment so that the stations could function again; and (3) immediately reopen all movie theaters to regain an atmosphere of normalcy. Terami-Wada (1990) notes that the special attention paid to the press, radio, and film was because Filipinos had a prodigious appetite for reading news and magazines, watching movies, and listening to the radio. Beyond that, Filipinos read very little. Thus, newspapers, magazines, radio programs, and films were deemed the best media to deliver the Japanese message in the islands.

The choice for the *Tribune* as the main organ of propaganda by the Japanese was not borne of coincidence, as investigated by military historian Ricardo Trota Jose (1990a), since the Japanese have kept tabs on Philippine media before the war. The *Tribune* is part of a chain of newspapers owned

by Alejandro Roces's T.V.T. (*Tribune-La Vanguardia-Taliba*) publishing corporation. According to Jose (1990a), Roces favored journalistic independence and strived to show a balanced view of events, dubbing itself "the independent Filipino daily" and "the newspaperman's newspaper" (p. 45). Jose (1990a) also noted that the *Tribune* had the biggest circulation among Manila's major dailies, and was deemed by the Japanese Consulate in the Philippines to bear anti-Quezon and anti-United States sentiments, so much so that the consulate reported to Tokyo that the paper had become pro-Japanese after a sponsored series of Japan-Philippines friendship articles in 1935 and a competition that awarded readers an all-expenses-paid trip to Japan in 1936. As the war arrived in 1941, Jose (1990a) observed that the *Tribune's* tone became cautious, subduing its references to Japan, and a month later, the Japanese Propaganda Corps took over the paper. There was an attempt to feign normalcy by publishing the usual columns, sections, and the US-syndicated comic strips, but the control is evident, as the *Tribune* regularly reported on updates related to the Japanese military campaign. Filipinos know that the newspaper has become the Japanese organ of propaganda. Its readers expressed disgust on their diaries, a mute indignation was felt against the staff, and underground newspapers scoffed at the way the war was reported: the Japanese forces do not retreat, they always deal heavy casualties on the enemy, and that every Japanese plane that does not return to base blasts itself against an enemy plane, among others (Jose, 1990b, p. 140). Nonetheless, the paper remained popular. The historian Teodoro Agoncillo attributed this popularity since the paper's quality was so thin, it made for good cigarette wrapping paper (Constantino, 1994, p. 19). On the other hand, Terami-Wada (1990) contended that Filipinos were hungry for any news about the war, so they picked the *Tribune* up despite it being a propaganda paper.

Aside from regularly reporting the "imminent victory" of Japan in the war, the *Tribune* regularly published articles and features that taught Japanese language and culture, campaigned for the removal of Western influences, and suggested practical solutions to everyday economic problems (Jose 1990a, 1990b; Cheng-Chua 2005; Candelaria, 2014). The newspaper also published several columns and sections. Some of these are: "Public Pulse," which featured heavily censored letters to the editor; "Police Notes," which detailed petty crimes, robberies, and killings that were usually not connected with the Japanese; "Sports Flashes," which reported news on boxing, basketball, and other tournaments; "Home Front," which targeted housewives with practical tips for the home; and "Brevities," which contained news on marriages, debuts, engagements, parties, and other social events of families that could still afford them. All these columns and

sections ran under the blue pencils of the Japanese censors, but Jose (1990b) noted that however hard the *Tribune* tried to conceal the economic realities of the times, these were just too much not to spill into the pages of the newspaper, especially in these columns and sections.

The *Tribune* of the war, especially from 1942 to early 1944, featured many images, illustrations, and comic strips. Faithful to the propagandistic aim, these visual texts were also made to fit the narratives that Japan pursued. Even photographs were made to lie through misrepresentation, photo staging, and manipulation (Jose, 1990b). Several rotogravure issues of the *Sunday Tribune Magazine* were released, mainly pictorial features of the war. Small sketches and cartoons accompanied some articles, while comic strips, such as *The Philosopher of the Sidewalk* by Gat, *Now I've Seen Everything* by Ros, *The Boy "Pilipino"* by Keizo Shimada, and *The Kalibapi Family* by Tony Velasquez, were especially created under the control of the censors (Candelaria, 2014). Analyzing these strips, Karl Ian Cheng Chua (2005) argued that more than dismissing them as blatant propaganda, a more nuanced perspective reveals the strategies of Filipino artists in presenting lighthearted social commentary; and that these are alternative sources to the writing of history. Adding to this, I argue that the strips, together with other visual texts in the *Tribune*, could also reveal facets of the war that are otherwise relegated or understudied, such as the discourse of women and womanhood in the time of war.

### **"Balintawak at the symphony": The Filipino woman's image as normalcy**

On 9 August 1942, the *Tribune* published a feature about the first symphony concert under the "New Order," which had happened a fortnight ago. Titled "Balintawak at the symphony" (1942) the article celebrated the concert as proof that Japan is following through its policy of "bringing out the best in Philippine native culture" (p. 1) through the concert, as the first piece performed was a Filipino-composed symphony, *Taga-Ilog*, and that women, for the first time since the war started, wore the elegant *balintawak* dress. A full spread of photos of women on their way to or coming out of the concert, dressed in probably colorful clothes, were prominently featured (figs. 1 and 2). The *balintawak* is a traditional Filipino dress that was "confined to the shy rusticity of the country and the farm" (p. 1). The article went further to describe how the dresses the women wore blended with the atmosphere of *Taga-Ilog*, how the women moved and sat with Japanese officials "at a sober spiritual communion, free from the grossness of jazz and other empty shallow musical forms" (p. 1) and that the enjoyment of the classical music, enriched by the beauty of the women in traditional garb, created an

**Figure 1.** Women in balintawak (“Balintawak at the symphony,” 1942).



LEADING those who donned this typical Filipino dress were Miss Helen Benitez, chairman of the Ladies' Committee of the New Philippines Symphony Society, and Miss Lucrecia Kasilag, secretary of the Society, shown leaving the theatre.

“accidental harmony” that “testify to the prevalence of peace of mind and a sense of quiet security” (p. 1).

The article and its accompanying images incorporated several propaganda lines of the Japanese: the promotion of “native” and inherently “Asian” culture, the “communion” with the Japanese, the “grossness” of American popular culture, and the peaceful new order (“Balintawak at the symphony,” p. 1). There are many other examples of how normalcy is portrayed through women. An article titled “An abbreviated course of study for Filipinos,” published 23 August 1942, was accompanied by a photo of two women in dresses of highly contrasting colors, clearly posing in front of a room signage where

Japanese language classes were being held (fig. 3). One looked serious with a muted smile, while the other smiled more widely. Interestingly, the photo’s caption quickly attempted to dispel the notion that the picture was staged and that the smile could be taken as “an expression of how enjoyable the session has been.” It seemed that in hoping to portray the joy of learning the Japanese language, which involved the memorization of two separate syllabaries and more than a thousand logographic characters derived from Chinese, the image looked forcibly framed and inauthentic. The *Tribune* staff under the Japanese censors also seemed aware of how such images would be perceived and that the disclaimer could salvage how simulated and propaganda-like was the picture.

In another article titled “Filipino girl workers in factory prove efficient” (Kozuma, 1942a), Filipino women were shown in an assembly line, weighing and packing *Purico*, a brand of vegetable lard (fig. 4). The women wore “snow-white caps and aprons,” and the image’s caption titled “Women at work” cited that such factory activity indicates a “return to industrial normalcy.” It was not enough to show men and women working in the factory—images of women participating in the work in a factory assembly

**Figure 2.** More women in balintawak ("Balintawak at the symphony," 1942).



**Figure 3.** Women coming from a Japanese language class ("An abbreviated course of study for Filipinos," 1942).



**Figure 4.** Filipina workers in a factory assembly line ("Filipino girl workers in factory prove efficient," 1942).



line drive the point home further. However, this image indicated the limits of Japanese censors. As Clutario (2020) pointed out, Purico, a product of the Philippine Manufacturing Corporation (a very Filipino sounding company), was originally made by a US-owned coconut refinery. The image unwittingly associated normalcy under the Japanese to the availability of US manufactured or imported goods.

While the usual propaganda line of the return of normalcy involved women, another aspect commonly attached to women was how they were exposed to Western culture's undesirable effects. The Japanese urged that Filipinos be made aware of Western colonialism's consequences and abandon them immediately. The article "Dainty hands do useful work" (1942) featured images of women doing ordinary household chores such as ironing clothes, cooking, and cleaning (fig. 5). The article emphasized that the time wasted in pointless frivolity, especially by Filipina socialites and bourgeoisie, could be better spent by learning skills useful in the home. The article featured a program where these women can learn the practical art of homemaking, which it claimed was essential for women to learn. These images aim to contrast women before the war to those who are now being re-educated under Japan's "Co-Prosperity" agenda. The criticism of



**Figure 5.** "Socialites" demonstrating their mastery of household chores ("Dainty hands do useful work," 1942).

**Figures 6 & 7.** City girl and Barrio girl (“Three types of girls after six months of war,” 1942).



women who had a penchant for socializing during the US occupation of the Philippines was subtle but remained discernible in this article.

More articles and images showed how the war had changed the Filipina for the better. In an article titled “Three types of girls after six months of war” (1942), the war was seen as to have upset the typology of the “rustic barrio girl” and the “smart city sophisticate” (p. 3). Despite this, the article emphasized that the two girls, albeit different, proved equal to the emergency. However, the “city girl” has a wider gap to bridge in responding to the crisis since she was so consumed by Western culture that she forgot her “Malayan traits” (p. 3). To adjust to the new normal, she had to “cut down her flair for new and luxurious dresses ... curtail her social excursions” (p. 3) to the extent that her “U.S. manner has waned” (p. 3). The barrio girl had little readjustment to do since she is used to a simple life. The article ended by asserting that a third type of girl was created: the “in-between type,” who “gets bored with her daily sluggishness” and finds “an easy, profitable way of keeping pace with the times” (p. 3). The article came with two sketches (figs. 6 and 7). The city girl is portrayed playing the piano, wearing a fashionable hairdo, thick makeup, a short skirt that showed her legs, and high-heeled shoes to match. On the other hand, the barrio girl is depicted in the idyllic countryside, wearing the traditional baro’t saya and tapis, deftly pounding the *palay* with one hand. Articles such as these remind women that they

must be productive members of the new order no matter where they originate. In doing so, they must remember their “native” (Malayan, in this iteration) traits and be mindful of the Western influences they keep.

This discussion shows how women’s image and the discourse of womanhood were adopted in Japanese propaganda in the Philippines to serve as proof that normalcy is established quickly and efficiently under Japan. However, this normalcy goes above and beyond the status quo under the United States, as propaganda made it clear that under the new normal, women perform certain productive tasks that are indicative of their confidence in the new regime. In the next section, we will expand and explore the propaganda line of women’s productive participation by looking at visual representations of the Filipino woman at work.

### **“The ‘maestras’ can take it, too!”: Depicting the Filipina beyond the house and home**

In a 17 May 1942 article of the *Sunday Tribune Magazine*, a feature article titled “The ‘maestras’ can take it, too!” discussed teachers’ alternative careers during the war. The article pointed out a “misconception” about teachers being allergic to manual labor or any other livelihood source beyond teaching. It was only through the war that this myth was disproven, as the “maestras” “rolled up their sleeves to fish, sell foodstuffs in the market, launder, or do work regarded as unconventional” (p. 1), at least according to the article. Several images of women doing different activities such as watching over food prices to maximize family income (fig. 8), gathering information for the government as a form of social work (fig. 9), and even serving in the police force (fig. 10) accompanied the article.

**Figures 8 & 9.** A former teacher looking at fruit prices (left). A former teacher interviewing and collecting information (right) (“The ‘maestras’ can take it, too!,” 1942).



**Figure 10.** Teachers turned policewomen learning how to tie knots (“The ‘maestras’ can take it, too!,” 1942).



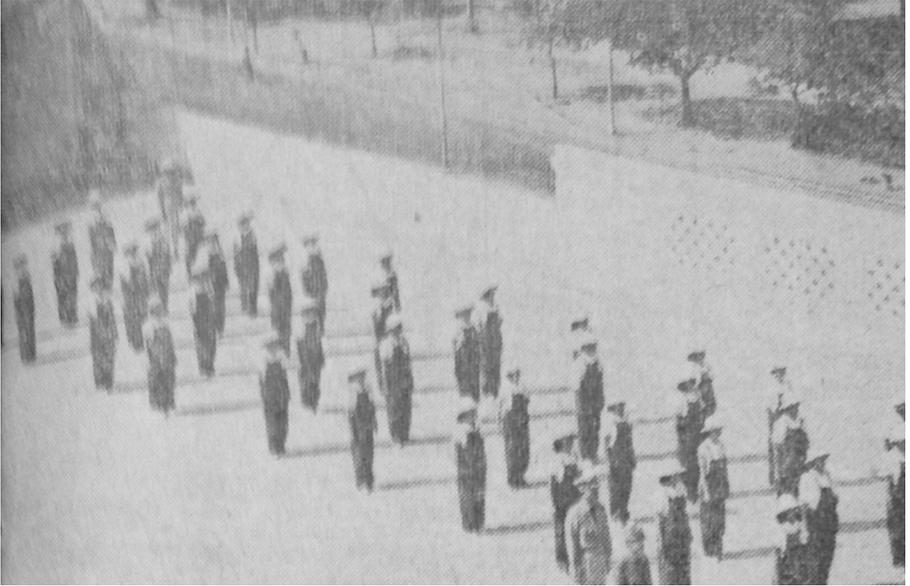
*SCHOOLMARMs now in the police force learn how to tie strong knots, which should be a warning to naughty overgrown children who do not behave.*

The article and the accompanying images focused on other tasks teachers can do because the reality was, the war had disrupted the educational system, and these teachers were out of jobs. The teaching profession was one of the few career options that had opened up for women since the US Occupation. It seemed to have created an unwarranted stereotype that they were allergic to manual labor. To say that the misconception existed is tantamount to saying that women who widened their dominion from the house and home were now seen as unwilling to do manual labor, discounting the fact that when female teachers go home to their respective families, they are still expected to do the household chores. In the backdrop of the war, the Filipino woman, according to this depiction, must find manual labor as a welcome break from the “monotony” of their professional careers and must lead by example, especially when their former students see them conducting tasks outside of teaching. The war,

and the required manual labor it brought on for women teachers, were opportunities to prove that the “dead truths they once taught to the young about the nobility of honest work are at last coming to life, substantiated by actual example” (“The ‘maestras’ can take it, too,” 1942, p. 1). The working woman’s image is used to show that everyone must adapt, even if they were put in situations where, according to the article, the “faint of heart is at a disadvantage.”

The *Tribune* is replete with the same kind of images. Women as members of the police force were touted as an essential contribution to the New Order, and pictures of them training accompanied the news articles that announced the initiative (figs. 11 and 12).

**Figure 11.** Women enforcers in military formation ("Police woman in training," 1942).



**Figure 12.** A demonstration of the required dress code and hairdo for women enforcers ("Police woman in training," 1942).

The presentation of women in military formation while being observed by Japanese commanders and the showcase of women enforcers in police uniform clothing could be seen as a way of imposing militarism and masculine ideals. Even the way the women's uniforms were designed looked odd, as it did not consider the utility of overalls for women. While women in the police force were arguably progressive for its time, the context of war and the structural gender issues that exist during that time betray the superficial widening of avenues for women's participation.

Other jobs given to women include their service as conductors in city buses. In an article titled "City bus girl conductors angelic, says visiting newsman," the author Hitoshi Kozuma (1942c) cites how the women's femininity, masked by the term "angelic," offers a reprieve to "unromantic" city travel. The article starts with, "It is the same in Nippon cities ... The girl conductors are really angelic" (p. 5). The imagery of women as a source of comfort and objects of sexual desire is juxtaposed to the conduct of a duty deemed as usually a male's job and essential for normalcy in a country at war. Accompanying this article is a photograph of women chatting in the vicinity of a city bus (fig. 13). In another article titled "More serious pursuits in Manila's changing scene," a photo of another female conductress is shown, smilingly punching holes in a bus ticket as her male passenger gamely smiles for the camera (fig. 14). While such a job for women is unusual during that time, the positioning of women "relaxing between trips" or smilingly carrying out her task belies that it was a physically taxing and demanding job (eight-hour shifts, according to the article). Note also that in figure 13, the women are depicted as chatting, which could be seen as reinforcing the idea of women as gossips, while in figure 14, the young woman had to be shown servicing a satisfied man. The tenacity of women to take on roles seen as masculine during the war is counterposed to signs of their femininity, as evidenced by these photographs.

In another article titled "Filipino women at work" (Kozuma, 1942b), the jobs women have taken as nurses in military hospitals under the supervision of Japanese doctors are prominently featured. Kozuma began the article by alluding to the women's femininity: "All the beauty and poetry of a woman at work are symbolized in Filipina nurses ... they are imbued with the new ideology and are ... working for the establishment of the new order" (p. 5), he wrote. He continued by extolling the "feminine" virtue of modesty shining through the "eyes of a woman." Together with the article are photographs of Filipina nurses at a local laboratory supervised by Japanese doctors (fig. 15) and another with patients (fig. 16). The whiteness of the nurses' uniforms stands out in the photos, as well as the staged poses, especially of the

**Figure 13.** Women conductors chatting in between trips ("City bus girl conductors angelic, says visiting newsman," 1942).



**Figure 14.** Woman conductor punches a ticket ("Serious pursuits in Manila's changing scene," 1943).

**Figure 15.** Filipino nurses in a local laboratory while being supervised by Japanese army doctors ("Filipino women at work," 1942).



**Figure 16.** Filipino nurses tending to military hospitals of the Japanese Army ("Filipino women at work," 1942).

patients all sitting while their nurses did a host of activities: placing flowers on a vase, measuring a patient's heart rate, among others.

Images of hospitals, nurses, and technical equipment are integral to Japanese wartime propaganda. Japan's positioning as a technologically advanced country, especially in the field of medicine, has been regularly touted in propaganda as a critical factor to its imminent victory in the war, and the addition of Filipina nurses is aimed at assuring the public that

institutions still work and that hospitals employ locals, especially women. It must also be noted, however, that depictions of Filipina medical workers are accompanied by language that essentializes gender, and only serves to push the agenda of patriarchy, akin to how the nurses in figures 15 and 16 either tended to men or are supervised by men.

There were also articles where the role of women as self-sustaining entrepreneurs was praised as a response to the difficulty of life during the war. A short article titled “Shorts—too late to classify” (1942) told an anecdote of an old woman from Malate who was converted to growing vegetables in her backyard. She planted seeds of *upo* or bottle gourd and improvised some trellis for the plants to climb on. She reported selling more than 45 pesos worth of *upo* from her plants, and with a wider plot to plant, she would be “on the road of plenty.” With this anecdote is a small drawing of a woman in traditional Filipino clothes, a sheer *kimona*, *tapis*, and *alampay*, with a basket of *upo* on her head and the *upo* trellis behind her (fig. 17). The self-sufficiency narrative in the *Tribune* usually assimilated a woman’s image, as a patriarchal society perceives dependency as the stereotypically feminine role. Subliminally, anecdotes such as this aim to get Filipinos to find ways to get food on the table, be it through backyard gardening or selling their own produce, as there is not plenty to go by due to the war disrupting agriculture. As the food scarcity worsened, backyard gardening became a full-blown campaign, and even government agencies engaged in planting activities (fig. 18).



**Figure 17.** An illustration of an old woman selling upo (“Shorts—too late to classify,” 1942).

But the image of women as entrepreneurs could also be seen in a bad light, as exemplified in an issue of the comic strip *Kalibapi Family* (fig. 19), created by Tony Velasquez (1943). In the strip, Nene, the story’s young protagonist, asked her father why their neighbor Aling Anita is not always at home. Her father responded that she is engaged in buy-and-sell downtown. With admiration, Nene inferred that she must be earning plenty of money



**Figure 18.** Nurses and staff members of the Philippine General Hospital plant the hospital's vacant lot with vegetables (*Tribune*, 1944).

**Figure 19.** The Kalibapi Family (Velasquez, 1943).



and expressed wanting to do the same if she were older. Her father dissuaded her by saying that “now is not the high time for a woman to devote her interest in the upkeeping of her home, as we’re in the stage of building the Philippine Republic.” “*Honto desu ne!*” (I agree), Nene responded in Japanese. This particular issue of the comic strip created by Velasquez (1943), the “Father of Filipino Komiks,” represented how women roles could be adapted to anyone’s agenda: a working woman understands that she works because it is necessary for the New Order, yet devoting her time into the household also supported the same endeavor. This flexibility indicated that there was nothing progressive in the way Japanese propaganda depicted women at work. What mattered more was how the women’s image could be co-opted to serve Japan’s aims.

## “Hands across the sea”: Juxtaposing Filipino and Japanese women

Another interesting depiction of women that regularly graced the pages of *the Tribune* was the Japanese woman. There were a variety of photographs of them interspersed in several feature articles. The article “Music at work” (1942) talked about how factory workers in Japan practiced playing musical instruments during break times, and a Japanese woman is seen playing the mandolin (fig. 20). In another article on Japanese nurses (“Training of Japanese nurses,” 1942), student nurses were photographed enjoying their leisure time by playing Chinese checkers and drinking green tea (fig. 21). In “Japan’s industrial might is a potent factor in her prosecution of this war” (1942), Japanese women were seen arranging gas masks, with the caption that women are worthy contributors to the war effort (fig. 22).

These images are consistent with Japan’s manifest propaganda line that the factories and hospitals are vital cogs of the war machine and instrumental to Japan winning the war. However, women prominently being featured in these images could be read to serve a separate purpose. In the article titled “Japanese women can quite equal their men in the realm of science” (1942), the meaning behind such depiction of women is somewhat revealed:

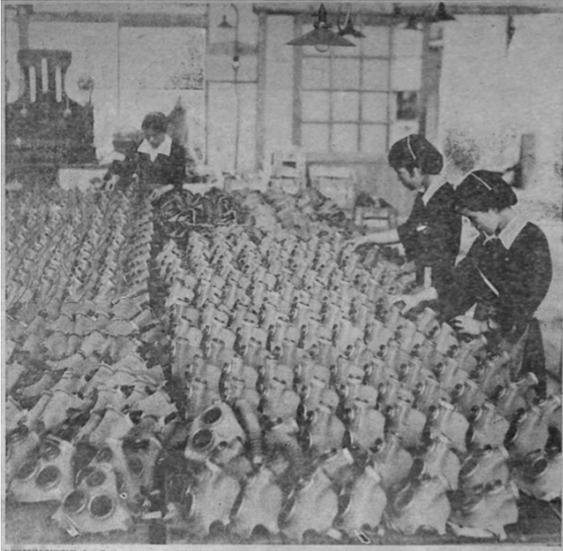
**Figure 20.** A Japanese woman playing the mandolin (“Music at work,” 1942).



**Figure 21.** Japanese nursing students enjoy their leisure time through games and tea (“Training of Japanese nurses,” 1942).



RECREATION for student nurses at the St. Luke's College of Nursing in Tokyo during their leisure moments includes parlor games—with the inevitable green tea (above).



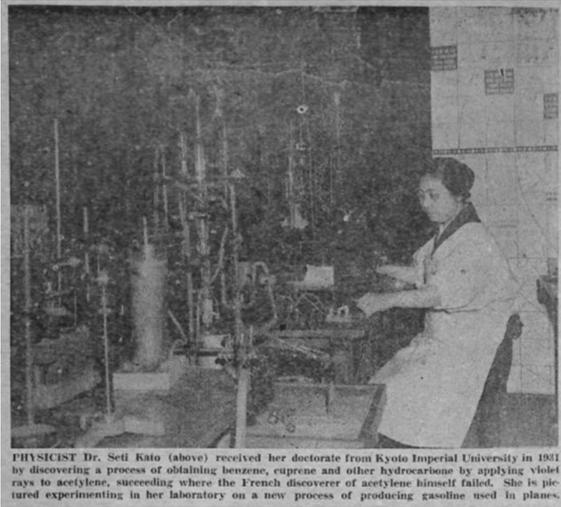
SOMEWHERE IN Japan proper, Nipponese women (above) arrange finished gas masks in a huge factory, capable of turning out thousands daily. They are worthy contributors to the war effort. For, in modern warfare, the tide of battle often depends on the quality, quantity of equipment—in this case, the important gas mask.

**Figure 22.** Japanese women arranging finished gas masks in a Japanese factory (“Japan’s industrial might is a potent factor in her prosecution of this war,” 1942).



THIS IS DR. Sigeyo Takeuchi, a physician who has broadened her work, taking up women’s general welfare, lecturing, publishing voluminously, forming societies for improving the lot of working girls, making contacts for the good of Japanese womanhood.

**Figure 23.** Dr. Shigeyo Takeuchi, a Japanese physician (“Japanese women can quite equal their men in the realm of science,” 1942).



**Figure 24.** Dr. Sechi Kato, a Japanese physicist (“Japanese women can quite equal their men in the realm of science,” 1942).

In the Philippines, knowledge about the Japanese woman is based on 60 per cent misinformation and 40 per cent ignorance. The poor creature is an unwilling slave of man, the married ones are submissive to their lords and masters, the unmarried ones are geishas. Thus, the prevalent superstition (p. 2)

With this article were several photographs of women doctors, chemists, physicists, and other scientists while doing their scientific work, as proof that indeed, these women exist in Japan (figs. 23 and 24).

There are many more of these images that feature Japanese women, and they all serve to disprove the myth of the Japanese woman as subservient, as geisha entertainers, or as *karayuki-san*, or prostitutes. In her work on the *karayuki-san* of Manila, Motoe Terami-Wada (1986) looked into the establishment of brothel houses in Manila and the prostitution of Japanese women all over the Philippines, from Aparri, Olongapo, Bicol, Cebu, Iloilo, Marawi, Davao, Zamboanga, and Jolo, among others (p. 299). While the prostitution of the Japanese was banned and virtually eradicated in the 1920s (Terami-Wada 1986; Yu-Jose 1996), there may have been remnants of this reputation. The Japanese, having kept tabs on the way they were perceived by Filipinos even before the war (Jose 1990a), may have been aware of this image of Japanese women and sought to salvage their reputation by showing the many industries where Japanese women excel and that women could equal the men in many fields of endeavor. Interestingly, Japan today remains to have high levels of gender inequality, ranking 120th out of 156 nations on the World Economic Forum’s (WEF) Global Gender Gap Index

in 2020 (WEF, 2021). Thus, it could be argued that the depiction of Japanese women with Japan’s technological achievements was aimed at promoting Japanese society as egalitarian, a suitable model for the Philippines whose colonial past had ruined its native values. Erasing the reputation of Japanese women as prostitutes serves this function.

Another way Japanese women figure prominently in the *Tribune* is that they are often juxtaposed with Filipino women. It could be as subliminal as a feature on a Japanese singer, Michiko Namiki (“Thoughtfulness in song, rhythm, and glamour” 1942), noting that “her handsome features resemble those of some local favorite cinema stars” (p. 1) (fig. 25), or as direct as a feature on Filipino college girls and Catholic Japanese schoolgirls who became pen pals after meeting in person years prior. The latter was the subject of the *The Sunday Tribune Magazine* article, “Hands across the sea” (1942). The feature article reproduced some letters sent by the women to each other, as well as photographs of the Filipino women’s visit to Tokyo in 1939. The article reported that the St. Scholastica girls impressed the Catholic Japanese girls of the Sacred Heart School in Tokyo by dressing in the balintawak and

**Figure 25.** Michiko Namiki, Japanese singer (“Thoughtfulness in song, rhythm, and glamour,” 1942).



LOCAL CHOICE for her singing of both Japanese and Western songs is MISS MITIKO NAMIKI. Her voice is easy and expressive, and the swaying of her form as she sings, elegant and winsome. Her handsome features resemble those of some local favourite cinema stars. (See more pictures of Japanese artists on Page 1, Pictorial Section of this issue.)

dancing the *tinikling*. A photograph of the event showed the women chatting and smiling, wearing their respective traditional dresses (fig. 26). This feature article is not the only instance where the Japanese strategically portrayed its Christian population in the *Tribune* to assert a connection to the Philippines (e.g. Fujita, 1942), despite the Christian religion being a minority in Japan, especially as Japan’s wartime regime was based on the foundation of pure religious statism. State Shinto was elevated to being the “only religion” that formed the

spiritual basis of Japanese ultranationalism, and the emperor was vested with both sovereignty and divinity (Sumimoto, 2000). The entire nation was forcibly converted, and all religions were either persecuted or subordinated to the “cult of emperor worship” (Sumimoto, 2000, p.79). Depicting Japan’s Catholic population in the *Tribune* was directed toward finding commonalities that the Japanese could take advantage of, including a field trip by the St. Scholastica students to Tokyo in 1939.



**Figure 26.** Filipina and Japanese Catholic school girls meeting in Tokyo in their traditional clothes (“Hands across the sea,” 1942).

This forced juxtaposition of Japanese and Filipino women was done to assert that Japan and the Philippines are no different from each other as the two countries are neighbors and share a commonality, unlike the United States and the West. This attempt at finding a connection between Japan and the Philippines, however remote, is best represented by this short article written by Saseo Ono (1942), titled “Pretty Girls”:

From far and near, rice-planting songs come floating on the soft southern breezes. On the road going up from Manila to Baguio, I saw the beautiful figures in red, green, and various other colors of native raiments—Filipino girls planting rice like the girls of Nippon.

“It is rice-planting time in the Philippines, I see.”

“Oh, no, it is always rice-planting time here. Look, look at the leaves of those trees. They are always richly verdant.”

“I see. The trees, too, have no time to rest. I sympathize with the trees.”

“Why do you have to sympathize with the trees?”

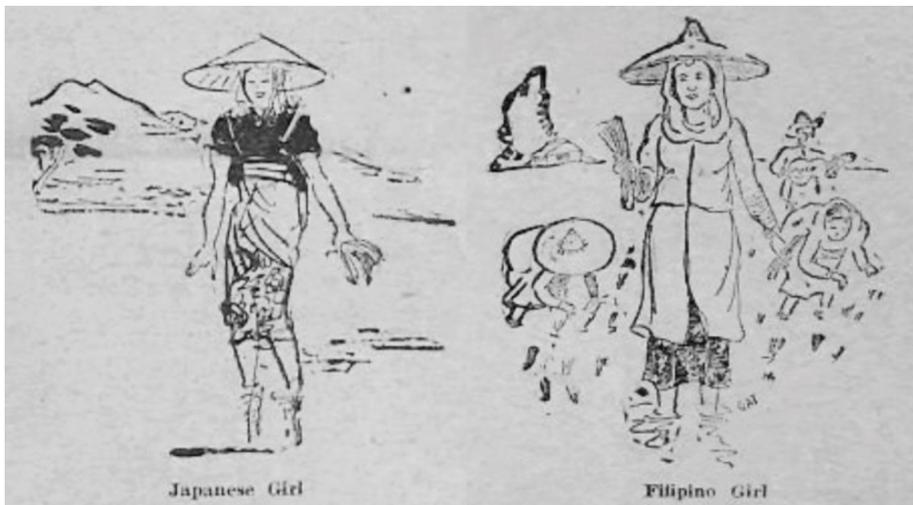
Most certainly, the trees of the Philippines have no rest. But what interests me most is not the greenery of the Islands, but the similarity of the Filipino and Japanese girls with each other like two peas in a pod.

Yes, there must have been something in the past which formed a link between the two countries. This is no shallow resemblance—the link between the two.

In the same way that the mellow voices of the Filipino girls filled the air with gay melodies during planting time, the Japanese girls also enliven the atmosphere in the rice fields with their songs (p. 4).

Two sketches accompany this concise story. Both show women planting rice, but one is Filipino, and the other is Japanese (fig. 27) (Gat, 1942). While it could be argued that the same description of women planting rice applies to all Asian countries where rice is grown, particularly in China, Korea, and Southeast Asia, the effort to make such a connection, although forced, clearly showed how the depictions of women served a specific purpose in Japanese propaganda. In this case, it uses the feminine ideals of beauty, modesty, and the portrayal of women as sources of entertainment, overlooking the fact that planting rice is a physically challenging task in itself. Paradoxically, the assertion of the connection between Japanese and Filipino women as “no shallow resemblance” betrayed the whole intent of the piece, as the comparison is nothing but shallow and superficial. The task of illustrating the story, resulting in the two sketches in figure 27, was taken up by Liborio Gatbonton, who signs his work as Gat, a Filipino illustrator and cartoonist. The depiction of the Filipino *salakot* and the Japanese *sugegasa*, or straw conical hat, is of interest, but conical hats are a general hat design in Asia, especially in rice-cultivating countries. Without the label “Japanese Girl,”

**Figure 27.** A sketch of Filipino and Japanese girls planting rice (Ono, S. 1942).



the image as it was drawn could represent any other woman from another country planting rice, as the hat and the ambiguous dress did not especially register as Japanese, except for the rendering of the tree in the background, stylized in the East Asian way. This vagueness in the images represented how the effort to link the women was forced, and at best, insubstantial.

## Conclusion

The Pacific War has been perceived by scholars as an interregnum that halted the steady march to independence during the Philippine Commonwealth. It may have also hampered the momentum that the women's movement gained in the 1930s, which peaked at the attainment of women's suffrage (Quindoza-Santiago, 1996). While these changes were felt more by the elite than the middle and lower classes, there is evidence that pointed to the changing perceptions of women's participation beyond the house and home.

The Japanese barged into the scene carrying the ideals of its Co-Prosperty Sphere and the vision of an Asia free from the vestiges of Western colonialism. Japan understood that more than a physical battle on land, air, and sea, they should also wage a thought war to gain the hearts and minds of their occupied subjects. In this case, the use of propaganda was necessary to serve war aims.

As parsed in the preceding sections, the depiction of women was crucial in portraying normalcy to assure the occupied subjects that Japan's victory is imminent and that cooperation with the new order could only lead to the two countries' shared prosperity. The image of women was used to bolster the claim of normalcy, as the violence, militarism, and the entire enterprise of war are perceived as masculine domains. Thus, if women were to take on jobs usually done by men, they were depicted according to the level of femininity that they bring to the job, like the "angelic" girl conductors of the city buses (Kozuma, 1942c) who still did feminine things such as gossiping. As argued by Bilge Yesil (2004), wartime persuasion assured women that their femininity would still be intact if they took on jobs usually tied to men. More often than not, their femininity is packaged in such a way that it added something new to the position they take on, a kind of patronizing masculine gaze as these values added were usually based on stereotypically feminine traits such as beauty, gentleness, attention to fine details, and the like. This masculine gaze is evident in the portrayal of women. Most, if not all, of the images of women in this study were taken, drawn, or staged by men. Thus, the images stand to satisfy their intentions. As Elizabeth Mary Holt pointed out in her work, *Colonizing Filipinas* (2002), "discursive practices have specific functions at particular times and different places" (p. 159). The seemingly oppositional portrayal of women at work and women at home

only makes sense in the context of a country at war, when national survival rested on mobilizing everyone to take on roles they traditionally do not take. Women could take on jobs outside those they traditionally engage in, but the home is still the woman's rightful domain. Women were called to take on public roles not to empower them, but to relieve the hardships of war.

A noteworthy aspect of the depiction of women in Japanese propaganda is how the image of a woman was co-opted to argue for a return to Filipino customs and traditions. But what the Japanese see as "native" seem to allude only to a period before the United States occupied the Philippines. Instead of envisioning a set of values and ideals from an earlier time, say, the pre-conquest period, the wearing of the balintawak dress, the modesty and conservatism of women, the preference for music other than the "grossness of jazz" ("Balintawak at the symphony," 1942) indicate a preference to the Spanish colonial period or at least the period of the Philippine Revolution, as many revolutionary heroes made their way into the numerous speeches of government officials, as well as feature articles in the *Tribune*. Takamichi Serizawa (2015) agreed in his analysis of the Japanese wartime solidarity discourse, that Japanese wartime writers somehow appropriated the revolutionary heroes, but the manifestation of said discourse through Japanese propaganda and women was more subtle and subliminal, and was limited to the identification of Filipino cultural signifiers.

Another crucial analysis I forward in this article is Japan's evident effort to clean up Japanese women's image in the Philippines by juxtaposing Japanese women to the country's advanced military, medical, and industrial technologies. The rationale behind this depiction could be varied. However, the "misinformation" and "ignorance" of Filipinos, as touted in an article about Japanese women in the *Tribune* ("Japanese women can quite equal their men in the realm of science," 1942), have resulted in the "myth" of the subservient Japanese wife or the heavily made-up geisha entertainer. Depicting Japanese women side-by-side with modern technologies could indeed improve the perception of Japanese women in the Philippines. On the other hand, the juxtaposition of Japanese and Filipino women served another purpose, which more closely related to the anti-US and anti-West propaganda line of the Japanese. The forced linkage between the two women, vividly represented albeit quite literally by the title "Hands across the sea" (1942), showed the mental gymnastics that Japanese propaganda had to go through to rationalize and justify such connection. In the painful stretching of link and logic, what was left was the generalized musings of feminine ideals that in their vagueness, could apply to women anywhere.

This study on Japanese propaganda leaves out audience reaction, counterpropaganda, and propaganda effects and evaluation. While these are fascinating aspects of propaganda, the available sources used to interpret propaganda effectiveness and audience reaction during the Pacific War are usually limited to memoirs, often criticized as privileged and not necessarily representative of audience response. Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, in their work *Propaganda and Persuasion* (2005), argue that it is not always possible to find all information necessary to make a complete analysis of propaganda, but answering as many questions in their proposed ten stages of analyzing propaganda, from purpose, ideology, context, structure, target audience, among others, allows a thorough understanding of propaganda to emerge. This idea was operationalized in this study.

Most of the visual propaganda materials included in this article are generally from 1942 and 1943. This limitation corresponds to the trajectory taken by Japan as a belligerent power fighting a war. As the battles raged on, particularly from 1944 to 1945, images in the *Tribune* started to decrease, until the pages dwindled and focused solely on straight, "hard" news. As the war increasingly became a battle for subsistence and survival, visual propaganda also waned. There was less opportunity to focus on the thought war as Japan was slowly losing to the Allied Forces. Nonetheless, the propaganda materials analyzed in this paper empirically ground the analysis on how the depiction of women served Japan's wartime propaganda aims.

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