

Invented Histories: The *Nihon Senshi* of the Meiji Imperial Japanese Army

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Abstract

Nihon Senshi (*Military History of Japan*) was part of the new Imperial Japanese Army's attempt to tie itself to examples from Japan's "warring states" period, similar to scholars who created a feudal "medieval" time in the Japanese past to fit into Western historiography, and intellectuals who discovered a "traditional" spirit called *bushidō* as a counterpart for English chivalry. The interpretations of these campaigns, placing the "three unifiers" of the late sixteenth century as global leaders in the modernization of military tactics and technology, show the Imperial Japanese Army's desire to be seen as a "modern" military through its invented "institutional" history.

Keywords: Imperial Japanese Army, military history, invented tradition, Meiji period, *bushidō*.

Izumljene zgodovine: *Nihon senshi* Japonske cesarske vojske v obdobju Meiji

Izvilleček

Nihon senshi (*Vojaška zgodovina Japonske*) je del prizadevanj nove Japonske cesarske vojske, da bi se povezala s primeri iz obdobja vojskujočih se dežel, podobno kakor so zgodovinarji ustvarili japonski fevdalni »srednji vek«, da bi se ujema z zahodnim zgodovinopisjem, in kakor so intelektualci odkrili »tradicionalni« duh imenovan *bushidō*, ki je ustrezal pojmu angleškega viteštva. Interpretacije teh vojaških spopadov, ki so predstavile »tri združevalce« poznega šestnajstega stoletja kot globalne voditelje pri modernizaciji vojaških taktik in tehnologije, razkrivajo željo Japonske cesarske vojske, da bi jo s pomočjo izumljene »institucionalne« zgodovine obravnavali kot »moderno« vojsko.

Glavne besede: Japonska cesarska vojska, vojaška zgodovina, izumljene tradicije, obdobje Meiji, *bushidō*

Over the thirty-one years from 1893 to 1924, the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) General Staff's historical division produced thirteen volumes, each covering a battle from Japan's "warring states" (*sengoku*) period, in a series entitled *Nihon*

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Senshi (日本戦史; *Military History of Japan*). Section 9 of the 4th division of the General Staff Office, headed by a colonel with a staff of three, was responsible for producing these historical analyses of the past Japanese battles (*Nihon Rikugun Ga Yoku Wakaru Jiten* 2002, 324). *Nihon Senshi*, despite the implication of the name, is not a comprehensive history of warfare throughout Japan's history. The thirteen volumes cover significant campaigns by Japan's "three unifiers", Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu, in the mid-sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, beginning with Tokugawa's campaigns to secure hegemony in 1600 and 1615, then circling back to the beginning of Oda Nobunaga's rise and moving forward through the major campaigns of his and Toyotomi Hideyoshi's career. The following table shows the focus and publication date of each volume:

Table 1: Focus and publication date of each volume of *Nihon Senshi*

Volume	Focal Campaign or Battle	Year(s) of Campaign	Year of Preface	Year of Publication
1	Sekigahara	1600	1893	1893
2	Osaka Summer & Winter	1615	1896	1897
3	Okehazama	1560	1898	1902
4	Anegawa	1573	1899	1901
5	Mikatagahara	1574	1901	1902
6	Nagashino	1575	1902	1903
7	Chugoku (Western Japan)	1576-82	1903	1911
8	Yamazaki	1582	1903	1920
9	Yanase (Shizugatake)	1583	1903	1907
10	Komaki (Nagakute)	1584	1908	1908
11	Kyushu	1587	1910	1911
12	Odawara	1590	1913	1893(?) ¹
13	Korean Invasions	1592-98	1923	1924

In the secondary scholarship of late medieval and early modern Japanese warfare, certain battles are treated as iconic—the “*kessen*”, or decisive battles of the *Sengoku jidai*, the Warring States period. Not merely representative of sixteenth-century warfare, these battles define it, in popular history books, on movie and television screens, and in video games.² Meanwhile, battles such as Funaokayama in 1511,

1 I have been unable to find a suitable explanation for why the Odawara volume lists 1893 as its date of publication, but has a preface dated 1913. Given that it is the twelfth volume of thirteen, I feel confident in assuming the publication date is a misprint on the part of the publisher of the 1978 reprint, Murata Shoten.

2 The director Akira Kurosawa's masterpiece film *Kagemusha* concludes with a climactic, though historically inaccurate, recreation of the Battle of Nagashino; video game titles available worldwide that include battles from this list include the *Kessen* series and the *Nobunaga's Ambition* series by Koei.

between two Ashikaga claimants to the title of *shōgun* and their powerful *daimyō* supporters, or the 1578 Battle of Mimigawa, a decisive clash between rival warlords in western Japan, are given minor consideration. It is not important at this time to debate the merits of one battle versus another in any list of major samurai conflicts. However, it is instructive to think about why some battles have achieved a certain status in both military history and popular culture. Academic historians are not the only ones who fashion “history”. I contend that the Imperial Japanese Army historical section chose to include these victories by the “three unifiers” of Japan because they assessed them as the beginning of a “modern” and “Japanese” military history. These battles provided tactical and strategic lessons, but in addition could be shaped to show historical antecedents for the IJA itself to claim.

This paper is thus an exploratory attempt to situate the production of these histories as an institutional microcosm of a larger discourse of national identity formation ongoing within the Meiji and Taishō state. Due to space limitations, this paper will not include a comprehensive analysis of each volume and how well (or poorly) each battle is portrayed. Rather, I will focus on why these histories were written at this time; why these particular battles were chosen as representative examples of a Japanese “military history”; and the transnational intellectual currents and political events that encouraged and shaped their production. Comparison with contemporary Japanese intellectual and institutional “invented traditions” that attempted to negotiate the complexities of the nation’s emerging modernity suggests that *Nihon Senshi* was one manifestation of the IJA’s same reconciliation between the conflicting identities of a “Japanese” and a “modern” or “Westernized” institution.

Yamagata Aritomo, the primary architect of the Imperial Japanese Army of the Meiji period, faced several considerable challenges as he attempted to turn an army of rebellious provincials into a modern, professional force.³ The early Imperial Japanese Army was a hodgepodge of former samurai and conscripted peasants, led by an officer corps divided by regional factionalism. The 1877 Seinan War, when Imperial forces defeated the rebel Satsuma army of Saigō Takamori, revealed the limitations of conscripted peasants thrust into the role of soldier. Even seemingly simple matters like adjusting to modern European-style uniforms caused

3 Yamagata started as a military leader during the Boshin War which put the Meiji government in power, and led Imperial forces during the Seinan War; during the Meiji period he was variously the Minister of War, the Chief of the General Staff of the Imperial Japanese Army (both of these multiple times, and sometimes concurrently), Home Minister, and Prime Minister twice. Of the “Meiji oligarchs” he had the most influence over the IJA, and regardless of what his specific title was at any given point during the time examined in this paper, it is safe to say he was the driving force behind the shaping of the IJA, either directly or through his disciples.

considerable consternation for both commoners and samurai, unused to “uncomfortable” Western-style dress (Drea 2009). The samurai-led rebellion demonstrated that excessive ties based on regional affiliation and the privileged class consciousness of samurai within the ranks drew loyalty away from the central Meiji state and the Imperial Japanese Army itself. Samurai prior to the rebellion were often looked on as old-fashioned and even parasitical; after the rebellion, they were a danger (Benesch 2014, 44–45). At the same time, the superior performance of the smaller samurai forces against larger and better equipped conscript units showed a need to indoctrinate the new army with samurai esprit and loyalty, directed not to a feudal lord but to the IJA command and, ultimately, the emperor.

The Seinan War also exposed the IJA’s inadequacy at planning and executing large operations (Matsushita 1963, 51). Until 1877 the IJA relied on French officer advisers, who focused on teaching lower level unit tactics at the expense of large-scale operations. American military texts on the U.S. Civil War were popular with Japanese officers, as were the formulaic “principles of war” devised by the French officer Antoine de Jomini; these simple and easy to remember “rules” were easily understood in translation. The German military thinker Carl von Clausewitz, on the other hand, was deemed “overly complex” and largely ignored (Drea 2009, 27–28). The overemphasis on small unit tactics correspondingly led to poor performance with regard to large unit manoeuvres and logistics, and if the IJA found it difficult to move troops from central Japan to southern Kyūshū, projecting military power outside of the country would be impossible. Yamagata realized that the IJA needed to improve its tactical and operational capabilities to be taken seriously as a modern military force by the outside world, primarily the West, but also its closer rivals the Chinese and Korean courts.

Yamagata and his fellow army leaders thus needed to find both a way to instil an institutional consciousness in the “hodgepodge” of former samurai and peasant conscripts, and models which the IJA could use as instructional ones in training the staff officers and commanders responsible for creating an expeditionary force. The 1880s saw the IJA reorganise to become a foreign expeditionary force (Ōe 1985). Edward Drea (2009) asserted that historical circumstances shaped Japan’s first modern army, while international pressures determined the pathways forward available to it. For Japan to be a first rank nation, the Meiji leadership believed, they must have a first rank army, one capable of projecting the emperor’s will and Japanese power outside of the nation’s borders (Kurono 2004). Yamagata and the IJA leadership believed that failure to project power overseas would doom Japan to second-class status. This is the traditional reading of “international pressures” as Drea (2009) frames it. However, the IJA exercised agency in choosing which pathway to take forward. Yamagata initially chose to use foreign models, as I shall

discuss shortly, but grounded them in an idealized Japanese traditional “history”; this synthesis of a “modern” military with a “historical” tradition is shown clearly in the campaign histories of the IJA General Staff’s historical department.

To create a sense of common military ethos that melded commoners and ex-samurai together, Yamagata appealed to an idealized samurai tradition: not from the Edo period, whence the warrior class had stagnated as indigent bureaucrats, but from the greatly romanticized medieval *chūsei* age of war tales. Drea (2009, viii) notes that from the start the IJA attempted to find instructional examples for its core values of loyalty, service, and personal sacrifice to the emperor in “real or imagined precedents”. By highlighting figures like Kusunoki Masashige, lauded as the loyal retainer of Emperor Go-Daigo who heroically resisted the military government on Go-Daigo’s behalf in the 1330s, the Meiji leaders redirected the loyalty of the samurai retainer away from a feudal lord and towards the Emperor and broadened it to the entire army and Japanese population at large. In this manner, Yamagata created a history for the IJA, to give its soldiers a unifying focus of loyalty (the emperor) that transcended class and regional divisions.

It should be noted, however, that while the historical precedents chosen were uniquely Japanese, the process was not; Western countries, especially Yamagata’s favoured model of Germany (which, it should be noted, officially united as a nation-state three years after the start of the Meiji Restoration) were also creating their own “traditions” for the same purposes. Through the Meiji Emperor’s participation in Western-style military ceremonies and the 1882 Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors, the soldiers’ “traditional” bond to the emperor was codified and strengthened in very “modern” ways (Drea 2009; Harries and Harries 1991). Eric Hobsbawm called the period from 1870 to 1914 one of the “mass production of tradition” in Europe. According to Hobsbawm, traditions are invented “more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which ‘old’ traditions had been designed.” The period referenced was one of significant change worldwide, as societies the world over tackled the challenges presented by industrialized modernity (Hobsbawm in Benesch 2014, 6, 10). Meiji Japan provides an interesting case for observation of this phenomenon, as the transformation from a feudal to “modern” society was abruptly imposed by the new Meiji government, with the majority of these changes involving the importation of an alien, Western product or concept. Japan had to adapt and modernize to prevent the fate of colonization and Western domination seen in much of the world. The late nineteenth century was divided into “first rank” nations that colonized, and the rest of the world who were the victims of such imperialism. Japan had to propel itself into that first rank tier; yet at what point would that change the nation so much that it ceased being “Japan”?

The IJA was thus but one significant participant in the overall struggle of Japan to invent itself as a modern country, one that by definition has a “past”; this struggle not only occurred in other “modern” countries of the time, but was a necessary condition for modernity. Stefan Tanaka (2004, 29) asserts that this “discovery and separation of the past” is one of the central components of the Meiji period. “One of the constituent parts of modernity is the separation and denigration of the past, as something to move away from.” The idea of “history” in Japan had up until this time generally followed a cyclical Confucian narrative, with imperial reign dates as the standard unit of demarcation: the Emperor reigned, the events of the reign were recorded, the Emperor died and a new Emperor reigned, the cycle repeating itself. In contrast, nineteenth-century Western historical theory saw history as a linear narrative of national development; events that caused change demarcated one era from the previous one (Keirstead 1998).

Meiji thinkers, like Fukuzawa Yukichi, recognised this difference: Fukuzawa bemoaned that Japan had 2,500 years of “stagnation” as opposed to “progress”, and therefore could not be said to have a “history”. For Japan to be modern in the present, the past would have to be separated from it as different, then constructed into a usable history. Tanaka (2004) identifies the 1871 order for preservation and inventory of the Shōsōin storehouse and other repositories of artefacts as the beginning of Japan’s “discovery” of its past, as such cataloguing imbued a collection of items with meaning as having “historical” value, where the previous fervour for the “new” and “modern” ignored and even destroyed such items as old and useless. This interest in preserving objects from the Japanese past was much driven by transnational ideas of each nation having a past worth preserving. Cultural and historical exhibitions were, at this time, an “international phenomenon”, and in fact one impetus for the Shōsōin survey was to find suitable objects that would represent Japanese history and culture at the 1873 World’s Fair in Vienna. At a time when Japan struggled to keep its identity while striving to be more and more like the West, artefacts imbued with this historical value provided that anchor to its unique past.

Indeed, if history was to be understood as a linear progression, then for a country to be “modern” it necessarily required a “past” from which it had evolved. In 1889 the Ministry of Education directed prominent historians to come up with a standard periodization of Japanese history, along the Western historiographic model. The Japanese past was thus reconfigured to demonstrate progression of events from one era to the next. The historian Nishi Amane coined the term *chūsei* as an analogue for the medieval period of Europe; Nishi and other historians like Hara Katsurō, armed with training in European historiography, found parallels between Japanese and Western (European) institutions (such as the European

medieval manor and the Japanese *chūsei*-era *shōen*) that allowed the Japanese past to be divided with the same ancient-medieval-modern structure. Conscious of European historiography (Marxist or otherwise) that saw a feudal medieval era as a necessary stage of development for the modern nation, historians like Nishi and Hara understood the implications for Japan. A *chūsei* period in Japanese history, as the temporal locus of national identity, placed Japan with the “gifted few” first-rank countries that could lay claim to a history with modernity as its end state (Keirstead 1998).⁴ In addition to external recognition by the community of “modern nations”, this broadened the past from a succession of imperial reigns to a “national” history for all Japanese, a critical step in the project of building a national consciousness. Keirstead asserts that this location of a historical origin of modernity in the middle ages (like Europe) solved the riddle of whether or not modernization meant the sacrifice of a uniquely Japanese identity. By identifying an analogous starting point for progress and a parallel trajectory similar to Europe’s, Japan could embrace both a modern present and traditional past.

In this way, history is an “invented tradition”, providing a departure point from which the modern Japanese nation evolved. As Hobsbawm suggested, the Meiji period was a time of continuous invention and reinvention of tradition, as the Japanese struggled to define what it meant to be “Japanese”. Meiji period Buddhists cited medieval religious works and figures to give historical credence to their responses to modern issues (Keirstead 1998). In his 2014 book *Inventing the Way of the Samurai*, Oleg Benesch impressively describes the Meiji period invention of a *bushidō* “warrior ethic” tradition. *Bushidō* had no coherent expression prior to the nineteenth century. Initially it was proposed by Ōzaki Yukio in articles in 1889 and 1891 as a possible Japanese counterpart to the English chivalric tradition, which he felt was responsible for Great Britain’s imperial success. Christian intellectuals like Uemura Masahisa and Nitobe Inazō also identified *bushidō* with the medieval, but a specifically Christian chivalry. Nationalist scholars Suzuki Chikara and Inoue Tetsujirō located *bushidō*’s roots in the martial and masculine *chūsei* medieval era, the same period in which contemporary historians had located Japan’s modern origins, as described above. Thus an idea invented as a native analogue to a European concept, shaped around Edo period literature, was collectively presumed to have nostalgic antecedents in the age of martial heroes from the twelfth through sixteenth centuries (Benesch 2014).

Though the precise nature of any connection between the periodization of a Japanese *chūsei* period by historians around 1889 and the selection of the thirteen

4 Keirstead (1998, 51–56) also notes that Hara was one of several prominent historians that were products of the Tokyo Imperial University history department, organised under the direction of Ludwig Riess, a German historian who had once been research assistant to Leopold von Ranke.

campaigns studied by the IJA military history section beginning in 1893 is unconfirmed at this time, the reasoning in selecting battles from the transition period between the “medieval” and “early modern” appears consistent: if Japan had a “medieval” *chūsei* period, then warfare, as expressed by the campaigns of Japan’s “three unifiers”, must surely have been a major catalyst for the nation’s movement into the “early modern” *kinsei* period. Yamagata certainly drew inspiration from the entire *chūsei* period—the prominence of Kusunoki Masashige, as previously mentioned, attests to that. Yet the battles of Kusunoki against the Hōjō and Ashikaga are not found in the campaign studies. Nor are the Minamoto and Taira in the 1180s, or the Ōnin War of the late 1400s. While those conflicts could provide IJA soldiers with tales of heroism and sacrifice to train their spirits, they lack the critical component of modernity necessary to be worthy of detailed analysis at the operational and tactical levels for use in training IJA officers in how to wage modern war. Whereas Western militaries could look over the previous two hundred years to Lee and Grant, Napoleon and Wellington, Washington, the Duke of Marlboro, and Vauban, Japan’s peaceful Edo period left them with few recent examples of military action. The 19th century Boshin War and the Seinan War were not only too recent to lend any “historicity” to the IJA, but were fought between the very conflicting groups Yamagata was trying to integrate into a cohesive force. The campaigns of Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu, in the standard periodization narrative, brought Japan out of the *chūsei* and into the early modern *kinsei*. These battles were far enough back in time to be “history”, but “modern” enough to be useful examples, firearms having been introduced as a significant battlefield presence in the decades before the first chronological campaign (Okehazama in 1560, volume 3). As such, by locating the “roots” of the IJA’s military tradition in the transition between the *chūsei* and the *kinsei*, the IJA staked a claim to a trajectory of military modernity similar to its aspirational “first-rank” Western peers.

If these thirteen campaigns were chosen in part because they were the “highlight” battles at the beginning of Japan’s “modern” age, they were also chosen as specific tactical and operational examples to train the Meiji IJA as a modern expeditionary force. Again, IJA leaders initially looked for models on how to instruct their staffs outside Japan. By the early 1880s, the IJA leadership turned to Germany for help in professionalizing its officer corps. Yamagata had studied in Prussia, and the Prussian victory over the French in 1870 cemented the Prussian General Staff’s reputation as the pinnacle of military science. Yamagata’s protégé Katsura Tarō and Army Minister Ōyama Iwao led a delegation to Germany in 1885 to request an instructor for the newly established General Staff College. At Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke’s personal direction, Major Jakob Meckel, an experienced

instructor and staff officer, was sent back with the Japanese as a military instructor (Drea 2009; Kurono 2004; Ōe 1985). Originally another officer was recommended to Moltke by Schlieffen, but Moltke strategically chose to send the more capable officer to Turkey to help rebuild their army and counterbalance the Russians, Turkey having been defeated by the Tsar's forces in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 (Kurono 2004; Ōe 1985).

The assignment of the more “administrative” and less tactically-gifted Meckel instead would have significant ramifications for the IJA. Meckel instituted an educational program based on the Prussian model, more focused on the theory of military art and science than his French predecessors' teachings on small-unit tactics. To teach the application of theory, he took his students to study and practice military manoeuvres on terrain models and in the field, similar to the staff rides military officers engage in today. Meckel also introduced military history to the IJA curriculum through the study of historical campaigns to illustrate tactical and operational lessons, clearly setting a precedent for the IJA General Staff's campaign studies (Drea 2009, 58).

Meckel's practical program of instruction, though he was only in Japan three years (1885–1888), won over even officers from factions that had preferred the French approach, and earned him high praise (Kurono 2004). However, his influence, both good and bad, would be seen more clearly in the IJA's performance in the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars. Meckel, not the most imaginative or intellectual staff officer, preached action over thought: his heavy emphasis on infantry manoeuvres influenced the massive, casualty-intensive infantry charges of the Russo-Japanese War, and would continue to predominate in Japanese planning through World War II. Ōe (1985) observes that Meckel's instruction focused on the tactical and operational levels of warfare, ignoring the strategic lessons of Clausewitz, possibly because he felt they were too difficult to teach through interpreters, but it is just as likely that Meckel simply cared less for strategic thinking. Ōe contends that this lack of strategic instruction would become a systemic problem in the IJA, leading to the misguided and haphazard strategies seen in China and the Pacific War. Ōe believes that Meckel's study of history, from which an understanding of strategy is derived, failed to take root in Japan. However, the IJA did study history, but Meckel's emphasis on tactics and operations at the expense of strategy would influence not only the case studies chosen for the IJA's own analysis, but also the ways in which Japanese military planners for several generations would interpret these as templates for execution.

Unfortunately, at the present time I have yet to find the names of the individuals assigned to the IJA Staff Historical Office in 1893, and cannot confirm they

were actually in Meckel's classes. Further research will hopefully yield these results and a more direct connection. However, Meckel's influence is evident in the selection of individual battles and campaigns, as a closer examination of the specific volumes shows a preference for decisive tactical battles. Only three volumes (Western Japan, 1911, Kyūshū, also published in 1911, and the Korean invasions, 1924) examine extended campaigns. Causation is difficult to determine here, but whether the selection of these battles as instructional models shaped Japanese army attitudes, or it was merely reflective of a preference already present (perhaps introduced by Meckel), the line-up is consistent with the later IJA doctrine that sought a "decisive battle", where the spirit of the Japanese soldier would overcome even a more technologically advanced or materially equipped enemy. The next section will look at the volumes in relation to the events and currents at their time of publication; I will highlight four (Sekigahara, Okehazama, Nagashino, and the Korean Campaign) in particular as indicative of the sorts of messages and lessons the IJA wanted its officers to internalize.

The IJA staff's first volume of military history was published just before their first real test as an institution—the 1894–95 Sino-Japanese War—and Japan's career as an imperial power began (Harries and Harries 1991). While completed in 1893 before the beginning of hostilities, I believe the publication to be significant as an academic expression of the IJA's growth; victory versus the Qing would be a confirmation of that growth. As the reprinted introduction states, Sekigahara is a quintessentially representative (*daihyōteki* 代表的) campaign, likely the most famous and possibly most important battle in Japanese history prior to the Meiji period (*Sekigahara no Eki*, *Nihon Senshi* vol 1, 1893). For an IJA staff trained by Meckel through studying the decisive battles of the Napoleonic and the Franco-Prussian wars, Sekigahara was an obvious place to begin, as the key battle that ended the period of endemic warfare known as the "Warring States" period, leading to 250 years of peace under the Tokugawa. Though it was not until 1615, fifteen years after Sekigahara, that the Winter and Summer Osaka campaigns finally destroyed the Toyotomi family that opposed the Tokugawa (covered in volume 2 of *Nihon Senshi*), it was victory at Sekigahara that secured control of Japan for Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa shogunate. Sekigahara was the closest Japanese equivalent to studying the decisive battles of the West, like Waterloo or Sedan. The thick book is filled with 393 pages of narrative, followed by 249 pages of supplementary analysis and 103 pages of reprinted source materials, including both narrative and documentary sources. Additionally, supplementary maps and order of battle charts very clearly display the strategic and tactical contexts visually, as well as the economic strength of the combatants which made up each side (in terms of domain tax values). As a first effort for the IJA military

history office, it is a very thorough “Western”-style campaign analysis; the quality of the maps and charts especially would not be out of place in any academic campaign history produced throughout the twentieth century. The IJA staff thus demonstrated that the lessons learned from Meckel could be applied to their own military history.

Japan’s victory over China gained it (and the IJA) a measure of respect; it had broken away from the backwardness of non-Europeans, and joined the club of modern, advanced, “first rank” nations capable of imposing their will on weaker neighbours (Harries and Harries 1991, 59–60). Success in Japan’s first “national” war accelerated interest in “native” subjects in general, as the Japanese regained a measure of confidence and sense of equality with the West. Consistent with this cultural trend, the IJA increased their production of battle histories (Benesch 2014). After all, first rank militaries needed deeper investigations into their histories. The complete lack of institutional connection between the sixteenth-century forces of the Tokugawa, Oda, and Toyotomi to the IJA was irrelevant; the victories of specific samurai family armies over other specific family armies displayed a “Japanese” history of tactical and operational success, regardless of the fact that the losers in these campaigns were also Japanese.

Five more campaign histories were completed prior to the 1904–05 Russo-Japanese War; three more were begun in 1903, based on the dates listed in the prefaces, but the actual publication dates were 1907 (Yanase), 1911 (Western Japan), and 1920 (Yamazaki). My assumption, as the publisher lists no explanation, is that the Russo-Japanese War, and the strain it put on the IJA General Staff, redirected even the military history section’s efforts. Two of this group of campaign histories require additional comment.

The volume on Okehazama, the third study begun and published in 1902, examines the 1560 battle that launched Oda Nobunaga from being a petty warlord onto a twenty-two year path towards national political pre-eminence and started the process of unification. Nobunaga, leading a force of less than 3,000 troops, used superior tactics and the element of surprise to destroy Imagawa Yoshimoto’s vastly superior force of 25,000. Ōe (1985) notes that this battle, an example of a smaller opponent defeating a much stronger one through superior cunning and surprise, was a favourite historical model for the Japanese military; the defeat of the Russian fleet at Port Arthur in 1904 and the attack on the US fleet at Pearl Harbor in 1941 were naval operations that drew heavily on the principles displayed at Okehazama. However, one wonders if this example was over-emphasized, with disastrous results for the nation: while there were certainly additional cultural influences, the prominent example of a smaller yet dedicated force

overcoming insurmountable odds is certainly consistent with Japanese military decisions at both the strategic (challenging the United States despite the clear understanding of how overmatched Japan would be) and tactical (Japanese units continuing to fight losing battles in the field well after it would have been prudent to retreat and regroup) levels.

Volume 6, the Battle of Nagashino, published in 1903, attempts to place a Japanese battle at the forefront of early modern military developments. Based largely on the Oze Hoan's *Shinchōki* account of the battle between Oda Nobunaga and Tokugawa Ieyasu against Takeda Katsuyori, the IJA assessment makes the case that Nobunaga used 3,000 arquebusiers in a rotational formation to destroy the charge of the Takeda cavalry (*Nagashino no eki, Nihon Senshi, vol. 6, 1903*). Like the 1912 account of Nagashino by Lt. Gen Oshiage Morizō, the IJA staff account posits that a Japanese military force was using revolutionary tactics with the “new” technology of firearms, contemporary with similar developments by armies in early modern Europe (Oshiage 1965). As Oshiage does not provide a bibliography for his 1912 publication, asserting definite influence by the *Nihon Senshi* volume on Nagashino would be conjecture. Oshiage's argument stems largely from his position as IJA chief of weapons procurement during the Russo-Japanese War; it could even be interpreted as an argument internal to the IJA for advanced weapons technology by the chief of the office responsible for such. While it would stand to reason that Oshiage would be familiar with the volume produced by the IJA, the larger point is that influence or not, multiple military officers within the IJA were making claims to advanced, even “modern” antecedents in their invented institutional histories.

Recent scholarship demonstrates that this interpretation, especially the image of the “rotating volley fire” as derived from the *Shinchōki*, is significantly flawed. Oze Hoan was not present at the battle, and though the work is a hagiography of Oda Nobunaga, his discussion of Nagashino concentrates almost entirely on the forces of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the junior commander to Nobunaga at the battle but the *shōgun* of Japan at the time of Oze's writing in 1610 (Oze 1981). However, the IJA account in *Nihon Senshi* was uncritically used by historians and gained traction in the popular media. Sir George Sansom relies on the account for his description of Nagashino in his 1963 *A History of Japan, Volume II, 1334–1615*; Geoffrey Parker cites Nagashino in his 1988 *The Military Revolution*, going so far as to call Akira Kurosawa's depiction in the 1984 movie *Kagemusha* a “credible reconstruction”. (Parker 1988, 140). The best recent works that shed light on the popular image of Nagashino and its flaws are the section on the topic in Thomas Conlan's 2008 book *Weapons and Fighting Techniques of the Samurai Warrior, 1200–1877 AD* and Fujimoto Masayuki's 2010 *Nagashino no Tatakai: Nobunaga no Shōin, Katsuyori no*

Haiin (*The Battle of Nagashino: Sources for Nobunaga's Victory, Sources of Katsuyori's Defeat*). Fujimoto should be credited in earlier work with bringing forward the *Shinchōkōki*, by Ōta Gyūichi, Nobunaga's personal secretary and a participant at the battle, as a more credible account.⁵

After a hiatus during and for a short time after the Russo-Japanese War, production of campaign histories resumed in 1908. Victory over the Russians changed the IJA's self-narrative. Whereas victory against the “backwards” Qing in 1895 was attributed to Japan's superior ability to industrialize and adapt to advanced modern warfare, the victory over Russia was attributed to a uniquely “Japanese” spirit of bravery and self-sacrifice (Benesch 2014; Drea 2009). The government and press played up the bravery and sacrifice of the Japanese soldiers and sailors who gave their lives for the emperor in Manchuria, rhetorically making individual sacrifice the key to victory. This unintentional encouragement of reckless attacks against prepared positions was observed against the Russians and extended into the famous “*banzai*” attacks seen against U.S. forces in World War II. Meckel's admonitions to his IJA students to “act instead of think” certainly influenced this mentality, though clearly as a part of a greater confluence of discourses. Benesch (2014) demonstrates that a discourse about a “traditional” value labelled “*bushidō*” provided a philosophical justification for self-sacrifice for the Emperor. The military's educational curriculum reflected this shift, as *bushidō* became a formal part of the service regulations in 1909 (Harries and Harries 1991). Likewise, Orbach (2017) shows that the “three unifiers” were not the only models for military action; the *shishi*, the young samurai who propelled the Meiji Revolution of 1868, were the very personification of “reckless action in the name of the Emperor” as a successful model. The teachings of Meckel gave an external corroboration to this prioritization of action over deliberation, coming from the leading global military power of the time.

The IJA began distancing itself from European advisers in the wake of the Russo-Japanese War, for two reasons. First, Japan had just beaten a European (if somewhat weakened) power, through her subjects' inherently superior spirit; what

5 My own analysis of Nagashino, based on extensive analysis of the terrain around the site and the force composition of each army, indicates that while Oda Nobunaga's guns were important, they were neither revolutionary nor decisive; Nobunaga and Tokugawa Ieyasu's use of obstacles and terrain, along with a deception plan to entice their Takeda opponents into attacking their much greater-size force, were the primary reasons for victory. Nagashino was the topic of my MA research at the University of Hawaii, and a project to which I will return at some future point. While I disagree with Fujimoto's over-emphasis of the competing *Shinchōkōki* narrative account as a source, he ably demonstrates that however many guns Nobunaga may have had at Nagashino, they were not as central to the victory as commonly believed. A recent translation of the *Shinchōkōki* by Jeroen Lamers and Jurgas Elisonas is also worth consideration.

need did she have to learn from the West anymore? Second, the less-favourable-than-expected settlement, with no indemnity paid by Russia through the intervention of other Western powers in the negotiation process, somewhat soured the Japanese on the West; Though it continued in alliance with Great Britain, the Japanese military appears to have believed it had graduated to a more equal level with its former European teachers (Benesch 2014). The histories produced from 1908 to 1913 (Komaki, Kyūshū, and Odawara⁶) finish the campaigns of Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi to unify Japan in the 1500s. None of these analyses are individually remarkable, but the symbolism of the nation unified under military leadership through these campaigns should not be ignored.

From 1913 until 1924, no new volumes of *Nihon Senshi* were published (Volume 8, covering the Yamazaki campaign of Hideyoshi, was published in 1920, after having been delayed during the Russo-Japanese War. The length of this delay likely indicates where it fell on the priority list). Over the intervening decades, Japan annexed Korea in 1910 and participated on the winning side in World War I. However, international challenges to Japan's claims of sovereignty over Korea, plus the manner in which Japan was treated with minimal respect by its European and American allies at the Versailles Conference in 1919, followed by the U.S. and Britain forcing limitations on the number of ships the Imperial Japanese Navy could have at the 1922 Washington Naval Conference, resulted in Japan's disillusionment with the West growing stronger. Military academy history education at this time, according to a British observer, consisted of the Russo-Japanese War and medieval examples of bravery and sacrifice designed to instil national confidence and pride, with little to no study of tactical lessons (Harries and Harries 1991, 144). Rather than Western-based tactics, it appears, military leaders placed confidence in "Japanese spirit" to overcome the enemy.

Despite this seeming lack of interest in the study of operations and tactics, however, in 1924 the last volume in the IJA campaign series, on Toyotomi Hideyoshi's invasion of Korea in the 1590s, was released. The largest book of the entire series, with 449 pages of main narrative followed by 168 pages of supplementary narrative, 258 pages of reprinted primary documents, and a final 255 pages of biographical essays, it is massive. It also has the largest set of maps and supplementary documents. The temporal separation is noteworthy. The right-wing thinker Suzuki Chikara had pointed to Hideyoshi's Korean expedition as a precedent for Japanese intervention on the peninsula in his 1893 work *Kokumin no Shin Seishin* (*New Spirit of the Japanese Race*) (Benesch 2014, 67). In 1919 a rebellion in Korea

6 The Odawara volume (vol. 12) is problematic; the preface is dated 1913, but the publication date is listed in the reprint as 1893. In the absence of other evidence, I am considering this an error on the part of the reprint publisher.

had to be suppressed after nine years of colonial rule. I interpret the IJA General Staff Historical Section's choice to compile and release a volume on a Japanese invasion of Korea to be a significant attempt to tie contemporary policies to a historical past. As has been mentioned, there was no actual historical link from Hideyoshi's armies to the IJA. However, as the IJA studied the operational and logistical needs of maintaining forces stationed in Korea, a historical presentation of early modern Japanese troops performing the same sorts of duties in a conquered Korea provided a sense of historical legitimacy and ties to the past, not the least of which would be a sense that the current situation was rectifying Hideyoshi's failure to defeat the Koreans and Chinese in 1598.

The thirteen volumes of *Nihon Senshi* were produced over a period of significant change for the Imperial Japanese Army. By tying the military institution of modern Japan to examples on the border of the medieval and early modern, the IJA staff participated in the same process of history creation as those historians who created a feudal "medieval" era in Japan's past or thinkers who invented a "traditional" Japanese spirit called *bushidō*. Like those instances of the invention of tradition, the IJA's codification of Japanese military history had transnational origins as well, as Major Jakob Meckel's German influence on the tactical and operational levels of warfare shaped the focus of the IJA General Staff in both their choices of history to study and their conceptions of future military planning. The IJA Staff interpretations contained in *Nihon Senshi* not only influenced military thinkers, but propagated a version of these campaigns that place regional military forces as national sources of pride and international leaders in military tactics and technology.

This essay is far from a comprehensive review of *Nihon Senshi*. However, it is clear that further analysis of these texts will not only serve as useful for the scholar of medieval Japan to see the transmission of battlefield historiography, but also show that the Imperial Japanese Army General Staff, even in a minor bureaucratic section such as the Military History Office, was an active participant in Meiji and Taishō era discourses framing Japan and Japanese institutions against the backdrop of emerging modernity.

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