

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ Tokyo)

DIJ History and Humanities Study Group



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Croft, Quiet, and *Kantai Collection*: Female Bodies in Japanese Videogames

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This presentation examines the representation of women in Japanese videogames, situating the depiction of female bodies in terms of political discourse. I first briefly overview different kinds of depiction in a range of genres, from fighting and fantasy genres to shooters and war games, with examples drawn from *Tomb Raider*, *Soul Calibur* and *Metal Gear Solid*. I then focus on a case study, the online card-based wargame *Kantai Collection* (DMM.com, 2013), in which the player serves as Admiral of the Japanese imperial fleet. Sending historical battleships off to a nameless war in the Pacific, the player occupies a masculine subject-positioning where each battleship is anthropomorphized as a beautiful 'ship girl' (*kanmusume*). Attributes of the Japanese warships are directly reflected in the physical characteristics of the women: a large warship with high tonnage is represented by a mature, full-bodied woman, while a smaller ship is represented by a younger, girlish figure. The body of the woman is thus analogous to the body of the ship, with sexuality and fertility made synonymous with a ship's destructive force.

Beyond computer-based gameplay, *Kantai Collection* is also a media-mix phenomenon that has taken Japan and Asia by storm. Encompassing anime, manga, game spin-offs, figurines and the usual gamut of related merchandise, *Kantai Collection* attracts a wide consumer audience. At the same time, *Kantai Collection* is highly political in its theme, representation of women, and enactment of war memories. In this presentation, I examine the game and related artefacts as part of a popular politicization of WWII by Japanese artists, also seen in the recent spate of blockbuster revisionist films, as well as Nazi imagery and narratives in anime and manga. Drawing on Ueno Chizuko's work on nationalism and gender, I conclude that the female body in *Kantai Collection*, and by extension other similar videogames, may be read in terms of the *kokutai*, the 'body politic' of the wartime Japanese state. Overall, I argue that the hyper-sexualization of women in *Kantai Collection* contributes to the exoticization of war as distant and unreal, in a continued context of controversial war memories in Japan vis-à-vis the Asian mainland.

Rachael Hutchinson is Professor of Japanese Studies at the University of Delaware, where she teaches Japanese language, literature, film and videogames. She has published widely on representation and identity in Japanese narrative texts, from the novels of Nagai Kafu to the manga of Tezuka Osamu, the films of Kurosawa Akira to the videogames of Kojima Hideo. Her latest book, *Japanese Culture through Videogames* (Routledge 2019) was featured on the podcasts 'Meiji at 150' and 'Japan Station.' She is currently co-editing a book on the Japanese role-playing game genre with J r mie Pelletier-Gagnon, forthcoming from Lexington Books.

About:

The DIJ History and Humanities Study Group is a forum open to scholars working on Japan in any field of the humanities. This session is organized by Barbara Geilhorn. All are welcome to attend.

Registration:

Registration for this online event is required via email to geilhorn@diجتokyo.org until 22 June 2021 (JST). Log in data will be provided after registration.