

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ Tokyo)

DIJ Social Science Study Group



March 27, 2024, 18.30h (JST)/10.30h (CET)

Socialising the Soldier: Negotiating History, Tradition, and Identity at Japan's National Defense Academy

Ben Moeller, University of Oxford/DIJ Tokyo

After the physical and moral devastation brought by the defeat in the Asia-Pacific War, Japanese administrations in the Cold War era charted a course of gradual rearmament against the backdrop of substantial anti-militarist sentiments among the wider society. This tension placed members of the newly rebranded Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in an uneasy position. Often referred to as 'hikagemono' (social outcasts), service members refrained from wearing their uniforms in public, while the SDF leadership made various efforts to 'civilianise' its public image through non-military activities and language. In the 21st century, however, rising defence budgets and rearmament across Asia have left Japanese society scrambling to reconsider its fraught relationship with the SDF. While there has been a lot of scrutiny on how actors in civilian society wrestle over how to reconcile the lessons of the past with the rapidly changing international situation of the present, little attention has been paid to how members of the military themselves perceive and respond to these tensions. This seems counterintuitive, given that both proponents and opponents of a further expansion of the SDF's activities and budget would seem to be interested in knowing more about those who wield the monopoly of organised violence in Japan. This research project examines the institutional socialisation of the SDF's leadership through a one-year ethnography of Japan's National Defense Academy (NDA), where the bulk of the future senior officers of the SDF's three branches are educated. Through this anthropological inquiry, this research seeks to answer how history, tradition, and identity of the Japanese SDF are negotiated at the NDA.

Ben Moeller is a PhD student in Area Studies at the University of Oxford and a DIJ scholarship holder. His research examines how history, tradition, and identity are negotiated at the National Defense Academy of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces. Previously he completed an MPhil in Japanese Studies at the University of Oxford and an MA in Chinese Studies at Peking University.

About:

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is a forum for scholars from all disciplines of the social sciences conducting research on contemporary Japan. The event is open to all.

Venue:

DIJ Tokyo: <https://www.dijtokyo.org/access/>

Hybrid Event:

On-site participation: Registration is required via email to polak-rottmann@dijtokyo.org until March 26, 2024.

Online participation: Please register via the webpage.