

# The Pacific War as Seen by Japan's General Public Via Official Posters

Modern wars of the type fought during the twentieth century demand a mobilization of the entire citizenry. Propaganda and official exhortations aimed at the home front took on great importance among all of the Pacific War combatants. The slides here show posters aimed at the general public in Japan, circa 1937-1944. Always bear in mind that the Pacific War, which Americans tend to believe started in December 1941, was a direct outgrowth of the Second Sino-Japanese War. This war had been simmering since 1931, and broke out into full-scale combat during the summer of 1937. Many of the posters here refer to that early stage of the conflict. Try to put yourself in the shoes of a consumer of these posters. Of course, there were other sources of war information (most tightly controlled by the state), but just based on these very typical images and messages, how would you perceive your country's war effort? Most civilians regard their country's war efforts as glorious and necessary most of the time, whether today or during the previous century.

The poster to the right is from 1940. It is a call for volunteers for the navy and explains minimum qualifications and the steps one takes to enlist, which can be done at any ward office in Kyoto. Incidentally, most of the military's manpower was in the form of conscripts, not volunteers.

海軍志願兵募集

一 兵種と年齢  
水兵 (空母艦上員等)  
航空兵 (飛行機操縦員等)  
機関兵 (機関部隊員等)  
工作兵 (造船部員等)  
看護兵 (看護部員等)  
主計兵 (主計部員等)

二 身體検査  
規格ハ兵種並ニ年齢ニ依リ差異アリ  
海軍志願兵募集 (各區役所アリ参照)

三 學力試験  
讀書及數學 (高等小學校卒業程度)

四 願書提出先  
各區役所

五 願書締切期日  
昭和十六年一月十日

六 検査期日及場所  
昭和十六年二月二十日 三月十七日迄  
京都市東山區役所

願書様式其他詳細ニ付テハ各區役所  
兵事係ニ面合ヌコト



# The war is for everyone, children included . . .

The poster below points out that even little boys can render service to the nation in its time of need, in this case by saving coins to buy war bonds at any post office. The image here is almost certainly of a classroom scene, with all the coin banks hung on the wall.



The slogan written on the flag these two children are hoisting is "*fukoku-kyōhei*," which goes back to the early Meiji period and never disappeared from public discourse until 1945.

The poster at left is ca. 1937-1940; the one at right is probably from this time, but could also be later.

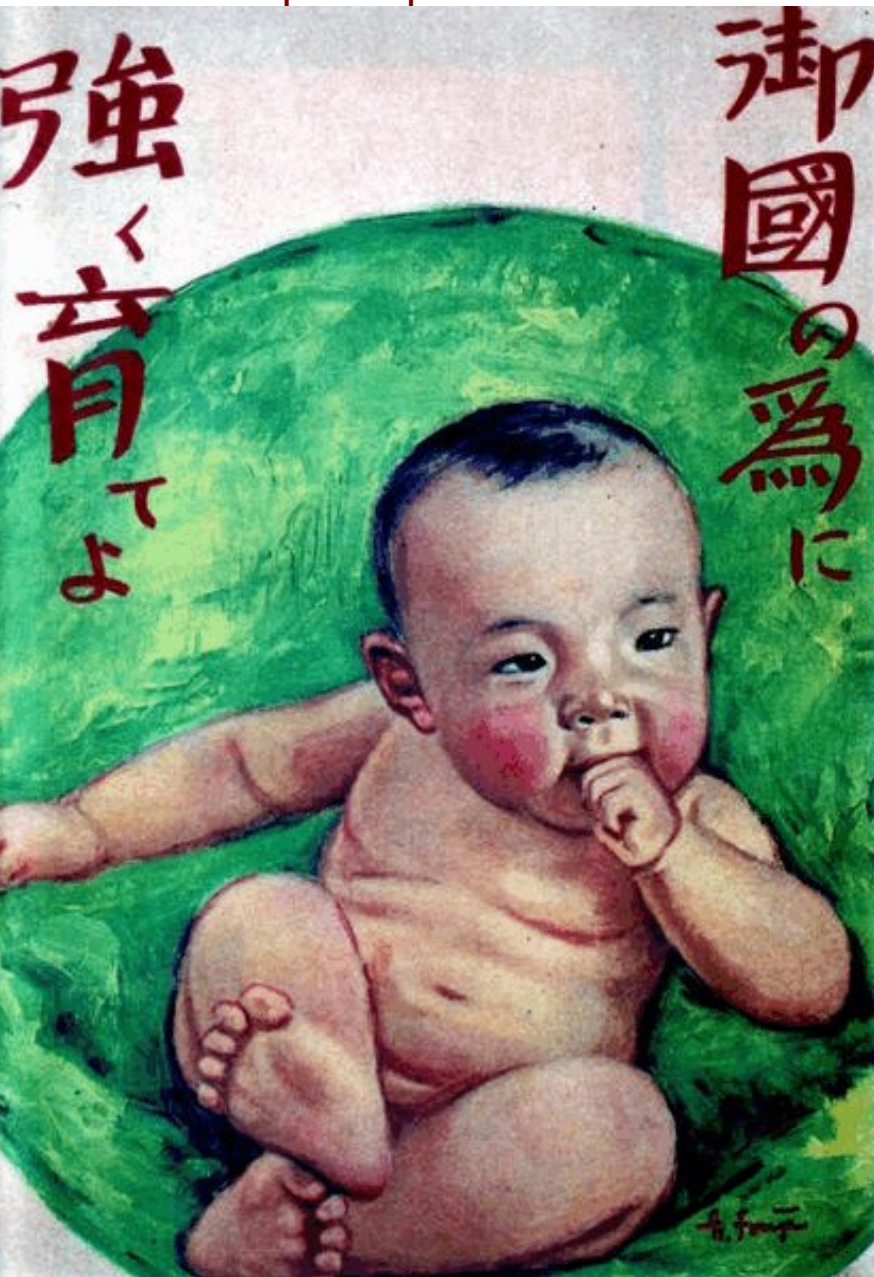


Notice again the characteristic of the big wars of the twentieth century whereby the state attempted to mobilize nearly everyone in society to contribute.



# The war is for everyone, women included . . .

Women did not serve in combat roles in Japan's military forces, nor, for that matter in any capacity except nurses and clerks. This situation was roughly the same among all the combatants. All combatants, however, specifically tried to enlist the active participation of women in the war effort.



The poster at left says "For the sake of our nation, raise them strong!" The poster at right says, "The patriotic movement starts with [or emanates from] women." The woman depicted in it is dressed as a Buddhist nun, suggesting that she lost her husband in the war.



Regarding the poster at left, the wartime government sometimes sponsored healthy baby contests, a strange sort of (naked) beauty pageant for infants.



Support Our Troops! Stand Firm and Resolute Behind the Guns!



Both posters use the expression “in back of the guns” to refer to the civilian population, which they urge to be resolute in support for the troops.



One way to support the troops is to look after wounded and crippled soldiers, their communities providing them with useful work, for example.



The poster at the right proclaims “Emphasis on Economic Warfare—Bank Savings to Repay the Nation” In short, it urges people to put money in their savings accounts as a way of aiding the war effort.



# Strength to Fight a Holy War

The poster at left announces the Kansai-wide Great Athletic Meet to Build the Spirits of Our Citizens.



The poster at right is hard to translate into a coherent English slogan. Here it is rather literally: “Look up at the holy war, permeated through-and-through with sagely duty.” It sounds better in Japanese: *Aoge seion tsuranuke seisen*.



# Kill those Flies and Pay Your Taxes!

The poster at left announces "Fly Extermination Day." Perhaps a bayonet is not the best tool for this job. Four specific days are listed, 4/10, 6/10, 7/10, and 8/10, the first apparently having passed.

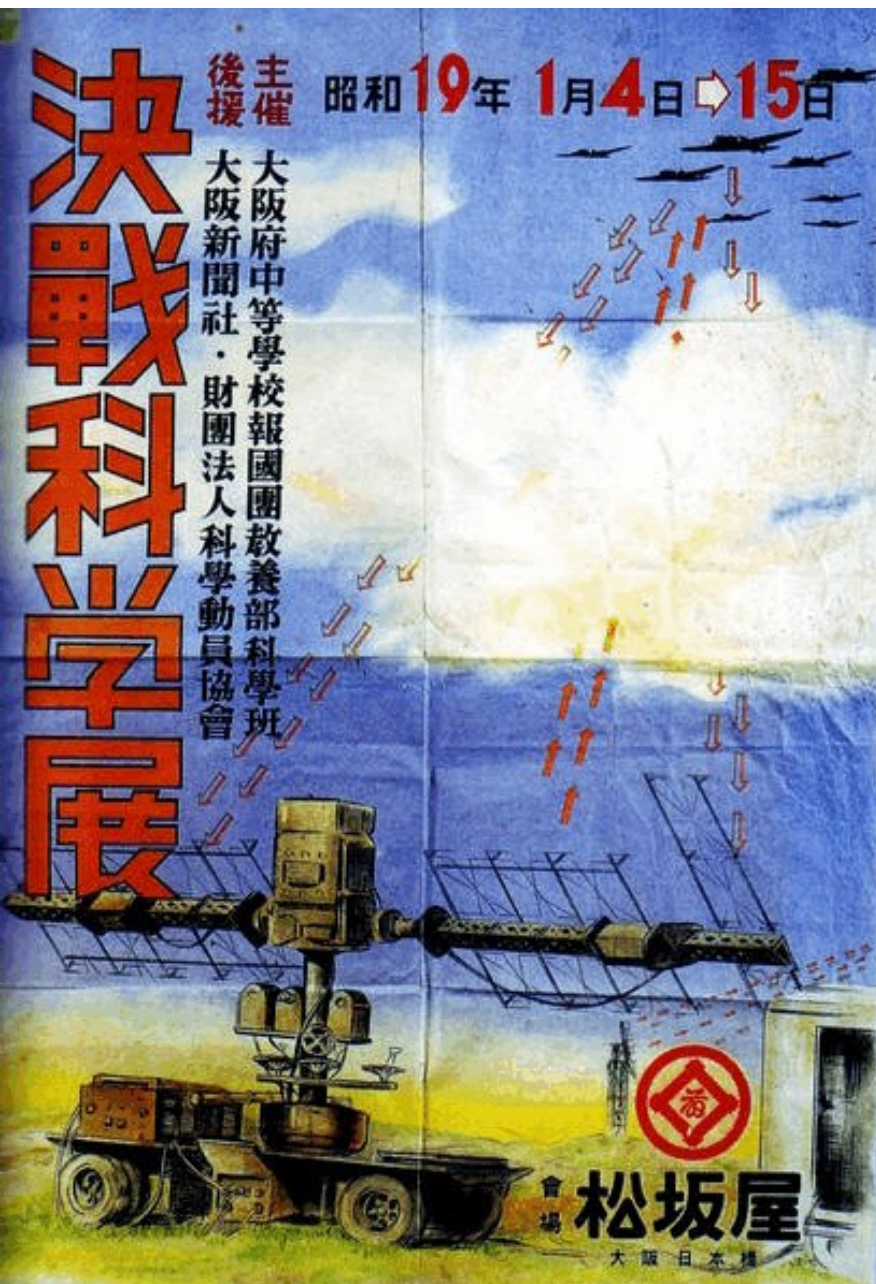


Right: "Look up to the rising sun symbol and do your duty by paying your taxes! Service through Paying Taxes!" Even in peacetime, nothing is more important for a state than tax revenues.



# A War of Science as Well as Spirit

The poster at left is from early 1944, a time when the war was closing in on the home islands. Its headline text literally says: “Certain Victory Science Exhibit” to be held at the Matsuzakaya department store. The object shown here, of course, is a radar station.



After defeat, it became common for Japanese pundits and commentators to state that “We lost the war because of inferior science.” In this way, they could suggest that Japan was second to none in areas like courage, sacrifice, etc., but that in the end it lacked the gadgetry to prevail.



The poster at right is sponsored by 6 different government agencies. It declares that national defense and long-term construction depend on radio transmissions. Otherwise, however, it provides no specific message or exhortation to action. From the architecture of the buildings, the “long-term construction” seems aimed at occupied China. This poster is probably from the early phase of the war, ca. 1937-1940.