February 26, 2015

Doris G. Quinn Fellowship Committee
Department of History, University of Wisconsin-Madison
3211 Mosse Humanities Bldg., 455 N. Park St.
Madison, Wisconsin 53706

Dear Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express my intention to apply for the Doris G. Quinn Dissertation Write-Up Fellowship. I have made steady progress towards completing my dissertation, and I am very excited with how the project is coming together. If granted this fellowship, I would have the necessary time and energy to devote to a final push to complete the write-up process. I look forward to developing my project, finishing my graduate experience and moving on to the next phase of my academic career. This fellowship would be instrumental in allowing me to accomplish this by the end of the coming academic year.

I have made steady progress throughout my time in the history program. After entering the program without a Masters degree in 2009, I completed my MA thesis, finished my major and minor coursework requirements, and completed language requirements in spring, 2012. I then passed my preliminary examinations with distinction in late June and early July 2012. I conducted fieldwork in Japan as a Fulbright scholar from September 2012 to December 2013. Upon returning to Madison in the spring semester of 2013, I spent significant time sorting and reading the vast materials that I had acquired while abroad before beginning the write up process. I currently have two chapters that near completion, and I hope to have one of them finished before the summer. I have also begun the preliminary reading for my third chapter. As I will focus exclusively on writing this summer, I am confident that I will have completed three chapters by the fall semester, and will have begun planning my last three chapters. This will put me within range of a target completion date of the summer of 2016 if I am able to secure fellowship funding next year.

While I have made significant headway in my dissertation, my progress was slowed this academic year by the fact that I have been working a 50% appointment at the University of Wisconsin Foundation as a Public Humanities Fellow. While this appointment provided me with a wonderful experience, I would cherish the opportunity that the Doris G. Quinn Dissertation Write-Up Fellowship would provide me to focus all of my time and energy on my research. Thank you for considering my application. I look forward to hearing the results of the fellowship competition.

Yours Sincerely,

James Homsey
With the domestic and international tension surrounding the Japanese government’s recent reinterpretation of Article 9 of the constitution, allowing for the dispatch of the Self-Defense Force abroad in the name of “collective self-defense,” it is more important than ever to seek a balanced understanding of the historical legacy of the Japanese army. Yet, this institution remains curiously under-analyzed in English-language scholarship, and its relationship with the general public in particular has been neglected. This omission is glaring, for while the meteoric rise of army influence in the 1930s stemmed partly from high-level political jockeying and intimidation, I argue that these efforts only met with such success due to the army’s deep and wide roots in general society. English-language studies that do touch on this subject tend toward basic tropes of collaboration, conspiracy, coercion and brainwashing to explain the complacency of the public in the face of militarism, and tend to lack concrete analysis of specific relationships, as they treat “army” and “society” as two distinct and coherent entities.

In my dissertation, I avoid such generalizations by analyzing civil-military relations in interwar Japan (1918-1937) through diverse case studies of interactions between particular sections of the army and specific civilian organizations. My chronology reveals both continuities and disjunctions between the "democratic" 1920s, and the militaristic 1930s. I contend that despite significant changes over these years, earlier patterns of engagement made possible, shaped, and limited the army’s later efforts to mobilize various groups in society. My research thus far has revealed that, rather than being purely top-down in nature, each relationship was interest-driven, dynamic and
bilateral. By tracing these interactions, I resituate the army as a part of society rather than as a completely distinct entity, and I explore how they exercised influence on, while being influenced by, the rest of society.

My study consists of two three-chapter sections. The first analyzes army figures as intellectuals. I begin with an analysis of their efforts to remain relevant in a quick-changing Japan while still maintaining and propagating their own particular worldviews as they sought to position themselves to be able to mobilize the public in the case of a future total war. I examine how their negotiation with contemporary political and social realities, and with such intellectual trends as socialism, liberalism and fascism, inspired the army to revolutionize their propaganda and education networks, and inspired their espousal of a particular brand of Japanist ideology that openly absorbed the “useful” aspects of competing ideologies while rejecting any ideas that would challenge the essence of the emperor-centered national polity. The end product was a sort of populist imperialism that was vague enough to elicit support from various elements of society.

Japanese society did not, however, represent a passive blank slate for army ideologues to freely manipulate. In my second and third chapters, therefore, I examine army interactions with the Suiheisha, a rights group for the domestic minority group, the hisabetsu burakumin, as an example of the negotiated nature of the army’s intellectual engagement with society. Lingering discrimination against this group within the ranks belied army ideology of egalitarianism, and therefore represented a thorny issue for the army authorities. It was only with the establishment of the Suiheisha in the early 1920s, however, that they faced significant pressure to address this matter. Public Suiheisha challenges forced army officials to address paradoxes in army thought. The Suiheisha’s
confrontational approach and leftist politics precipitated a series of jarring clashes with the army from 1926 to 1928, which I argue changed both organizations. To alleviate tensions, the army adopted a “carrot-and-stick” strategy in which they assimilated core Suiheisha demands into army ideology while repressing open conflict, thereby seeking to coopt the energy of the movement under their own guidance. Meanwhile, most elements of the Suiheisha adopted a two-layered approach towards the army by mobilizing army ideas and networks to demand improvements within the existing system even as they preached more revolutionary goals. By the 1930s, these developments dovetailed to create a situation in which each party sought to mobilize the other towards their own ends. Some army figures mobilized harmony-centered ideas of hisabetsu burakumin inclusion to inspire broader national unity and to paint an inclusionary vision of empire abroad. As army leaders of the 1930s came to espouse ideas resembling state socialism, and presented themselves as a leveling force, meanwhile, some Suiheisha members called on the army to effect social change, even as they worked to combat “military fascism.” In this manner, I offer a more nuanced view of the “conversion” phenomenon amongst leftist groups in 1930s Japan that is more specific to particular institutional prerogatives.

My second section positions army figures as professionals, analyzes their integration into broader professional communities, and traces their exchanges with these communities. First, I look at the relationship between the army’s medical corps and the broader medical community, as represented by the Japanese Medical Association. I analyze the mutual research interests and professional networks of both parties through their interactions surrounding three contemporary medical issues that were of particular concern for the army: tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases and mental health.
Despite such synergy, however, the broader medical community rankled at a drive by the state, increasingly spearheaded by the army, to intervene into the sphere of public health in order to foster a healthier national body for more effective mobilization. This drive culminated in the establishment of a Ministry of Welfare in 1938. I have found that particular research organizations and medical associations appealed to the increasing authority of the army to buttress their positions on certain issues even as they struggled against the authorities to maintain autonomy and professional exclusivity in the face of state demands. I will explore the mutual impact of such exchanges and debates, and their impact on the state of the Japanese medical world.

In my final case study, I trace interactions between the army’s managerial department and the textile industry. While army ideologues often castigated industrialists and unions alike for putting their own interests ahead of those of the nation, concerns regarding industrial productivity, management and labor organization forced them into dialogue and intellectual exchange with all parties. The textile industry provides a particularly intriguing case study, for while heavy industry is more central to military-industrial complexes, textiles were central to prewar Japan's economy. Also, as a majority of textile workers were women, the army’s relationship with this industry provides a glimpse of how this male institution interacted with an element of the female population via the workplace.

Methodologically, my project is rooted in analyzing interest-based interactions between these various organizations and the army. This will of course require me to trace concrete financial, political, professional and interpersonal connections. However, as organizations only follow their own interests as they perceive them, I will combine such
hard data with a discursive institutionalism-based approach that focuses on the role of discourse in effecting institutional change. By tracing both discursive exchanges through journals, magazines, memorandums and other such documents, and more concrete connections, I offer a more complete picture of how the army formed societal connections. Moreover, by demonstrating how Japanese subjects pursuing their perceived self interests could associate with the army for reasons other than jingoism, I hope to help demystify the militarization of Japan for English speaking audiences in a manner that neither neglects the responsibility of the Japanese public nor portrays them as uniquely bellicose.
James Homsey  
Statement of Research Interests (Doctoral Dissertation Research)  
Doris G. Quinn Write up Fellowship – 2015-2016

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