

# Bringing the Filipino Woman Back Home: Idealized femininity as idealized Orientality under the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, 1942-44

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フィリピンの女性を家庭・東洋に連れ戻す  
— 大東亜共栄圏における理想化されたオリエンタリティとしての  
理想化された女性らしさ (1942-44) —

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## Abstract

In 1943, Japanese propaganda called widely for the cooperation of women across all occupied territories for the success of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere (GEACPS). This campaign was met with unusual tension in the Philippines which, according to Gen. Masaharu Honma of the Japanese 14th Army, showed an “excessive esteem toward the weaker sex. This criticism of the Filipino woman was shared by many Japanese assigned to the Philippines at the time, and prompted several speeches, writers’ forums, and articles across major publications debating the issue of the Filipino woman—to what ideal should she be held, in light of the Philippines’ return to a more Oriental culture under the GEACPS? This paper examines not only the gendered language by which Japanese propaganda aimed to bring back Filipino women into the Sphere, but also (and more importantly) the ways in which Filipino women responded to this call. Through this, the study aims to trace how Filipino women understood this “Oriental” nature and saw themselves in relation to the Sphere, and to exhibit how idealized womanhood served as a fulcrum for Japanese propaganda’s back-to-the-East campaign by bringing the Filipino woman back to her conservative, “Eastern roots. Scholarship on the GEACPS thus far has not been scarce, but has also been the history of a handful of powerful men. This study hopes not only to bring a local and feminine perspective into the dialog on Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, but also to stand in contrast to the narrative of the liberal West saving women from the conservative East.

**Key Words** : Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, women, gender, the Philippines, Oriental

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## 1. Introduction

In a 1944 address to the Filipino people, Lt. Gen. Masaharu Honma, who led the Japanese 14th Army, found it necessary to note the Filipinos' "corruptive custom of showing excessive esteem toward the weaker sex". Honma was not alone in his astonishment. In fact, even before he gave the said address, other Japanese officials and propagandists had expressed criticism of the liberties enjoyed by the Filipino woman in several speeches and articles across most major publications. They called for the Filipino woman in articles and symposiums to return to the household, much unlike Japanese-occupied Malaya where women were encouraged to go beyond the household and participate actively in nation-building (Musa 2016). The years 1943-44 saw a wave of discussions regarding the question: to what ideal should the Filipino woman be held, in light of the Philippines' return to a more "Oriental" culture under Japan's Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere (GEACPS)?

By that time, Japan had been disseminating a rhetoric of brotherhood and cooperation in order for "Greater Asia" to return to its Eastern roots and decolonize itself of Western influence. In the Philippines, the Japanese Propaganda Corps of the 14th Army had also seized all media, with all major outlets being operated by Mainichi Shinbunsha (Hayase 2018, pp. 23-44). This meant the GEACPS's language of re-Orienting Asia to its Eastern way of life resonated throughout these publications, in English and in multiple Filipino languages, both by Japanese and Filipino writers and intellectuals. With the Philippines being formerly occupied by the United States, these publications were naturally preoccupied with a witch hunt of the facets of Philippine society that were assumed to be inherited from the West. Love for American popular culture and fashion, the prevalent use of English and Spanish, and the loss of old-time family values were all blamed upon westernization, especially liberal individualist thinking which was said to have tainted the nation's "Oriental" qualities.

It was under this same rhetoric that Honma made his remarks about Filipinos' attitude toward women. He noted that this custom was "produced by the American influence". Similarly, many of those who agreed with Honma's line of thinking criticized Filipino women for their "individualistic" tendency to place their own interests before their duties as wife or mother. Indeed, by the time the Philippines was occupied by Japan in 1942, Filipino women had already enjoyed certain privileges, such as a long history of education under institutions established during the Spanish colonization. Under the American occupation, women's literacy and enrollment rate became even higher, and academic curricula were revised to encourage their active (but gendered) participation in the work force (Sobritchea 1990, 70-91). It had also been half a decade since women earned the right to vote and to run for office. Yet interestingly, Filipino women writers involved in the discussion criticized American individualism and liberalism, and adamantly refused to attribute the power and esteem they enjoyed to America. They even insisted that Western colonization disrupted the privileges women had enjoyed during precolonial times and led to the oppression of women.

Some who have examined Filipinos' regard for the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere have

claimed how Filipinos resisted true integration into the Sphere because they, having undergone centuries of Western colonization, saw themselves more as “cosmopolitan” rather than Asian (Yellen 2019, pp. 110, 137; Matthiessen 2019, p.574). Are we then to find a similar view were we to focus on women’s writing on the Sphere, which has been largely ignored in the study of the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines? In light of how “woman” was defined, idealized, and negotiated in the grand campaign to re-Orientalize the Philippines under the GEACPS, the paper asks: where did Filipino women writers imagine the Philippines in relation to the Sphere? Where did they imagine the “Orient” and “Oriental culture” to be? This is done, firstly, by providing a background of the kind of “Oriental” womanhood the dominant GEACPS propaganda prescribed through an illustration of the gendered language seen in speeches given and articles written by Japanese assigned to do military and propaganda work in the Philippines. Second and more importantly, the paper looks at both major and minor propaganda publications in both English and Filipino, such as *Liwayway*, *Philippine Review*, and *Michishirube*, which saw not little writing by Filipino women who were called to participate in this campaign.

Cynthia Enloe has noted the central role of gender structures in enabling empires and building nations, and has noted the role of the woman in these structures. Though often treated as other in narratives of empire or nation-building, women have been crucial to these tasks as symbols, as laborers, and as “nurturers” (Enloe 2014). These three tasks of the woman, all particularly present in the discussions on women during the Japanese Occupation, point to women’s significant role both in the discursive and the material aspect of empire. By looking at the different voices that were involved in the discussion regarding the position of the woman under the New Order under the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, this paper aims to understand women’s involvement in both of these aspects.

All of this is in the hopes of adding to the literature on Filipino women during the Japanese Occupation beyond the usual route of portraying her as the victim of colonial violence. Moreover, a close look at women’s creative and active assessment of their condition—not only as colonials but also as women—may offer alternatives to the prevalent narrative that paints Western feminism and liberalism as the savior of women from the oppressive conservatism of the East.

## **2. Women and the Creation of a “New Order” in Japanese Propaganda**

### **2.1 The Rhetoric of Masculinity as Empowerment**

The structures that guide gender and the rhetoric of war both rely on similar binaries of strength vs. weakness, of hard vs. soft, of war vs. peace. It is no surprise then that the binary of man/woman would be used in reinforcing imperial propaganda. Carol Cohn has pointed out how gender is used as a weapon of war: “If war hinges on disempowering one’s opponent, and gender difference encodes power, then manipulating gender can be deployed as a tactic of disempowerment... not just men but their *manliness* are a target” (Cohn 2012, p. 19). This same rhetoric is at play in Japanese officials’ speeches addressed to the Filipino people, like Honma’s address mentioned earlier, where

he says: "The corruptive custom of showing excessive esteem toward the weaker sex, which was produced by the American influence, led to the breakdown of the time-honoured principles of the East to respect the head of the family" (1942, xv-xxi). Here, esteem towards women is portrayed as a kind of "corruption" with which America has tainted and weakened Filipino culture, which, because it is of the East, is assumed to have the same native regard for the male "head of the family". The natural, "time-honoured" manliness or masculinity of the East is rendered as under threat because of the feminizing West. What it means, then, to keep the Philippines' (and consequently, Greater Asia's) Oriental identity is to avoid becoming weak, by keeping the woman from being superior or from garnering too much esteem. This same regard for masculinity as an essential quality in reconstructing the nation and battling the evils of Westernization is mentioned by director general of the Japanese Military Administration Yoshihide Hayashi in his address on the necessity for re-education in fortifying the new society that is to be built in the Philippines under Japan: "It shall be the cardinal spirit of educational renovation in the Philippines to cultivate and promote the spirits of independence, fortitude and manliness, in lieu of the spirits of dependence and frivolity that have existed in the past" (1942, pp. xiii-xviii).

## **2.2 The Oriental Woman's "Strength"**

In his own address to Filipino women about "The Nippon Woman's Code of Ethics", Lt. Gen. Shigenobu Mochizuki noted how "it is necessary that Filipino women alter their mode of thinking, from the Anglo-American type of 'petticoat government' to that of the East Asiatic manner of respecting both man and woman" (1943, pp. 5-11). Like Honma, he attributes a kind of weakness and lack of masculinity to American influence, and insists that reclaiming the lost balance in gender roles is a way to expel individualist tendencies and strengthen the state, which is the Philippines' supposed goal at the time after years of colonization. However, he does not attribute "weakness" to women. Sharing his recent experience in a symposium by Filipino women, he cites how the American government (wrongfully) gave women certain civil rights without recognizing the fundamental physical differences between men and women, and insists on the importance of first understanding "the natural mission of women", namely housewifery and motherhood. For Mochizuki, it is in these differences that women's and men's respective roles in the state lie. It is through bearing and rearing exemplary sons who would contribute to the nation that the woman can exhibit strength:

Those who carry infants on their backs are carriers of the State. Those who rock the cradle rock the State. Those who wash diapers purify the State. All mothers of men, in order to accomplish the great mission imposed on woman by their nature, must transcend all personal and worldly interests (p.9).

For Mochizuki, it is through bearing sons and embedding the virtues of ideal masculinity in

them that the woman can exhibit strength for the sake of a powerful state. This mission given to the woman by nature and by the state “must transcend all personal and worldly interests”, a kind of self-negation by the woman which is also to be taught to her sons for the sake of this great cause. It is by maintaining this balance, by keeping the proponents of the state and of the empire in their proper place and expecting them to do well in their assigned tasks that the Philippines can reclaim their “Eastern” identity.

A similar argument was made for Japanese women by writer Hiroshi Ueda, who was then part of the Literature Section of the Japanese Imperial Army’s Information Department. In an article entitled “The Japanese Family”, translated into Filipino and published in *Liwayway* on July 31, 1942, Ueda states that all aspects of life in Japanese society are geared towards one goal, that of enriching the nation. This includes women, who equally partake in doing their best in daily life to perform this task:

*Kung nakikita ang katamtamang paraan ng pamumuhay ng mga babaing Haponesa, ang ilang mga taga ibang lupa ay nakapagpapalagay na ang pamumuhay na iyan ng mga babaing Haponesa ay katulad ng sa mga pang-aalipin. Nguni' t ito'y isang pangit na pamamalagay na pasapyaw. Ang ipinalalagay na lisyang tanawing ito sa mata ng mga tagaibang lupa ay bunga ng pangyayaring ang kabuhayan ng mga mag-anak na Hapones ay nag-ugat sa katangitanging pagmamahalan at pagsasamahang Silangan na malayo at kaibang-kaiba sa kabuhayan ng mag-anak na Anglo-Sahon na nag-ugat sa pagpapahalaga lamang sa sari-sarili.*

When they see the Japanese woman’s modest way of life, those from other lands assume that this way of life is like that of a slave. But this is a poor and superficial assumption. This false view from the foreign perspective stems from the fact that the way of life of the Japanese family is rooted in love and fellowship found only in the East that differs greatly from the Anglo-Saxon way of life which is rooted in love only of the self. (p.3)

From the mere fact that Ueda finds it necessary to acknowledge and argue against “foreign” and “Western” views, it is evident that he was aware of the arising change in how the world saw gender roles, and of criticism that rendered the Japanese woman’s state as oppressive. He justifies this by attributing it to that of servitude to the state, and illustrates Japanese women’s predicament as something that is required in a society that functions effectively for the good of everyone instead of the individual. With this rhetoric, he shifts the focus from one issue of oppression (that of women) to another (that of the East, by the West), claiming that Eastern culture has been misjudged because of the prevalence of individualism. He also invokes the economy of filial bond and love, which can be expected to be useful for his purposes since it views women’s sacrifices (including being restricted to social rules that limit them and the labor required of them) as something that is abstract and cannot be measured. Ueda then adds that he hopes GEACPS citizens will go back to

this way of life “untainted and undamaged” by foreign influence.

Though the statements we have laid out in this section seem to ascribe more agency to the woman, it is necessary to note how they still ultimately point to the same end, which is to justify the domestication of women for the sake of the nation. Honma’s denouncement of women’s “excessive esteem” (i.e. allowing them agency outside the home) and Mochizuki’s recognition of their “strength” as tools of reproduction for the state are not contradictory, but rather in line with each other; the latter’s call for women to contribute to the state means for them to go about their domestic tasks with an enthusiasm that comes from knowing that they are doing it for the nation. Similarly, Hayashi’s insistence on the importance of a “masculine” spirit in state-building is not unrelated to Ueda’s idea of female sacrifice for the sake of the greater community. Therefore, what might seem to be more layered arguments on womanhood are actually merely differently expressed reverberations of the same imperial and patriarchal thrust to maintain traditional gender roles in the name of a collectivist “East”.

### 2.3 Silenced Dissent and Nuances of Traditional Womanhood

From late 1942, it is obvious that the Imperial Army’s Information Department started to recognize the significance of women’s cooperation with the war cause. Local magazines started to allocate space for women’s concerns and women writing, and women writers from Japan were also sent to different territories to interact with local women intellectuals. Writers Tsuyako Abe (known more famously by her maiden name, Tsuyako Miyake) and Kikuko Kawakami were sent to the Philippines to tour the archipelago and write about their impressions, and to hold symposiums with local intellectuals. Their departure from the Philippines after a year was featured in the March 29, 1943 issue of the *The Tribune*. In the April 1943 issue of the *Philippine Review*, the transcript for Mochizuki’s speech on women was published, followed by this quote from Tsuyako Abe:

A wife’s place is at home. If she has to choose between being a good wife and becoming socially famous, she would never hesitate to sacrifice social fame... Women enjoy no political rights whatsoever. The women, however, have never entertained the idea that they should have a hand in the management of the state (p. 11).

This was from a speech she delivered in a Manila Shimbunsha symposium “on the status of Nipponese women.” It echoes the kind of womanhood shown in Mochizuki’s and Ueda’s statements, and describes women’s involvement in anything outside the home as an excess, referring to political involvement as “social fame”. However, the speech was not published by *Philippine Review* in its entirety. Instead, lines that emphasize Japanese women’s domesticity were chosen and appended to the transcript of Mochizuki’s speech. In her personal account of her time in the Philippines, Abe mentions how there are notable Japanese women in fields like literature and medicine, but that they do not find their domestic tasks as a burden and instead take pride in it. Though Abe’s account

of this symposium in her diary would attest to her support of female domesticity, splicing her statement significantly skews her views on the woman question (Abe 1944, pp. 228-229).

In any case, it would be reckless to assume that these reflect the general sentiment among Japanese women intellectuals regarding the role of women in society. By the time these discussions came out, Japanese women had been lobbying for rights to political involvement and suffrage for two decades, and were a mere three years away from realizing it (Weiss and Brueske 2018, 170). At this time, the Meiji-era ideal of “good wife, wise mother” (*ryōsai kenbo*) still insisted upon by the likes of Mochizuki was already implausible (Koyama & Sylvain 1994, pp. 31-52). Many Japanese women’s writing at the time also had varying feminist sensibilities, such as Fumiko Hayashi who was assigned to Java and Sumatra for propaganda work, Ineko Sata who was assigned to Malaya, and Akiko Yosano who was sent to see Manchuria. Even philosopher Kiyoshi Miki noted that the esteem women enjoyed at the time rooted back to precolonial Philippine history (Miki 1942, p.10).

Of course, this clamor for change would not serve well the rhetoric of re-Orientalism, which hinged on nostalgia for conservative practices from olden times in “the East”. The argument against “excessive esteem” for women were built around the assumption that all Eastern women were originally subservient to the traditional domestic roles assigned to her, and Filipino women’s enjoyment of rights outside these domestic roles was a breach of their faith to this Eastern identity—a claim that would be passionately refuted by the women whose writing we will encounter in the following section. Under this assumption, to conform to this supposed Eastern subservience of women means also to conform to the whole project of re-Orientalizing Greater East Asia; resisting it means also to resist the empire’s efforts of decolonization from Western influence towards building the New Order under the Japanese Empire. This frustration with Filipino women expressed in Japanese officials’ speeches reflects a wider frustration regarding their inability to get the Philippines to willingly subscribe to GEACPS.

### **3. Filipino Women’s Response to the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere**

The year 1943 saw an increase in women’s writing appearing in Japanese-held publications, as women writers respond in various ways to Japan’s call for women’s participation in the war effort. Besides individual articles by women on their involvement in the sphere, there was a surge of articles teaching them how to exhibit their Easternness in concrete ways, such as advice columns about managing the household and surviving under economic scarcity. This increase in women’s writing was also part of the attempt to establish normalcy in the area despite the desolation people were going through (Terami-Wada 1990, p. 287). Though the articles studied here all appeared in propaganda material, these women provided differing and complex views of this Sphere, especially since they had other spheres—such as that of the family under duress, and that of a nation quickly gaining a postcolonial attitude—to navigate.

### 3.1 Voices of Dissent: Social Esteem for Women as a Precolonial Trait

Among those who responded to these criticisms of the Filipino woman, the strongest and most direct voices of dissent came from those who believed that the high regard for women within the home and outside of it was something indigenous to Filipinos, and was present even before the Spanish colonized the islands. In a maneuver that uses Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere's very rhetoric of returning to the East, Encarnacion Alzona and Maria Kalaw Katigbak cited precolonial Philippine history to refute the propaganda that considered women's rights as a negative effect of Western influence. If, as we have seen in the first part of this paper, Japanese propaganda claimed that the West feminized the Philippines with its liberalism, Alzona and Kalaw-Katigbak insisted on the intrinsic femininity of the islands at its very core.

In "What of the Filipino Woman", historian and suffragist Encarnacion Alzona defends the Filipino way of regarding women, arguing that this has been the case even before the Philippines became colonized by Spain: "Even before the introduction of the Christian faith the status of our women was high, for the Filipinos were Malaysians among whom women occupied a high social position, a fact which impressed the first Spaniards who came to the Islands." She notes what the Spanish had written on Filipino women upon encountering them, citing Fr. Gaspar de San Agustin, Antonio de Morga, Sinebaldo de Mas, and Wenceslao Retana. Based on these sources, she gave examples of laws protecting women and rights that women enjoyed during the precolonial period, such as equal rights to the family's resources, rights to the family inheritance, and rights to divorce.

Alzona attributes this high regard for women as a quality native to Filipinos' "Malayan forebears". In a footnote, she claims that Filipinos were called "Malaysians" before the Spanish named the archipelago in honor of King Philip II. She claims: "It seems Malayan is the more appropriate name for us and for our country, Malaya, which means 'the land of freedom'." However, Alzona does not say anything about the cultural similarities between the Philippines and the rest of "Malaya", nor does she define where Malaya is located beyond the Philippines. Instead, she presents an imagined Philippines of pre-colonial past that excludes all its occupiers. In her suggestion, she uses "Malaya", the adjectival form of the Tagalog word "laya", meaning freedom or independence. Clearly, this is not the same kind of freedom in GEACPS's imagination of a "Free Philippines", which ideally is able to decolonize Western influence and return to its "Asian" roots. It is clear that she does not place the Philippines under the GEACPS. Not only does she refuse to mention the Sphere in her essay, she even made it a point to highlight how this critique of the Filipino woman comes from the inability of "newcomers" who are "strangers to our customs" to understand the Philippines (1943, pp. 33-36).

A year after Alzona's article was published, journalist and later politician Maria Kalaw-Katigbak still found it necessary to dispel "repeatedly critical remarks" about the Filipino woman in an article called "May We Have Our Say". She talks about how she and other Filipino women writers sat with Japanese writers Abe and Kawakami, who asked them whether it was true or not that Filipino women dominated the men. She argues that these critical remarks stem from an "inadequate background on the history of the Filipino woman". She denies that Filipino women were empowered



by Western influence, stating that the Filipino woman was highly regarded in society “long before the Filipino ever set eyes upon a Western face”, and that it was the arrival of Westerners, particularly the Spanish, “which unbalanced the unique position of the Filipino woman in society.” Like Alzona, she talks about the rights enjoyed by women in the islands before Spanish colonization, citing scholars such as Encarnacion Alzona herself. She also notes how women during her time educated themselves and excelled in judicial, legislative, executive, and even administrative government positions, and in professions like education, pharmacy, and dentistry.

Unlike Alzona, she does not attribute this position of the woman to Filipinos’ Malay roots, but similarly refuses to simply keep with “the new spirit” that was being endorsed by the Japanese. She also points out how it would be problematic to simply group Filipino women into a homogenous idea of an “Asian” woman: “It is fruitless today to make comparisons whether stated or implied, between her position and that of her Japanese and Chinese sisters, without taking into account the very serious difference that exists in their respective histories” (1944, pp. 27-29).

Alzona and Kalaw-Katigbak’s postcolonial view paints a picture of the Philippines as a unified body whose imagined ideal state is independence from any colonizer. Preoccupied with this goal of cultural independence which has been the disposition of Filipino nationalism, it differentiates itself from foreign influence yet does not imagine the Philippines as part of or in proximity to a specific region. Also because of this goal, they homogenize all native cultures in the islands into a single idea of “the Philippines”.

### **3.2 Patriotic Writing by Filipino Women in Propaganda**

As is to be expected of writing under Japanese propaganda, many of the articles—including those by women—echo the GEACPS call for the re-Orientalization and revitalization of the Philippine nation, and emphasize the need for women to “do their part” in this project. For instance, in “Women and the New Order” (“*Kababaihan at Bagong Kaayusan*”), Avelina Osias writes about the activities of the women’s sector of the KALIBAPI, the only existing political party at the time (1943, p. 10). Like Osias, many women wrote calling for cooperation with Japan and the Sphere, though their voices varied not only in their definition of the ideal ways of performing femininity, but also in how they imagined the Philippines in relation to GEACPS.

One such writer is Josephina Phodaca, who wrote in “Valuable Things to Learn from the Japanese” (“*Mahahalagang Bagay na Matututuhan sa Hapon*”) about the noble qualities of the Japanese that could be emulated by Filipinos in order to strengthen itself in preparation for independence, and in order to become worthy members of GEACPS. These qualities include simplicity in lifestyle (as opposed to the prevalent lavishness that could be seen in Filipino households) and readiness to sacrifice one’s life in service to the Emperor. She calls to mind the image of Japan’s Emperor as “the FATHER of everyone in the country” (“AMA ng lahat ng tao sa bansa”), for whom a mother or anyone is ready to sacrifice her life. With this, she poses a challenge to Filipino women. With this image, she, like Ueda, panders to Filipinos’ strong familial ties and

likens the nation to a family, equating love for the nation to filial love. She looks to Japan as a model to follow, seeing the empire's subjects' strong sense of responsibility and readiness to die for the Emperor. It is notable, though, how she emphasized that women's contribution in history had not been limited to motherhood, and instead recalled even their participation in the armed revolution; the need to keep women in place to maintain a productive status quo is absent in her call.

In a similar patriotic spirit, Josefa Gonzales de Estrada writes about love for the country, invoking Horace in her article, "Dulce et Decorum...". Quoting the Roman poet's famous line, "Dulce et Decorum est pro patria mori", Gonzales de Estrada lays out an understanding of patriotism as, in its very core, a type of love that stems from the love of the self, and therefore patriotism and the readiness to suffer or die for the country's sake comes naturally and instinctively. In a way, this echoes the Japanese empire's call for sacrifice for the sake of strengthening the nation. But it is curious how de Estrada makes no mention at all of either the United States, or Japan and the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. She even acknowledges the long history of the Philippines' suffering under foreign rule, saying that patriotism, sacrifice, and "hurried improvisations of culture" are not new to the Filipino, especially considering what notable countrymen have gone through.

It might be too generous to say that de Estrada was being deliberately subversive in her statement, but at the very least, this kind of ambiguity allows (or even pleads) for a somewhat complex reading of her collaborative propaganda work and her position regarding the Sphere. In a manner that is common among propaganda writers both from Japan and from the Philippines, she talks about the importance of endurance, advising to "withstand suffering by a deliberate daily dosage of self-administered discomfort". But she was also quick to say that this suffering is for the sake of developing a kind of discipline that can be used as self-defense, a forging of virtue in order to be able to confidently "await the onslaught of the charging adversary with steady eyes". We may ask: who is the "adversary" that de Estrada refers to? By choosing to leave names unnamed, she opens this statement to the possibility of simultaneously seeing Japan as both an enemy and a key to freedom, hence the need for "eternal vigilance". Instead of a patriotism that sees the Philippines within GEACPS, de Estrada's stance may then be read as a kind of opportunistic nationalism similar to that adapted by many statesmen that collaborated with Japan for the sake of independence (See: Yellen 2019).

### **3.3 Oriental Female Virtue, Oriental Female Labor**

Many women did indeed write about embracing the Oriental way of life, and this "Easternness" is, for many, manifest in the kind of conservative virtue upheld by women. Many lamented the loss of conservative femininity similar to that idealized in Catholic Filipino women during the Spanish period, a nostalgia that came with negative sentiments regarding American colonization and the cultural changes it brought about. And so when the time came for propagating the ideals of the GEACPS, including idealized "Eastern" femininity, it was not surprising that many were more than ready to support this call, clamoring for old-time virtues instilled in the woman such as simplicity,

meeekness, and hard work. In this way, religious virtue served as a kind of mechanism that enabled the GEACPS rhetoric of bringing women back into the home but also into her civic role within the Sphere.

Unsurprisingly, this nostalgic sentiment was present in publications dedicated to evangelical work. In *Michishirube*, a magazine whose aim was to propagate both the teachings of the Church and the ideals of the GEACPS, articles on Filipino womanhood appeared, criticizing Western materialism and calling for women's return to domesticity. In "The Ways of the Modern Filipino Woman", Dr. Joaquina Lucas reminisces about the "golden years" of Filipino femininity, when the woman's duties were tightly tied to her love of the home, "the cozy nest that her untiring sacrifices had built to satisfy that inborn craving of every woman to give her heart and life to others". She laments how this natural state of femininity was disturbed in the "immediate past", obviously referring to the years of American occupation, the age of magazines and theater which distracted the woman with "frivolities" such as beauty contests, fashion shows, coiffuring, film stars, and "disreputable" fashions, and luring them into public professions, "men's professions". She then celebrates the present time, noting how women had been returning to their natural feminine ways because of the trials they faced during the time (1943, pp. 19-20).

In the next issue of the same magazine, however, an article by Pacita Santos entitled "The Government and the Filipino Womanhood" offers a view that insists on the woman's Catholic task of molding the household, but at the same time celebrates the reverence and rights that women enjoyed outside the home. She states how wisely and virtuously women had been in using their rights to suffrage and positions in power. However, for Santos, motherhood or "the noble task of bringing up citizens" is still the most "complete and significant" of all the woman's roles. For her, the quality of Filipino women is evident in Filipinos' deep sense of responsibility, as can be seen in history. She calls motherhood the woman's "sacred duty", and hopes that the woman won't allow her accomplishments to "overwhelm her *vanity*," and that she would "not get drunk with the glories she has so deservingly won" (1943, pp. 18-19).

This contempt for excess is largely evident in women's propaganda writing, like Maria Luna Lopez in "A Filipino Woman Looks at the War". She notes how undergoing terror and scarcity brought good changes to the country, and taught Filipinos valuable life lessons. She says that war taught Filipinos to shed the frivolous excesses they used to enjoy in their past materialistic life and to replace it with a life of simplicity and sacrifice, including the ways in which women carried themselves. She also observes the ways people have dealt with scarcity, like planting more things that they can grow in their homes. She attributes this pleasant change to Filipinos' "Oriental character", which made them resilient and helped them cope under times of distress (1943, pp. 40-42).

It can be observed how Lucas, Santos, and Lopez all use the mechanism of calling upon the virtue of simplicity and meekness to shame and dismiss women's desire for anything outside domestic duties as "frivolity" or "vanity". While this is condemned, sacrifice and disregard for the self is praised. This is not surprising during a time like the Japanese occupation, first because it is in line

with an anti-American campaign to destroy individualism, and second, because women's labor as wife and mother was required to maintain a kind of equilibrium given the challenges brought about by the war, especially economic scarcity, a rather ubiquitous reality faced by women in any area touched by war. Though glorified and romanticized in abstract virtues of love, simplicity, and sacrifice for the sake of an imagined State or Sphere, her role in the GEACPS was ultimately to cater to its material needs, and catholic/eastern virtue served as the mechanism by which the empire imposed on the woman the material task of bearing the brunt of war. Even the women who wrote mainly on women and patriotism found it inevitable to talk about the material aspect of this patriotism: Phodaca wrote about planting vegetables at home and keeping livestock as a form of "sacrifice", and Osias's article gives us a glimpse of how KALIBAPI's Women Sector was tasked with community-building, food harvesting, and livestock. Various articles on how to keep the home together despite the challenges of war, serving as evidence of how these challenges such as profiteering and food and textile scarcity fell on women's shoulders. It is also notable how their labor in factories for soap and fabric, in plantations for cotton and rice, and in other working-class jobs were highly celebrated in the name of national progress. The campaign to keep the Filipino woman bound to her supposed essentially "Oriental" task of keeping the home is also to enlist her gendered labor into the war effort.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this paper, we have seen how gender was a key aspect of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere campaign, and that the role of women was considered by Japanese propaganda as an important aspect of propagating Eastern ideals. In the symbolic sense, the image of the ideal "Oriental" woman was used as a hinge to discuss and propagate re-Orientalism in light of the GEACPS, and the role of women as wife and as mother were glorified as a major component of rebuilding the nation as part of a new order under the Sphere. Japanese officials noted the privileges enjoyed by women in Filipino society, and criticized these as a manifestation of materialism and individualism brought about by Western influence on Philippine culture. Gendered language was used by many proponents of the GEACPS, feminizing American rule in Filipino society and insisting on masculinity as an essential quality in leadership and citizenship under the New Order.

We have also examined how the "Easternness" prescribed by the GEACPS campaign was tackled by Filipino women, allowing for a more complex understanding of the Philippines's position within "East" or "West". Though the writing studied here are limited to propaganda material under GEACPS, they all differ in how they imagined the Philippines in relation to the Sphere, and in how they imagined the idea of the "Oriental". Those who supported the GEACPS agreed with the importance of women's domestic role in nation-building under the New Order and saw Japan as a possible model to follow, though not all disregarded the rights enjoyed by the Filipino woman in the workplace and politics. Among either supporters and non-supporters of GEACPS, none of the women who wrote during the occupation imagined the Philippines as organically "Asian". It is

evident how their definition of “Oriental” is also highly informed by their conception of the “West”.

Many who criticized the American colonization of the Philippines agreed with GEACPS’s criticism of individualism and capitalist materialism, but in turn were nostalgic for traditional Catholic femininity usually attributed to Spanish-occupied Philippines. This means that they pushed back against American liberalism, while still recognizing Catholic influence as part of what is “Filipino” and of the Filipino’s “Oriental quality”. Meanwhile, some found the Philippines’ “Oriental” characteristic to be that which is not brought about by either Spanish or American influence, and turned to precolonial history to define Filipino culture. As we have seen in their responses to the issue of the ideal Oriental woman, Filipino women turned to different configurations of the Filipino woman’s hybrid identity to engage in a discourse that challenged the rights they had enjoyed to a degree before the Japanese occupation.

Women’s participation was enlisted not only in the symbolic sense, but also in the material sense. It is evident in women’s writing how the burden of dealing with the economic challenges during the war, such as scarcity in resources and profiteering, was brought upon women. The narrative of Catholic virtue served as a mechanism to impose this, in line with the narrative of Eastern virtue. Many considered returning to the home as a sacrifice to be made for the sake of rebuilding the state. However, as in most places affected by the war, the labor of working class and rural women was still necessitated by the changes brought about by the war, and celebrated as a component of building GEACPS. This presented the dual task of having to work but also be in the home for those who could not afford to choose only one, reflecting the still present double burden of traditional femininity and modern capitalist society.

(Received 4th November, 2020)

(Accepted 8th February, 2021)

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