
Local Religion and the Imperial Imaginary: The Development of Japanese Ethnography in Occupied Manchuria

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THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY saw scholars from throughout the world busy at work in China, unearthing ruins, translating texts, charting mountain ranges, and collecting botanical specimens. This explosion of research interest in nearly every field of the social and natural sciences occurred in the context of an increasingly complex political, intellectual, and cultural relationship between China and the foreign powers, the most notable case being that with Japan.¹ More than any of the Western powers, Japan devoted an immense amount of human, material, and cultural capital to its scholarly enterprise in China, and comparatively speaking, it had the most at stake. While much of the Japanese scholarly activity in China was designed to directly facilitate the expansion of economic and military interests on the continent, other areas of research, such as archaeology and classical studies, had no such immediate application.² This latter type of research—like the Orientalist scholarship of India produced by the academic societies of Victorian England or the French Egyptology of the nineteenth century—reveals the role of a scholarly apparatus in creating regimes of knowledge, particularly in a colonial setting.³

The corpus of field investigations produced by teams of Japanese researchers remains an especially difficult and important legacy of this period. Amateur and professional scholars began collecting data on the economy, history, politics, and society of the continent as early as the 1870s, especially in those areas that would

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¹ On the place of the natural sciences, see Fa-ti Fan, *British Naturalists in Qing China: Science, Empire, and Cultural Encounter* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004).

² Japanese research activities during this period were overwhelmingly concerned with questions related to economics and commerce, and later to internal security. Social research took a distantly secondary role. John Young, *The Research Activities of the South Manchurian Railway Company, 1907–1945: A History and Bibliography* (New York, 1966). See also Douglas R. Reynolds, “Training Young China Hands: Tōa Dōbun Shoin and Its Precursors, 1886–1945,” in Peter Duus, Ramon H. Myers, and Mark R. Peattie, eds., *The Japanese Informal Empire in China, 1895–1937* (Princeton, N.J., 1989), 210–271.

³ See, respectively, James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 255–276, and Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1979). For an extensive discussion of the role of archaeology in nationalist constructions of Northeast Asia, see Hyung Il Pai, *Constructing “Korean” Origins: A Critical Review of Archaeology, Historiography, and Racial Myth in Korean State Formation Theories* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000).

constitute the frontier of the Japanese empire. By the late 1930s, this type of work had matured into the anthropological enterprise of semi-official bodies such as the South Manchuria Railway (*Minami Mantetsu tetsudō*), which sponsored extensive social surveys on local conditions in the villages of the North China Plain. These surveys and others conducted by ethnological institutes throughout the empire produced volumes of raw data and have served as the empirical foundation of much of the most influential scholarship on the economic and social history of the period. They had a particularly strong impact on scholarly understanding of local society and religion, and Japanese anthropology continues to inform the research agenda and methodology of much of the postwar research on society and religion in Taiwan and on the Chinese mainland.⁴

One notable aspect of this vast scholarly enterprise was the development of Japanese academic representations of local religion in occupied Manchuria (officially known as Manchukuo, 1932–1945).⁵ Two particular problems arise from Japanese study of local religion, neither of which is unique to imperial Japan. The first is the significance of local knowledge, specifically ethnographic and anthropological field research, under colonialism. On the one hand, field research served a purely practical function, supplying administrators with needed information on local customs and organizations. More fundamentally, however, when such knowledge was draped in the legitimating robes of academic discourse, journals, and societies, it also exerted a hegemony of interpretation that defined the local in terms dictated by the powerful.⁶ Colonial anthropology, with its juxtaposition of “traditional” societies against the universal modernity of the metropolitan center, has thus been criticized as an intellectual arm of the European civilizing mission. The methodology of ethnographic research itself represents a type of power by virtue of the inequality of access. Regardless of their own sympathies for the native population, researchers were enabled by imperialism to visit local sites and collect souvenirs, photographs, and physiological data (or even human specimens). Developing their disciplinary knowledge as they enabled empire, early anthropologists were able to subsequently display their “discovery” to a scholarly or popular audience in the metropole. The fruits of such

⁴ For a meticulous and sophisticated overview of the Japanese anthropological enterprise, see the two volumes edited by Jan van Bremen and Akitoshi Shimizu, *Anthropology and Colonialism in Asia and Oceania* (Surrey, 1999) and *Wartime Japanese Anthropology in Asia and the Pacific* (Osaka, 2003). The enduring impact of the Mantetsu surveys on English-language historiography of China can be seen in Philip C. C. Huang, *The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China* (Stanford, Calif., 1985), and Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power and the State: Rural North China, 1900–1942* (Stanford, Calif., 1988), among others. Methodologically, they continue to inform the work of Japanese scholars and collaborative efforts such as the Chinese-Japanese project headed by Sasaki Mamoru and Lu Yao, *Kindai chūgoku no shakai to minshū bunka* [Society and Mass Culture in Modern China] (Tokyo, 1992). Not surprisingly, many Chinese scholars would rather forget this lineage. While mainland Chinese ethnography does remain more heavily influenced by Western models, it is significant that many accounts, such as Wang Wenbao, *Zhongguo minsuxue shi* [A History of Folklore Studies in China] (Chengdu, 1995), ignore the Japanese influence entirely.

⁵ This is the older and better-known spelling of the Chinese “Manzhouguo” or Japanese “Manshukoku,” both of which translate literally as “the Nation of Manchuria.” Because of its enduring association with the wartime state, the term “Manchuria” is assiduously avoided in present-day China, in favor of the more nationally oriented reference to the region as the “Northeast” or the “Three Eastern Provinces.”

⁶ Timothy Tsu, “Japanese Colonialism and the Investigation of Taiwanese ‘Old Customs,’” in van Bremen and Shimizu, *Anthropology and Colonialism*, 197–218.

research became a literal display of power relations by virtue of the fact that the flow of information itself traveled in only one direction.⁷

The second problem extends from the unique role played by religion in the maintenance of larger cultural entities and imaginaries, be they national, colonial, or otherwise. The formation of national religions, often at the violent expense of more local forms of belief and organization, had been fundamental to the extension of central power in European nation-states, and such lessons were often applied to overseas colonies. In contrast to the centralizing and homogenizing processes that accompanied the formation of national culture, however, the imperial context was by nature more pluralistic, dictating a wider diversity of responses to local religion, ranging from direct conflict to calculated protection.⁸ Beyond the purely practical need to court politically connected missionary societies at home, to prop up sympathetic local regimes through conspicuous religious patronage, or to prevent native resistance from forming around millenarian teachings, religion figured at the heart of imperial conceptions of social progress and civilizational identity. The scholarly study of religion, particularly as it developed in late-nineteenth-century Europe, created genealogies of more or less advanced beliefs and forms, assumptions that also drove social theory.⁹ Such attempts to portray mankind's graded intellectual progress through the evolution out of primitive religion also characterized an array of more popular initiatives, such as the 1893 World Parliament of Religions. Both types of initiatives drew inspiration from the idea of Western uniqueness, the core of Orientalism as defined by Said, the binary juxtaposition of Oriental and Occidental spiritual civilization. Whether the West represented itself as the culmination of Christian destiny, the triumph of rational secularism, or the depths of modern decadence, it did so most clearly in light of the exotic spiritualism of the mysterious Orient.¹⁰

The Japanese scholarly enterprise in Manchuria reveals these processes at work in a very different setting. As it had been in Europe, the colonial experience in Japan

⁷ The best-known critiques of anthropology remain Talal Asad, ed., *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (New York, 1973), and Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Objects* (New York, 1983). The visual representation of the exotic in fairs and exhibitions has produced an increasingly large body of literature. See Timothy Mitchel, "Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order," in Nicholas B. Dirks, ed., *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1992), 289–317, and Greg Dening, "The Comaroffs Out of Africa: A Reflection Out of Oceania," *AHR* 108, no. 2 (April 2003): 471–478.

⁸ Edmund Burke III, "The Terror and Religion: Brittany and Algeria," in Gregory Blue, Martin Bunton, and Ralph Crozier, eds., *Colonialism in the Modern World: Selected Studies* (Armonk, N.Y., 2002), 40–50; Robert Crews, "Empire and the Confessional State: Islam and Religious Politics in Nineteenth-Century Russia," *AHR* 108, no. 1 (February 2003): 50–83; Robert W. Hefner, "Of Faith and Commitment: Christian Conversion in Muslim Java," in Hefner, *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993), 99–125.

⁹ Max Weber's attribution of Western European material success to the influence of Protestant Christianity and the Marxist prediction of the eventual "withering away" of religion are among the more notable examples. Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago, 2005).

¹⁰ Talal Asad, "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category," in Asad, ed., *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, Md., 1993), 27–54. The study and exhibition of religions during the late nineteenth century is dealt with in the large body of literature on foundational figures such as Max Müller. See, for example, Norman Giardot, *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage* (Berkeley, Calif., 2002). On the interaction between American theosophists and Japanese Zen priests, see Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2003).

was both product and process of metropolitan self-definition.¹¹ Since the mid-nineteenth century, a sense of curiosity and mission had come to characterize Japan's relationship with the Asian continent (as Stefan Tanaka has called it, "Japan's Orient"), casting Japan's newfound modernity in sharp contrast with the decaying empires on the mainland.¹² However, Japanese overseas imperialism did not begin until the very end of the nineteenth century, when world imperialism was already at its apex, while by the 1932 founding of Manchukuo, both the eventual demise of imperialism and a major regional or even global conflict were visibly on the horizon. In contrast to the long century of British high imperialism, the entire history of Manchukuo is thus one of urgency, grandiose planning, and bold execution. Manchukuo itself spent roughly half of its short history at war, one that not only ended the life of the empire, but also leaves a taint on scholarship produced under its auspices, leading many to dismiss this work out of hand as having been either an intellectual offshoot of fascist ideology or simple wartime propaganda.¹³ While it cannot be denied that by the late 1930s the scholarly apparatus was willingly or forcibly compliant with imperial aims, reducing the entire colonial experience to its culmination in the Pacific War does not do justice to the larger cultural impetus of Japan's development as a colonial power.¹⁴

Religion was a matter of high importance to Japanese colonial expansion, both as a motivating force and as a practical method of control. The success of the Western missionary model plus a growing confidence in the Japanese civilizing mission for East Asia prompted Japanese Buddhists to begin making mission trips to China almost immediately after the 1868 Meiji Restoration. Even with the backlash against Buddhism in Japan, they were able to portray their mission as worthy of state support, lobbying the government to protect their missionaries in China as early as 1881.¹⁵ As the empire spread, so too did the idea of a Pan-Asian identity, one bound by primordial cultural traits and perfected in Japanese spiritual civilization. The first Japanese colony of Taiwan established not only administrative and military patterns, but also the foundation of a regime of knowledge based on an extensive and well-organized scholarly apparatus. As the empire expanded into Korea, Manchuria, and Southeast Asia, the experience of empire transcended individual colonies, further enforcing a binary division between Japan and unrealized Asia, while anthropologists responded with theories of primordial Asianism and Japanese uniqueness. The late-nineteenth-century incorporation of Shintō into the state reflects the conflict

¹¹ Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton, N.J., 2001).

¹² Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993). On the interaction between social engineering and security concerns in Japanese anthropology in colonial Taiwan, see Timothy Tsu, "Shokuminchi tōchiron to shite no Taiwan shūkyō kenkyū" [Theories of Colonial Governance and Research on Religion in Taiwan], in Yamaji Katsuhiko and Tanaka Masakazu, eds., *Shokuminchi shugi to jinruigaku* [Colonialism and Anthropology] (Nishinomiya, 2002), 71–95.

¹³ A thorough assessment of the Mantetsu materials is seen in Huang, *Peasant Economy*, 39–42.

¹⁴ It also ignores the fact that no social science (including that of the modern day) is ever free of ideology. For an especially convincing treatment of this topic in the context of U.S. social science after the September 11th attacks, see Bruce Cumings, "Boundary Displacement: The State, the Foundations, and Area Studies during and after the Cold War," in Masao Miyoshi and Harry Harootunian, eds., *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies* (Durham, N.C., 2002), 261–302.

¹⁵ Nakano Kyōtoku, *Tennōsei kokka to shokuminchi dendō* [The Emperor System State and Colonial Missionization] (Tokyo, 1976), 18.

between this image of transhistorical spiritual essence and “religion,” the latter being defined in terms of concrete ecclesiastic organizations that were optional, private, and—especially in the case of Christianity—potentially subversive.¹⁶ Indeed, experience at home and abroad had clearly taught the political necessity of controlling and, if possible, harnessing religious organizations. Although conflict with religious organizations had plagued the Japanese state since the late nineteenth century, many of these same groups were later courted to become staunch supporters of the war effort.¹⁷ Moreover, with the frequent transfer of Japanese administrative personnel among colonial postings, experience gained in Taiwan and Korea, which taught the potential for religious organizations to serve as a conduit for resistance, was shared across the empire. For both spiritual and security reasons, religion would remain an issue of consistent significance throughout the short history of Manchukuo, such that funding for research into religion continued long after other “nonessential” programs had been cut.¹⁸

However, as Prasenjit Duara and others have noted, Manchukuo was technically founded as an independent nation, and was in many ways less a colony than a grand-scale experiment in modernity and state-making along the lines of Japan’s own experience. This combination of decades of soul-searching for Japanese essence during the late nineteenth century, plus the concerns and context of a uniquely technocratic twentieth-century empire and the confidence in social engineering characteristic of the interwar years, all had unique implications for religion in Manchukuo.¹⁹ Beyond the careful manipulation of religious organizations and interest groups, spiritual ideals were mobilized along the lines of the Japanese model to engineer a sense of nationhood for the newly created country. In Japan, the foundations of imperial authority, the transcendent essence of the nation, and, especially after the stunning but costly military defeat of Russia in 1895, the emerging place of Japan on the world stage were each portrayed to some degree either in theological terms or with a sense of moment and destiny that approached the religious. These ideas were replicated in Manchukuo as well, where theologically conceived ideals were held up as guiding principles of the state, and of the foundation of social and ethnic policy. Whatever the reality, by design the new state was to be an autonomous node in a spiritually

¹⁶ Helen Hardacre, *Shinto and the State, 1868–1988* (Princeton, N.J., 1989).

¹⁷ Sheldon Garon, “State and Religion in Imperial Japan, 1912–1945,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 12, no. 2 (1986): 273–302; James Edward Ketelaar, “Hokkaido Buddhism and the Early Meiji State,” in Helen Hardacre and Adam L. Kern, eds., *New Directions in the Study of Meiji Japan* (Leiden, 1997), 531–548.

¹⁸ These would include the 1915 Xilai An Incident, a Taiwanese uprising organized largely around religious networks, following which Japanese policy toward native religions became markedly hostile; and the 1919 March First Movement, in which Korean Christian leaders led the way in declaring independence from Japan. Christians would later mount fierce resistance to the establishment of Shintō in Korea. Tsu, “Shokuminchi tōchiron”; Paul R. Katz, *When the Valleys Turned Blood Red: The Ta-pa-ni Incident in Colonial Taiwan* (Honolulu, 2005), 92–118; Kim Duk-Whang, *A History of Religions in Korea* (Seoul, 1988), 376–384, 393–400; Wan-yao Chou, “The *Kōminka* Movement in Taiwan and Korea: Comparisons and Interpretations,” in Peter Duus et al., eds., *The Japanese Wartime Empire, 1931–1945* (Princeton, N.J., 1996), 40–70. On state funding for religious research in Manchukuo, see Katsumi Nakao, “Japanese Colonial Policy and Anthropology in Manchuria,” in van Bremen and Shimizu, *Anthropology and Colonialism*, 245–265, 250.

¹⁹ Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, Md., 2003).

unified empire, not to be assimilated into Japan, but rather to reproduce its cultural and religious organizations and ideals.

With so much at stake, any scholarly portrayal of local religion in Manchuria was necessarily one made with an eye to the future, and academic writing on religion was at once a reflection of scholarly trends, personal conviction, and a broad confidence in the ability of social engineering programs to bear fruit. The practice of Japanese ethnography during this period created disciplinary traditions that resonated with the discourses of national and cultural self that propelled the quest for empire, leading scholars to seek out certain data in the field and occasionally to overlook others that did not fit the structures of thought they had built for themselves. The fact that many of the themes and assumptions evident in these writings did transcend disciplinary boundaries, interest groups, and a wide spectrum of political convictions forces us to look beyond the specific exigencies and extremism of the period of total war and into their origins in deeper conceptions about religion and its role in society.

MUCH OF THE JAPANESE RESEARCH on religion in Manchukuo took the rural village as its starting point, which is not surprising, given that understanding and reforming village society in Manchukuo and China remained a high priority in Japanese policy before and during the occupation.²⁰ Obviously, the Japanese were not the only ones to express such a concern; numerous Chinese actors, including the Guomindang, reform-minded scholars such as Liang Shuming and James Yan, and especially the Maoist faction of the Chinese Communists, all intended to use village reform as the foundation of a more sweeping administrative and cultural transformation.²¹ However, Japanese scholarly concern with the village also developed out of a tradition of native ethnography, which understood the village as the basic organizational and moral unit of the nation. When scholars trained in this tradition began work in Manchukuo, they took with them a desire to discover the true or essential nature of the Manchukuo village, with an eye to capturing and refining the spirit of the new nation.

The interest shown by Japanese scholars in the villages of Manchuria is at least partially a legacy of native ethnography as it developed in Japan. During the Edo period (1603–1867), travelers and scholars wrote accounts of Japanese local customs, both for the popular book trade and with the aim of rediscovering a lost Japanese spirit, as with the work of the nativist scholar Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801). While much of this early work was episodic, a few attempts were made to systematically collect information on local customs, rites of passage, and annual festivals throughout the nation, and some employed surprisingly advanced methods, such as the 1813 distribution of questionnaires on local customs to each province, which demon-

²⁰ Seen in the attempt, however abortive, to implement the Confucian ideal that sought to build a society based on autonomous villages, as expressed in the officially idealized Confucianism of the “Kingly Way” (Jap. *Ōdō*/Ch. *Wangdao*). See Louise Young, *Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley, Calif., 1998), 274–300. Military control of the countryside was based on the creation of secure villages, a policy used by the British in the Malayan Emergency and again resurrected by the United States in its “strategic hamlet” strategy in Vietnam.

²¹ On the role of intellectuals in rural reform, see Charles W. Hayford, *To the People: James Yen and Village China* (New York, 1990). The best depiction of rural reform following the Communist revolution remains William Hinton’s *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997).

strated an embryonic attempt to integrate the local into a transcendent whole.²² Following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, a number of influences drove this interest in local customs to focus specifically on village society. First, many of the cultural reform initiatives of the early Meiji, specifically the eradication of popular “old customs” (*kyūkan*) and Buddhist practice, and establishment of an orthodoxy of Shintō ritual, required action at the village level. The latter in particular involved developing the village as a ritual community based around shrines to village spirits (*ujigami*). Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the backlash against local Buddhism and the initial enthusiasm for Shintō orthodoxy and for Western modernism had begun to subside. However, researchers retained their interest in village customs, inspired now by the disciplinary mission of “salvage anthropology,” and a continued fixation on discovering the true and transcendent essence of Japan in its remote and unsullied countryside.²³

These ideas coalesced and matured in the work of Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962), the scholar most often credited with the foundation of ethnography as an academic discipline in Japan. In government service at the turn of the century, Yanagita became concerned with the rapid flight of Japanese peasants from the overcrowded countryside to urban industrial centers, which lacked the bonds of village society and were plagued by social dislocation and crime. More deeply, he feared that this trend threatened the welfare of the nation, as these village communities were the core of Japan’s spiritual strength. Yanagita thus came to champion both economic policies that would protect local communities from the ravages of unchecked urban capitalism and a program of scholarly research, epitomized in the journal *Research on Local Society* (*Kyōdo kenkyū*, published 1914–1917), which sought to capture and record village customs before they were irretrievably lost. Again, this was neither simple antiquarianism nor idle curiosity. For Yanagita, studying the material culture and visible customs of the countryside was a route to a deeper spiritual reality. Examined carefully, such customs revealed “the psychological framework of the common people” and the essence of the Japanese spirit.²⁴

Yanagita further refined these ideas during his stay in Europe (1921–1923), during which time he found inspiration in the fieldwork methodology of European anthropologists, especially Bronislaw Malinowski, who sought to penetrate the consciousness of a people through a combination of long-term residence in the field and massive collection of statistical data. Upon his return to Japan, Yanagita expounded upon these ideas in a series of seminars and research groups organized out of his home, putting them into practice in his “Mountain Village” and “Fishing Village” projects, and outlining them in his 1935 *Methodologies of Research into Local Life* (*Kyōdoseikatsu no kenkyūhō*). Like Malinowski, Yanagita distinguished different lev-

²² Wakamori Tarō, “Minzokugaku no hattatsu to genjō—Nihon” [The Development and Current State of Ethnology—Japan], in Wakamori Tarō, ed., *Minzokugaku no hōhō* [Methodology of Ethnology] (Tokyo, 1976), 55–86, 55; Margarita Winkel, “Academic Traditions, Urban Dynamics and Colonial Threat: The Rise of Ethnography in Early Modern Japan,” in van Bremen and Shimizu, *Anthropology and Colonialism*, 40–64.

²³ Wakamori, “Minzokugaku no hattatsu to genjō,” 56–61.

²⁴ Minoru Kawada, *The Origin of Ethnography in Japan: Yanagita Kunio and His Times*, trans. Toshiko Kishida-Ellis (London, 1993), 109. For one example of the lasting influence of Yanagita on village studies, see Yasuyuki Yagi, “‘Mura-Zakai’: The Japanese Village Boundary and Its Symbolic Interpretation,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 47, no. 1 (1988): 137–151.

els of ethnographic inquiry, but he differed in emphasizing the importance of the researcher's cultural affinity, reserving the deepest levels of understanding for cultural insiders. Here Yanagita diverges dramatically from the ideals of personal neutrality sought by Western anthropology. Working far from home in the South Pacific, Malinowski had sought "to gather pure facts, to keep the facts and interpretations apart," and prized the scholarly objectivity that allowed the outsider to see the social functions of cultural forms. In contrast, Yanagita ethnology aspired to transcend facts, and to uncover a deeper spiritual essence that was inaccessible to foreigners.²⁵

Given Yanagita's overt concern for the spiritual welfare of the nation, it is not surprising that village religion featured prominently in his ethnographic project. Specifically, he felt that local religious practice, especially the characteristically collective nature of village shrine communities (*ujiko*) still extant in rural areas, provided the key to the "national character" of Japan. Despite their inherent particularism, local shrine communities demonstrated the shared values and common ethical code of the Japanese people as a whole. No less than his contemporaries, Yanagita was committed to mobilizing religion to the end of national reform. However, his method was not to eradicate local worship, but rather to harness and refine the spirit of village religion, emphasizing the universality of such local communities and the worship of *ujigami* deities among the Japanese people. He thus opposed programs such as that designed by the Department of Shrine Worship (*Jingikan*) to reform local customs by forcibly incorporating local practice into a vertical state cult. For Yanagita, the material and psychological life of the village, rather than that of the region or family, was the cellular component of the national spirit of Japan, and as such, the study of village religion would be foundational to any ethnographic project.²⁶

Yanagita and his style of ethnography (also known as "Yanagita Studies") profoundly influenced a generation of scholars, including Ōmachi Tokuzō (1901–1970), who conducted field research in Manchukuo under the auspices of the Japanese military through the war years.²⁷ By training, Ōmachi was an ethnographer rather than a Sinologist or self-styled "China hand." After graduating from Tokyo Imperial University, he embarked on a brief career as a translator of German literature, but he became a student and lifelong devotee of Yanagita after attending one of the

²⁵ Bronislaw Malinowski, "Baloma: Spirits of the Dead in the Trobriand Islands," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 46 (1916): 237. Chapter 8 of this text elaborates the need for objectivity, as does his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (1922; repr., London, 1987); Kawada, *The Origin of Ethnography in Japan*, 128.

²⁶ Kawada, *The Origin of Ethnography in Japan*, chap. 2. Nor was Yanagita the only one to express interest in the village. Marxist scholars in Japan and later in Manchuria also saw the village as the cell and microcosm of society. Their interest, however, was in overturning the relations of agrarian production as the foundation of a larger program of social reform. Joshua A. Fogel, "Introduction," in *Life along the South Manchuria Railway: The Memoirs of Itō Takeo*, trans. Fogel (Armonk, N.Y., 1988), xiv–xv; Tanaka, *Japan's Orient*, 258.

²⁷ Yanagita's ethnographic style was known literally as *Yanagitagaku*—a phrase used by Ōmachi, among others. Like Ōmachi, many of those working in Manchuria were professional ethnographers trained by Yanagita and established in Japanese scholarly circles. In Korea, however, such research was joined by that undertaken by civil servants and the police, leading to very different results. See Nakao, "Japanese Colonial Policy and Anthropology in Manchuria," for the former, and Boudewijn Walraven, "The Natives Next-Door: Ethnology in Colonial Korea," in van Bremen and Shimizu, *Anthropology and Colonialism*, 219–244, for the latter. The same tension among different types of research, alternately devoted to salvaging lost traditions, eradicating irrational beliefs, and rooting out criminal activity, is also present in writing on Manchurian religion.

latter's lectures in 1932. For the next few years, Ōmachi accompanied Yanagita on numerous local investigations throughout Japan, and he came to regard Yanagita's ethnographic method as one of the "shining achievements of post-Meiji cultural studies." These projects, particularly the two extended "Life in Mountain Villages" and "Life in Fishing Villages" surveys, became models for his own work.²⁸

Ōmachi's writings during the mid-1930s illustrate the importance that he placed on the village as the foundation of Japanese society, and his goal of capturing the essence of the Japanese nation by comparing village customs drawn from diverse locations. In a 1935 essay on rituals of passage in Japan, Ōmachi freely used data collected from throughout the country, both from his own investigations and from those of contemporary ethnographers.²⁹ In essays written over the next few years, he elaborated on these ideas, always striving to demonstrate the significance of locally collected data to a larger perspective. For Ōmachi, customs that survived in villages provided a mirror to those of the past. Thus, he likened the purpose of ethnology to comparing fossils to living organisms, the goal being to understand how much of the ancient core remains extant today. With this primeval culture as the spiritual foundation of the nation, all of its regional expressions, seen in diverse data "from Okinawa to Tōhoku . . . from deep mountains or outlying islands," were equally valuable as mirrors reflecting back upon a single source.³⁰ For Ōmachi, the spirit of Rural Studies was precisely to "unite Japan by drawing together research on all of its local customs."³¹ Moreover, like Yanagita, Ōmachi held that the basic unit of analysis was the village, and although any village in Japan could shed light on this deeper spiritual unity, it was important to approach and understand the community as a whole. Thus, the field researcher must speak to all sorts of people within the community—old and young, men and women, rich and poor, ritual participants and observers, religious believers and unbelievers.³² For Ōmachi, the spirit of any village was that of the nation in microcosm.

IN 1939, ŌMACHI TOOK HIS IDEAS AND SKILLS TO Manchukuo, taking up a lectureship in the Department of Ethnology of the newly established National Foundation University (*Kenkoku daigaku*), located in the new capital of Shinkyō (modern Changchun). For the young scholar, not only was this a rare opportunity, it was also undoubtedly an outlet for a restive political idealism. Ōmachi had been active in the student left as a leader of the radical New Man Society (*shinjinkai*) during the 1920s,

²⁸ Ōmachi Tokuzō, *Ōmachi Tokuzō chosakushu* [Collected Works of Ōmachi Tokuzō], ed. Takeda Akira, 6 vols. (Tokyo, 1975–1982) (hereafter, *OTC*), vol. 6: *Manshū no shūzoku* [Customs of Manchuria], 580–583. Ōmachi reveals his debt to the Yanagita method in his 1943 "Minzokugaku to minzokugaku" [Racial Studies and Folklore], *OTC*, 6: 141–142; and later again in his 1960 "Minzoku chōsa no kaiko" [Recollections on Investigating Folk Customs], in *OTC*, vol. 3: *Tsūkagi rei so no ta* [Rites of Passage and Other Matters], 203–204.

²⁹ Ōmachi Tokuzō, "Kan kon sō sai no hanashi" [Discussion of Capping, Marriage, Funeral, and Sacrificial Ceremonies], *OTC*, 3: 17–47.

³⁰ Ōmachi, "Saishū hōhō no shurui" [Types of Data Collection Methods], *OTC*, 3: 220.

³¹ Ōmachi, "Minamiyo to minzoku kenkyū" [Minamiyo and Ethnographic Research], *OTC*, 3: 308–309.

³² Ōmachi, "Saishū hōhō no shurui," 220–223. At this time, he still had not initiated any of the intensive village studies for which he would become known later. These all date from the period after his postwar return to Japan.

and he may have joined the Japanese Communist Party as early as 1926. One year later, he returned to his native Kanazawa to volunteer in the local self-defense corps, but he remained active enough politically to warrant arrest and a three-year prison sentence. Disillusioned with increasing Soviet influence over the left, many within groups such as the New Man Society would later redirect their idealism toward a nationalist framework; and following his release from prison, Ōmachi was easily won over by the groundswell of patriotic sentiment that accompanied the 1931 commencement of hostilities with Chinese forces in Manchuria. Intellectually, this shift was punctuated by his quick and lasting enthusiasm for Yanagita ethnology. However, the ease with which this switch was made demonstrates the breadth of idealism that was housed within both this school and the search for national essence in general. Specifically, while Yanagita was himself staunchly anticommunist, many of his students remained active Marxists.³³

Ōmachi's abrupt political transformation also demonstrates the ease with which a range of intellectuals were drawn into the imperial cause. Throughout the 1930s, the climate in Japan had grown increasingly restrictive toward academic research, and the newly formed nation of Manchukuo provided a refuge such that leftist scholars "flocked to the Manchurian research organizations and state think tanks."³⁴ On the other hand, such appointments clearly served other ends. Foundation University was heavily influenced by far-right ideologues such as Ishiwara Kanji (one of the two field officers who had manufactured a supposed Chinese attack on a Japanese railway, thus initiating military action in Manchuria) and was clearly intended to spawn a new elite that would be committed to the Japan-centered Pan-Asianism of the new nation.³⁵ The recommendation for Ōmachi's appointment came from none other than Tsuji Masanobu, under whom Ōmachi had served in Kanazawa, and who would later become infamous for wartime atrocities throughout Southeast Asia.³⁶

Over the next six years, Ōmachi acted as the head of the Society for the Study of Manchurian Customs (*Manshū minzoku gakkai*), producing an impressive body of research on local religion in Manchukuo and North China, and establishing a number of scholarly projects modeled on those being formed elsewhere in Japan and the colonies.³⁷ The research of this group was aimed at a variety of audiences, and was published widely if not exclusively in Manchukuo itself. To be sure, the society was a tool of state administration. In the Japanese as in other empires, one of the primary goals of colonial ethnography was the codification of local traditions for the

³³ On the shifting ideology of the New Man Society, see Henry DeWitt Smith II, *Japan's First Student Radicals* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), esp. 71–77, 219–230. For Ōmachi's political activities, see Tsurumi Taro, *Yanagita Kunio to sono deshitchi: Minzokugaku o manabu Marukusu shugisha* [Yanagita Kunio and His Disciples: Marxist Students of Ethnography] (Kyoto, 1998), 69–105; Kawamura Minato, "Tai tō-A minzokugaku" no kyojitsu [The Truth or Falsity of "Greater East Asian Ethnology"] (Tokyo, 1996), 199–201. Akitoshi Shimizu suggests that the field of ethnography itself continued to act as an umbrella for leftist political sentiment. Akitoshi Shimizu, "Anthropology and the Wartime Situation of the 1930s and 1940s," in van Bremen and Shimizu, *Wartime Japanese Anthropology*, 49–108.

³⁴ L. Young, *Japan's Total Empire*, 268–282, quote from 278.

³⁵ Mark R. Peattie, *Ishiwara Kanji and Japan's Confrontation with the West* (Princeton, N.J., 1975). This role of ideology in university life is reflected poignantly in the diary of a student. See Mariko Asano Tamanoi, "Classifications: The 'Japanese' in 'Manchuria,'" *Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 2 (May 2000): 248–276.

³⁶ Kawamura, "Tai tō-A minzokugaku" no kyojitsu, 201–203. For a particularly damning account of Tsuji, see Ian Ward, *The Killer They Called a God* (Singapore, 1992).

³⁷ Wakamori, "Minzokugaku no hattatsu to genjō," 33; chronology in Ōmachi, *OTC*, 6: 583–584.



FIGURE 1: Ōmachi Tokuzō (in black) and a group of uniformed Foundation University ethnography students on site in rural Laixi, Shandong, 1943. From *Ōmachi Tokuzō chosakushu*, vol. 6.

purpose of adjudication, and the society worked with other scholars and the state to transform family, inheritance, and other customs into law.³⁸ However, this and allied institutes also conducted field research and held numerous scholarly and public conferences on topics more clearly derived from Yanagita-style ethnography, such as one held in 1943 on “The Religious Nature of the Village,” and released numerous publications, most notably as the *Assorted Notes on the Races of Manchuria* (*Manshū minzoku zakki*, 1941–1944).

THE INFLUENCE OF ŌMACHI’S TRAINING UNDER YANAGITA clearly shaped his understanding of religion in Manchukuo. Even more strongly than he had in Japan, Ōmachi was determined to portray the Manchukuo village as a fundamentally religious body, the basic unit of religious life, and a natural object of study. In a 1943 essay, he outlined the necessary religious elements of the village, of which at least one shrine to the tutelary deity (*Ch. tudi shen*) is most important. Although such shrines and their deities are actually marginal to votive life in Chinese villages, Ōmachi understood them as parallel in function to the Shintō *ujigami* shrines in Japanese villages, portraying them quite inaccurately as “objects of collective village devotion” and “the center of village religion.” In ritual life as well, Ōmachi sought evidence that the village addressed its problems by praying for rain (*amagoi*) or seeking pro-

³⁸ Sally Engle Merry, “Law and Colonialism,” *Law and Society Review* 25, no. 4 (1991): 899–922.

tection as a collective. Although Ōmachi did mention the existence of other ritual bodies, such as the family, his reason for focusing on the village becomes clear when he confidently speaks of “the religious nature of the Han race, or more correctly, the religious nature of the village, which should be called the cell of Han society.”³⁹

Despite his public and no doubt sincere admiration for Yanagita’s methodology, when Ōmachi took this method to the continent, some changes were inevitable. The most obvious is a change in perspective on the place of the researcher. Both Yanagita and his student had seen the true goal of ethnography as seeking the fundamental essence of a culture based on close examination of its essential building blocks. However, Yanagita felt that this level of understanding was accessible only to a cultural insider, a difference for which he had criticized European predecessors such as Malinowski.⁴⁰ By taking his craft to the continent, Ōmachi was forced to reconcile how he, as an outsider, could overcome the spiritual divide between cultures that had been so strongly emphasized by his mentor. Indeed, this problem was not unique to ethnographers, but was at the core of the identity of the new state, and Ōmachi came to solve his dilemma by actively embracing the official portrayal of Manchukuo as a single cultural entity, one in which the Japanese had a vital role.

Like the ethnic nation of Japan, the multiracial state of Manchukuo was understood to coalesce around a transcendent national spirit, one that was discernible in microcosm in each of its component pieces. Thus, just as individual studies of villages in Japan demonstrated aspects of a larger Japanese spirit, ethnography on the “five races of Manchukuo” (Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, and Japanese/Korean) emphasized difference with the goal of distilling a common cultural essence and national spirit.⁴¹ Like his research in Japan, Ōmachi’s essays on village religious life in Manchukuo proudly emphasized the diversity of his data, which drew upon his own investigations near Changchun and other data culled from throughout the country.⁴² Although he was careful to distinguish among the various ethnic groups in Manchuria, Ōmachi drew comparisons among them as well. In an essay on the female matron (*niangniang*) deities worshipped by the Han, he noted that the Evenki, Oroquen, Mongols, and Daur also believed in similar spirits, whom they would entreat to similar ends, specifically to pray for children.⁴³ Similarly, in his investigation of the mixed Han and Manchu Greater Blue Banner Village (*Dalanqitun*), he noted how the “Daoist” pantheon of the Han had supplanted the ancient beliefs of the Manchus. However, this did not demonstrate the cultural aggression of the Han or

³⁹ Ōmachi, “Tochikami to obaegaki—tamuro no shukyo teki no bunseki” [Records of the Tutelary Deity—Toward an Analysis of the Religious Character of the Village], *OTC*, 6: quotes from 21 and 17, respectively. Tutelary deities in North China are generally treated less as local patrons than as administrative functionaries, and such shrines are usually small structures located on the outskirts of the community. Thomas DuBois, *The Sacred Village: Social Change and Religious Life in Rural North China* (Honolulu, 2005), 41–51.

⁴⁰ Kawada, *The Origin of Ethnography in Japan*, 124.

⁴¹ The precise content of the “five races” did change occasionally, often with Japanese and Koreans sometimes listed separately, at the expense of another group, such as the Muslim Hui. In general, however, Japanese and Koreans were considered to be two branches of the same race, and the rhetoric of Korean colonization was thus one of long-delayed unification. Most Japanese in Manchukuo came as a result of a massive immigration campaign meant to resettle a million households on the continent; see L. Young, *Japan’s Total Empire*, 314–321.

⁴² Ōmachi, “Tochikami to obaegaki,” 19.

⁴³ Ōmachi, “Haru no kami nyannyan” [Niangniang Spirit of Spring], *OTC*, 6: 31–32.

the weakness of the Manchus; rather, it revealed the fundamental similarities between the two.⁴⁴

Despite his confidence in the larger cultural unity of Manchukuo, Ōmachi remained committed to preserving the distinctiveness of the races and of their religious traditions, both from each other and from Japan. Most notably, even as he vastly exaggerated certain elements of his own data to fit the notions of Yanagita ethnology, Ōmachi followed his teacher in rejecting the imposition of standardizing practice in the name of village reform, and he does not appear to have supported the institution of Shintō shrines or worship in Manchurian villages. In a 1944 essay on Shintō in Manchuria, he outlined a number of logistic difficulties faced by Shintō shrines, among which was the small number of Japanese settlers, which made it difficult to replicate the tightly knit shrine communities in Japan. However, it is clear that he regarded Shintō as a religion for the Japanese only; nowhere does he suggest that other races be recruited into shrine communities. This is especially significant considering that the “Japanization” (*kōminka*) policy being instituted in Korea and Taiwan focused specifically on the spiritual transformation of the people into Japanese citizens through their incorporation into Shintō communities.⁴⁵ In contrast, Manchukuo was intended as a living example of Pan-Asian multiculturalism, and if the village was to serve as the spiritual foundation of Manchukuo, it would be through retaining different types of religion for each race, at least for the foreseeable future.

In a larger sense, then, how did research on religion in Manchukuo deal with the question of race? Having been centered in Japan, which largely equated racial and national identity, the research of Yanagita ethnology had not needed to address the question at all. However, just as Japan came to define its cultural distinctness largely in reference to the continent, the search for the biological origins and genealogy of the Japanese people coalesced in the sciences of physical anthropology and racial typification. This tradition stemmed from the work of late-Meiji Japanese anthropologists such as Torii Ryūzō (1870–1953), who, along with numerous other pursuits, spent years recording physiognomic traits of peoples throughout Asia. Although this type of research had already passed its prime by the 1920s, racial and cultural conceptions of Japan and its relation to Asia continued to evolve in tandem, such that the image of Japan as the center of a culturally defined East Asia was joined by theories of racial unity between Japan and the peoples of the continent.⁴⁶ Rather than a single race, the Japanese people were actually a combination of discernible racial groups (originally from the continent, except for one that was marked as the “Japanese proper”). The element that bound these races together was their common aspiration to cultural perfection, made possible by the spiritual guidance of the emperor.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ōmachi, “Ōaihata tamuro no shinkyō” [Belief in Greater Blue Banner Village], *OTC*, 6: 62–68.

⁴⁵ Ōmachi, “Jinja hōshi no mondai” [Problems with the Ritual Enshrinement of Shintō Deities], *OTC*, 6: 136–140; Chou, “The *Kōminka* Movement.” In Taiwan, the process worked to a similar end, but was more focused on establishing Japanese schools of Buddhism, and accelerated as the war turned against Japan. Charles Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660–1990* (Honolulu, 1999).

⁴⁶ Kevin Doak, “Nakano Seiichi and Colonial Ethnic Studies,” in van Bremen and Shimizu, *Wartime Japanese Anthropology*, 109–129, 111; Paul D. Barclay, “An Historian among the Anthropologists: The Inō Kanori Revival and the Legacy of Japanese Colonial Ethnography in Taiwan,” *Japanese Studies* 21, no. 2 (2001): 117–136.

⁴⁷ The interplay between race and nation is best expressed in the debates surrounding the assimilation

The interaction of cultural and racial criteria is evident in the early Pan-Asianism of the late nineteenth century, when the call was made to develop the consciousness of the “yellow races” around the superior culture of Japan. The limits of racial and cultural expansion were explored during this period, when Japanese emigrated in large numbers from the home islands to Okinawa and Hokkaido. In one of many ad hoc solutions to this problem within the northern islands claimed by Japan, only the Ainu population of Hokkaido was marked for active assimilation, while indigenous groups in Karafuto (Sakhalin) were intended to be left culturally intact, a state that Tessa Morris-Suzuki says intentionally placed the “cultural hybridity of empire” on physical display.⁴⁸ Indeed, racial and cultural criteria were largely complementary—the former expressed in theories of how the Japanese race reached the archipelago from various points of continental origin, and the latter in the unique ability of the “Japanese spirit” to perfect influences imported from the outside. Toward the turn of the century, cultural criteria took on the more assertive role, and nowhere is this more evident than in religion. In contrast to earlier fears that foreign teachings would infiltrate Japan and weaken its traditional spirit, Japanese religious leaders confidently proclaimed the uniqueness of native Christianity and Buddhism, sending missionaries to the Asian continent and even proposing (no doubt ironically in the case of the former) that they be sent to enlighten the West.⁴⁹

Convinced of the racial unity between Japan and the continent, it was a small step for scholars to begin seeking their common culture and history. Archaeologists sought traces of Japanese culture on the continent, and the discovery by Tokunaga Takeshi of ancient Japanese-style stone fortresses and keyhole tombs (*kōgoishi*) in Korea and Manchuria fanned an interest in these spiritual and historical connections. Just as Ōmachi had sought the larger unity among patterns of worship in Manchukuo villages, Tokunaga made these Pan-Asian ties explicit, comparing structural similarities among sacred architecture in ancient and modern Japan, China, and Manchuria, and positing a fundamental similarity that transcended later developments:

Japanese ancient shrines are of the *kannabi* (popularly known as Mt. Fuji-style) shape. There are many of these in Manchuria, as well . . . [The artifacts] develop from the same agrarian culture and philosophy as Japanese Shintō (*kannagara no michi*) . . . Modern [Chinese] matron temples have these elements, as well. Therefore, since the temples were built later, it is thought that matron worship was grafted onto this earlier pattern of belief.⁵⁰

In terms of ritual, other scholars found the common link in ancient shamanistic traditions. Using linguistic analysis of ritual terms, anthropologists and philologists proposed a common root for all Asian shamanism, which is itself the foundation of

of the northern Ainu. Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “Becoming Japanese: Imperial Expansion and Identity Crisis in the Early Twentieth Century,” in Sharon A. Minichiello, ed., *Japan’s Competing Modernities: Issues in Culture and Democracy, 1900–1930* (Honolulu, 1998), 157–180; David L. Howell, “Making ‘Useful Citizens’ of Ainu Subjects in Early Twentieth-Century Japan,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no. 1 (February 2004): 5–29.

⁴⁸ Morris-Suzuki, “Becoming Japanese,” 167.

⁴⁹ Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism*; Nakano, *Tennōsei kokka to shokuminchi dendō*, 13–33.

⁵⁰ Okumura Yoshinobu, *Manshū nyannyan kō* [Study of Niangniang Temples in Manchuria] (Shinkyō, 1940), 242–245.

all Asian religion. From these common origins, different cultures had evolved a hierarchy of religions. On the continent, shamanism in its “pure” form was still considered to be in existence in Manchuria and Mongolia, whereas in China it had been transformed into worship of animal spirits. Only in Japan did this primordial shamanistic tradition reach its purest expression in the high religion of Shintō.⁵¹

The ascendancy of culturally defined ethnic nationality over normative racial identity was expressed directly in Manchukuo. In contrast to the ideas of racial purity and biological determinism being developed in Nazi Germany, sociologists such as Takata Yasuma saw ethnic national identity as a form of subjective social consciousness, one that need not be coterminous with the political state, but which could be developed by it.⁵² In the late 1930s, Japanese scholars (such as the sociologist Nakano Seiichi, a student of Takata, who arrived at Foundation University in the same year as Ōmachi) came to Manchukuo, and set about mobilizing their theoretical training in the service of the new state. Together, the assumption of common racial and cultural origins between Japan and the continent and the understanding of ethnic nationhood as both contingent and created inspired a program of social engineering that supported the cultural expression of individual races within Manchukuo while reserving a “pivotal role” for the Japanese race, who would draw the five together into a greater whole.⁵³

Just as Japan had adopted the assimilationist *kōminka* policy aimed at molding the outlying populace of its own nation (such as Hokkaido, Okinawa, or Korea) into subjects of the emperor, Manchukuo required a program of education to create its own national citizens (*kokuminka*), to build a sense of common history, culture, and identity as a bulwark against the combined threats of Soviet communism, Chinese hegemonism, and American opportunism. Although Japan would act as a mother to “protect and suckle the new nation,” Manchukuo would still need to develop as an independent entity, with a distinct sense of nationhood built on a foundation of its five races.⁵⁴ This type of civilizing mission was thus not assimilation strictly speaking, but rather the promise that multiracial Manchukuo would replicate the essence of Japanese civilization, allowing each race to perfect and refine itself under the enlightened rule of the Manchukuo and Japanese emperors. In this, religion must play a fundamental role, a feeling captured in popular as well as scholarly writings. One essay penned by an author identified only by the religious pseudonym Daikyo Dōjin (Master of Great Emptiness), and published by a veterans’ association for what must have been a sympathetic audience, made no effort to hide contempt for illiterate Han immigrants, or for the Mongols and Manchus who had “never produced their own

⁵¹ Ibid., 8, 57–61. Shamanism was even more central to research in Korea, where it was laden with both positive and negative connotations but was universally portrayed as fundamental to the Korean character. Walraven, “The Natives Next-Door.”

⁵² Kevin M. Doak, “Culture, Ethnicity and the State in Early Twentieth Century Japan,” in Minichiello, *Japan’s Competing Modernities*, 181–205.

⁵³ Nishi Junzō, *Manshukoku no shūkyō mondai* [The Problem of Religion in Manchuria], *Dai tō-A bunka kensetsu kenkyū*, vol. 4 (Tokyo, 1942), 6. On the ambiguous place of the Japanese in the racial schema of Manchukuo, see Tamanoi, “Classifications.”

⁵⁴ Daikyo Dōjin, “Manmō kōkaron” [Essay on Imperialism in Manchuria and Mongolia], in Teikoku zaigō gunjinkai honbu [Imperial Army Veterans’ Association, Main Branch], ed., *Manmō mondai shiryō* [Materials on the Manchuria and Mongolia Problem], vol. 10 (n.p., n.d., probably from 1932), 46–83, quote from 79–81. Howell, “Making ‘Useful Citizens,’” contains a detailed discussion of the significance of ethnic and cultural homogeneity under Japan’s emperor-system ideology.



FIGURE 2: “A modern Manchurian paradise, the army and the people working together.” The dual images of the Japanese sun penetrating the Manchukuo flag and of the soldier protecting and guiding the somewhat distracted-looking civilian reflect both the paternalistic role assigned to progressive forces within the new state and the place of Japan in bringing it to fruition. Courtesy of the Ono Hideo Special Collection, Tokyo University Library.

high religion.” In addition to recognizing the superiority of Japanese culture, this vision required the five races to unify “with a common morality and a single heart” (Ch. *wuzu yide yixin*) under the premise that “their ancestors shared the same blood as the Japanese people,” and thus as each other, as well. Having themselves been raised to the lofty heights of Japanese civilization, the 200,000 Japanese in Manchukuo were an example of what the other races could aspire to be, and they had a special responsibility to serve as advisors.⁵⁵ Popular authors such as Daikyo Dōjin further recommended that research on old customs and folktales of Manchukuo be undertaken so that the people could understand that their common culture transcended and indeed bound the five races.⁵⁶ In a 1943 essay, Ōmachi elaborated on these ideals with an uncharacteristic degree of nationalistic fervor. For Ōmachi, the Yanagita method was originally appropriate for inside Japan, which is racially homogeneous. However, under the principle that “all the world lives under one roof”

⁵⁵ Ibid., 78–79. Although this essay was written in Japanese, the pseudonym of the author could be either Chinese or Japanese, which complicates its translation.

⁵⁶ As did the authors of the large-scale project on marriage customs in Manchuria, which was published in 1942 and is tinged with similar “five races” rhetoric. Nakao, “Japanese Colonial Policy and Anthropology in Manchuria,” 251; Kawamura, “*Tai tō-A minzokugaku*” no kyojitsu, 204–205.

(*hakkō ichiu*, a phrase characteristic of wartime propaganda), the same methods could be applied to a nation such as Manchukuo, and by extension to the multiracial Japanese empire. Indeed, it was necessary that Japanese scholars combine the methods of racial studies with ethnology, so as to better portray the spirit of all races within the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere through their customs and beliefs. Just as the Japanese people were the center of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, Japanese ethnology should be the center of the study of folklore in East Asia.⁵⁷

Coinciding with these ideals of racially centered spiritual revival was the promotion of race and racially defined religion as a unit of observation and administration. In the same way that Shintō was the religion of the Japanese in Manchukuo, this sort of ethnography paired other races with their ancestral religions: a “Chinese religion” (occasionally titled Daoism) for the Han, Islam for the Hui, Lamaist Buddhism for the Mongols, and either Shamanism (often one that was modeled on the court ritual of the Manchu Qing dynasty) or Han-style “Daoism” for the Manchus.⁵⁸ Within these strictures, the religions of each of the five races were to remain separate, yet united by their common cause of producing national citizens of Manchukuo (*Manshū no kokumin*) and the “religious feeling of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” (*dai tō-A no shinkō kanjō*).⁵⁹ Using a model of structural affiliation developed in part from emulation of Christian missionary groups and pseudo-religious associations such as the YMCA, native religions were given a degree of support, both financial and political. The latter took the form of official or semi-official bodies, such as the Buddhist General Assembly of Manchukuo, which was established in 1939 and had three subassemblies for Japanese, Mongol, and Manchu Buddhism, or the Lamaism Conference of the Imperial Government of Manchukuo (*Manshū teikoku rama-kyō shūdan*), which was founded one year later.⁶⁰ Naturally, such bodies were staffed liberally with Japanese advisors and were intended to be agents of control as much as of reform. This is evident in the Islamic Society of Manchuria (*Manzhou Yisilan xiehui*), which was created in 1939 as an affiliate of the Greater Japan Muslim Society (*dai Nihon Kaikyō kyōkai*). The aims of the former society as stated in its charter were the “propagation of the spirit of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, realization of ethnic harmony, the

⁵⁷ Ōmachi, “Minzokugaku to minzokugaku,” 141–147. The previous year, the magazine *Minzoku Taiwan* (Taiwanese Folklore) had also made a call for the formation of “Greater East Asian Ethnology.” Tsu Yun Hui, “For Science, Co-Prosperity, and Love: The Re-imagination of Taiwanese Folklore and Japan’s Greater East Asian War,” in van Bremen and Shimizu, *Wartime Japanese Anthropology*, 189–207, 193.

⁵⁸ In other ways, Japanese seemed divided about whether to portray the Manchus as “sinicized” or whether to try to seek out a unique Manchu cultural tradition. Daikyo Dōjin, “Manmō kōkaron,” 78, represents the former viewpoint, saying that while the Mongols were Lamaist, the Manchu race shared the Daoist beliefs of the Han. Others, including Ōmachi, emphasized the shamanistic tradition of the Manchus, possibly because of the influence of the Russian ethnographer Shirokogoroff, who had worked extensively on shamanism in Siberia. Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*, 184.

⁵⁹ Nishi, *Manshukoku no shūkyō mondai*, 6–7. Even the rhetoric of the aggressive Pan-Asianist Buddhist mission was to revive local Buddhism rather than supplant it with Japanese schools. Tsuji Masanobu, “Fujii Nichidatsu no Bukkyō Ajiashugi to Manshū, Indo” [The Buddhist Asianism of Fujii Nichidatsu in Manchuria and India], paper presented at the International Association of Historians of Asia conference, Tokyo, 2005.

⁶⁰ Li Narangoa, “Japanese Imperialism and Mongolian Buddhism, 1932–1945,” *Critical Asian Studies* 35, no. 4 (2003): 491–514.

spread of Muslim teachings, and the reform of Muslim life,” as well as to court fellow Muslims outside of Manchukuo.⁶¹ At least as significantly, they were to serve as a body that would reach administratively into the lives of individual congregations, promoting political programs, but also collecting detailed data on membership.

The complementary definition of ethnic communities and religious affiliation naturally affected how religion was portrayed and administered in Manchukuo. In contrast to the integrated village studies produced by ethnographers, official depictions of racial religions emphasize categorization and head counting. The less subtle of these rely heavily on statistical data, dividing the local population neatly if implausibly by religion, and like the report on Islam cited above, many contain detailed data on the congregations, leadership, and property. As different as these scholarly, popular, and official portrayals appear, they share a search for spiritual essence in religion, and in some cases the logic of the attempt to mutually define ethnicity and religion led beyond the intellectual construction of religious traditions to the literal creation of new ones. One example concerns a Shintō shrine erected in the northern Hebei city of Kalgan (modern Zhangjiakou). More striking than the shrine itself, which was intended for use by Japanese residents, was the 1939 initiative of Japanese Buddhist activists to cast a statue of Chinggis Khan to be placed in the shrine for worship by the local Mongols. Such an act was part of a larger, and in this case popular, desire to effect Mongol spiritual reform through religion. Rather than reviving a lost tradition or bringing the Mongols into the Japanese orbit, it was designed to celebrate the shared history between Japan and the Mongols, and to give the latter religious tutelage to match the political. Such an invention would serve the interests of the Mongols, who, in the words of foreign ministry envoy Ogasawara Shōzō, “need a new religion, specifically a new god.”⁶²

HOWEVER, IF THE SEARCH FOR THE SPIRITUAL ESSENCE of village, race, nation, or empire led scholars to overstate the coherence of their data, one must also ask what might have been left out. The ambiguous portrayal of Christianity, for example, hints at a degree of ambivalence to religions that fell outside the realm of official discourses or policy initiatives. Christianity itself has a violent history in Japan. Native converts were persecuted relentlessly during the early seventeenth century, and the resur-

⁶¹ *Manshukoku no Kaikyōto mondai* [The Muslim Problem in Manchukuo], *Shūkyō chōsa shiryō* [Materials on Investigations into Religion], vol. 13 (Shinkyō, 1945), 273. As seen in the 1936 meeting between the Manchurian society and its Turkmen counterpart, there was an attempt to use Manchurian Muslims as a proxy for the Japanese in the creation of a Pan-Asian Islamic identity. Nishi, *Manshukoku no shūkyō mondai*, 7. On the place of Islam in Japanese Pan-Asianism, including specific reference to the Pan-Islamic movement in Japanese Manchuria, see Selçuk Esenbel, “Japan’s Global Claim to Asia and the World of Islam: Transnational Nationalism and World Power, 1900–1945,” *AHR* 109, no. 4 (October 2004): 1140–1170.

⁶² Significantly, this initiative originated with a group of Nichiren Buddhists in Hakata Bay, the site of the failed thirteenth-century Mongol invasion of Japan. Nakano, *Tennōsei kokka to shokuminchi dendō*, 78–81. I have not been able to discover much about Ogasawara. In 1935, he edited one volume of the *Tōa bunka ronshū* [Collected Reports on East Asian Culture], which suggests that he may have been part of the scholarly intelligence network. A similar mobilization of religion toward the aims of social engineering was attempted by Japanese and Korean intellectuals in Korea, who were charged with deciding “what the right religion for the Korean people should be.” Walraven, “The Natives Next-Door,” 228.

gence of the religion in the late nineteenth century saw the resurrection of old suspicions that it would develop into a fifth column. Although such fears had been largely assuaged by the beginning of the twentieth century, portrayals of Christianity in Manchukuo do differ from those of the other ecclesiastic religions. As with Islam, official materials on the state of Christianity are primarily concerned with assessing the size and strength of the organization. However, in contrast to the work on Islam, there was little attempt to demonstrate the affinity between Christianity and East Asian culture or the desirability of mobilizing the local Church for national ends. Instead, individual churches were categorized primarily according to the type and strength of their foreign contacts. From the perspective of these reports, at least, Christianity was a fundamentally foreign religion that resided in Manchukuo (especially among populations of foreign missionaries and Russian émigrés) but was spiritually not of it.⁶³

In a similar vein, numerous highly influential lay teachings were fairly ignored. The White Lotus tradition of lay sectarian religion has a long history in the Chinese heartland, particularly in the northern provinces of Hebei and Shandong, from where most Han settlers of Manchuria originally migrated. This tradition grew out of Buddhist votive groups during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and was composed of many dozens of independent teachers and networks, bound loosely together by a shared scriptural core.⁶⁴ By the sixteenth century, this type of teaching pervaded most areas of urban and especially rural religious life, and while this tradition is commonly associated with violent millenarian activity, most teachings emphasized simple piety and devotion, and satisfied the ritual needs of ordinary people, such as healing, exorcism, and funerals. The roots of these teachings reached deep into local society, such that they were the foundation of religious life for the Han majority throughout North China and most of Manchuria, and were certainly more in evidence than formally ordained Buddhist or Daoist specialists.⁶⁵ Despite the number and significance of lay teachings in Manchuria, only a few appear prominently in Japanese scholarship, usually those that were either tacitly approved or actively courted by the Japanese. Quite a lot was written about this type, including records of charitable or patriotic activities, such as the 1934 visit of leaders of the Hearth Li Teaching (*jialijiao*, *zaijiali*) delegates to Japan. Accounts of local religion often

⁶³ There were some efforts made, but they were church-initiated, and were coolly received by authorities. *Kirisutokyō chōsa hōkokusho* [Report on an Investigation of Christianity], *Shūkyō chōsa shiryō*, no. 7 (Shinkyō, 1941).

⁶⁴ For a general introduction to the development of this tradition, see Daniel Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), or Richard Hon-chun Shek, "Religion and Society in the Late Ming: Sectarianism and Popular Thought in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century China" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1980). Barend ter Haar argues convincingly that by the early 1600s, the term itself was used primarily as a criminalizing autonym for any unauthorized religious networks. Regardless of the name, however, it cannot be denied that the teachings formed a coherent and distinct tradition of religious organization. B. J. ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Honolulu, 1999). For one case from what would become the southern edge of Manchukuo, see Richard Hon-chun Shek, "The Revolt of the Zaili, Jindan Sects in Rehe (Jehol), 1891," *Modern China* 6, no. 2 (April 1980): 161–196.

⁶⁵ There were significantly fewer ordained religious specialists in rural North China than in the wealthier Yangtze region. Compared to the rural population, local White Lotus specialists were the only force even close to the numerical significance of parish priests of early modern Europe. Vincent Goosaert, "Counting the Monks: The 1736–1739 Census of the Chinese Clergy," *Late Imperial China* 21, no. 2 (2000): 40–85; DuBois, *Sacred Village*, 86–105.



FIGURE 3: Funerary ritual performed by village-based lay teaching during late 1990s. The rituals of this teaching and many others like it employ a great deal of Buddhist and Daoist iconography, and often focus on scripture recitation. Such a sight would have been very common to researchers in Manchukuo, but most often went unmentioned in their descriptions of “religion.” Photos by author.

include a brief mention of the Red Swastika Society (*hong wanzi hui*), a moral society that originated in the northern Chinese province of Shandong but quickly spread to Manchuria; a “Red Swastika Society of Manchukuo” was founded soon after the country was established. Many accounts of these particular groups were quite flattering, emphasizing their spiritual mission and the important role that they could play in the moral transformation of the Han.⁶⁶

On the whole, however, White Lotus-style teachings were not taken seriously by scholars looking for religion. Most groups either went completely unnoticed or were portrayed in a manner that discounted their religious significance. This omission is especially glaring given the prominence of many of these teachings, and their significance to the everyday religious life of the Han majority in Manchukuo. While smaller teachings might have escaped the notice of researchers or been perceived as diffuse “folk belief” rather than independent organizations, there were some highly organized teachings, such as the Way of Penetrating Unity (*yiguandao*), which claimed nearly 180,000 registered members in nearby Beijing, and had a similarly large presence in the cities and countryside of Manchukuo, as well.⁶⁷

Rather, the omission of such teachings stems from the predisposition of researchers themselves as to what constitutes religion, a problem inherited from earlier debates within Japan. While Shintō had been portrayed as transcending religion, lay teachings did not live up to the name. Instead, these were frequently conflated with “secret societies” (*himitsu kessha*), and were treated not as religion, but rather as social organizations bound together with religious dressing. According to such depictions, both White Lotus teachings and pseudo-religious secret societies evolved from a single tradition of mutual-benefit organizations, such as local self-defense alliances, which mobilized only in case of need, and therefore relied on religious oaths, symbolism, and rituals to maintain internal cohesion and a sense of purpose during periods of inactivity.⁶⁸ Thus, while such sources might agree that secret so-

⁶⁶ Manshukoku kokumuin minseibu, kōseishi, kyōkaka [Manshukoku National Assembly, Department of People’s Livelihood, Welfare Division, Culture Section], *Manshukoku Dōen Kōmanjikai no gaiyō* [Overview of the Daoyuan Red Swastika Society in Manchukuo], *Kyōka dantai chōsa shiryō*, no. 2 (n.p., 1943), 161–175; Nishi, *Manshukoku no shūkyō mondai*, 49–50; Sun Jiang, “Shūkyō kessha, kenri to shokuminchi shihai—‘Manshukoku’ ni okeru shūkyō kessha no tōgō” [Religious Societies, Power and Colonial Rule—The Consolidation of Religious Societies in “Manchukuo”], *Nihon kenkyū* 24 (2002): 161–199. The transformative character of these societies is emphasized in Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*, 111–122.

⁶⁷ Shao Yong, *Zhongguo huidaomen* (Shanghai, 1997), 364–373, 467, 472. Nor does it explain how these groups escaped the attention of the very thorough Mantetsu researchers, some of whom remained in a single village for months or even years, and developed close relationships with their interview subjects. These groups and their political significance are discussed in greater detail in DuBois, *Sacred Village*, 106–185.

⁶⁸ The military potential of such groups was of obvious concern to the state, and fieldwork among them often coincided with registration, as in work on Korean shamans (Walraven, “The Natives Next-Door”) and a 1942 project on Manchurian Daoism. However, of the 248 anti-Japanese incidents recorded in Manchuria between 1932 and 1940, only 7 were attributed to religious groups (Nakao, “Japanese Colonial Policy and Anthropology in Manchuria,” 252, 261 n. 4). Cho Kyeungdal, “Shokuminchi Chosen ni okeru shinkō shūkyō no tenkai to minshū—Pochon-gyo no kou Nichi to shin Nichi” [The Development of a New Religion and the Masses of Colonial Korea—Pro- and Anti-Japanese Movements of Pochongyo], 2 pts., *Shisō* 2 (2001): 64–90 and 3 (2001): 136–162. One source proudly proclaims that while “secret societies” may have been forced into sedition in China, many developed independently, “semi-secret” (*han himitsu*) Manchukuo branches, such as the Manchukuo Zaijiali Assembly (*Manzhouguo zaijiali zonghui*), which maintained better relations with the state. Nishi, *Manshukoku no shūkyō mondai*, 48.

cieties were “centered on personal cultivation (*xiulian*), belief, and magical arts (*wushu*),” their religious beliefs and ritual activity were understood to be secondary to or symptomatic of their social function. Lay White Lotus teachings were painted with a similar brush, with one author even making the telling slip of identifying the influential Eight Trigrams of the Qing dynasty not as a “teaching” (*jiao*), but as a “society” (*hui*).⁶⁹ This is not merely nominal. In contrast to Islam or Buddhism, which were seen to capture the essential spirit of an entire race (and thus of all Asia) in microcosm, the White Lotus teachings that thrived throughout China and Manchukuo were not religion, but rather represented nothing more than the inability of an unenlightened society to vocalize or address its deeper socioeconomic realities.⁷⁰

LIKE THE EMPIRES OF THE EUROPEAN POWERS, the Japanese empire was built not only on armies and commerce, but more fundamentally on ideas of progress and civilization. Just as the United States was defined by its western frontier, and the colonial experience in India shaped the understanding of what it meant to be British, the Japanese sense of destiny that began to emerge in the late nineteenth century was inextricably bound up with the unique role that Japan saw for itself in a new Asia. To be sure, this was a complex and multivocal process, dominated by no single actor. Nevertheless, the particular position of Japan at the center of a rapidly expanding formal empire encouraged the integration of local knowledge and experiences into ever larger and more sweeping discourses. Nowhere is this more evident than in the influence that Manchukuo, which served both as a living embodiment of multiracial Pan-Asianism and as a laboratory for colonial policy, had on the rest of the empire.

A legacy of Japan’s frantic modernization during the late nineteenth century, one of the unique characteristics of the Japanese empire was its emphasis on spiritual essence. This would ultimately reveal itself in the anti-Western propaganda created during the Pacific War, but its roots ran far deeper, both transcending political loyalty and revealing itself in less immediately political structures of thought, including academic disciplines, such as the school of ethnology founded by Yanagita Kunio. The foundational assumptions of this school continued to characterize the work of Yanagita’s disciples, even when they disagreed with him politically. This begs the usual questions posed of wartime scholarship, which focus on the sincerity of the researchers themselves, asking in essence if they were honest scholars or merely propagandists. While this essay does not wish to remove the taint of Japanese imperialism, it is clear that the ideas of empire and academia developed along parallel tracks, and that imperial interests and scholarly idealism may not have been so irreconcilable as we might now wish to believe. Many of the scholars who came to Manchukuo from Japan did so out of a sense of genuine conviction, and many left-

⁶⁹ Nishi, *Manshukoku no shūkyō mondai*, 45–50.

⁷⁰ Here the obvious parallel is with subsequent generations of scholars in the People’s Republic of China, who valorized these societies as an embodiment of untapped proletarian consciousness, or Western social historians of the 1970s, who saw them as a response to demographic pressure. Given the Marxist leaning of many Japanese scholars in Manchukuo, it is intriguing to speculate about similar, although less clearly vocalized, motivations. Zhou Yumin, *Zhongguo banghui shi* [History of Chinese Associations] (Shanghai, 1993). In English, see Jean Chesneaux, ed., *Popular Movement and Secret Societies in China, 1840–1950* (Stanford, Calif., 1972).

leaning intellectuals became personally committed to the ideals of the new state.⁷¹ This new activist stance among the scholarly community both “nurtured delusions of grandeur” among scholars who had been marginalized in Japan, and created unusual alliances, such as that between idealistic ethnographers and the armed military escorts who accompanied them into the field.⁷²

The integration of academic research into the larger complex of ideas that grounded Japanese imperialism also explains the frequent blurring of lines between scholarly description, official policy, and popular activism. Being employed either by the state or by pseudo-state entities such as the South Manchuria Railway, the majority of scholars in Manchukuo were literally on the intellectual front lines of the empire. Moreover, scholars were themselves only one part of a much larger collection of officials, soldier-intellectuals, and missionaries, all of whom, at some level at least, shared certain assumptions about Japanese destiny in Asia and the transformative power of religion. This explains not only the underlying consensus among various portrayals of religion in Manchukuo, but also the frequent integration of scholarship and scholars themselves into matters of social policy.

⁷¹ See esp. Fogel, *Life along the South Manchuria Railway*. One example of such a coincidence would be the many exhaustive studies of land sale and tenure, such as the six-volume *Manshū kyūkan chōsa* [Study of Old Customs in Manchuria] (Shinkyō, 1935), which attracted the commitment of pragmatic colonial administrators and idealistic economic determinist scholars alike.

⁷² L. Young, *Japan's Total Empire*, 291–303, quote from 291; on the personal transformation of one scholar, see Doak, “Nakano Seiichi,” 117–125.

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