

Introduction

During the last decade three wars and a railway invasion have opened the minds of the Manchurians more than could be done by a cycle of western schooling. China is recognizing Manchuria as the theater for a political experiment for the whole empire, and is instituting, according to her lights, the best system of balancing the opposing interests of the Russians and Japanese and recovering her sovereignty.

San Francisco Call, June 14, 1907

Manchuria: Land of Progress

Looking out at the world at the dawn of the twentieth century, it would have been hard to overlook the importance of Manchuria. Over recent years, China, Russia, and Japan had begun maneuvering for *de facto* control over the region, sparking two wars in the space of ten years. In the aftermath, the Chinese Qing government finally turned its attention to its neglected northeast, creating for the region a regular provincial administration, opening the door for a sweeping program of reforms, including the opening of more than 600 schools. Within a few years, progress on a number of fronts had exceeded even the most optimistic predictions. By the 1920s, the region possessed an enviable agricultural and industrial base, an efficient railway network connecting to one of the world's great port cities, as well as a legal and educational infrastructure. From an underdeveloped backwater of the Qing, Manchuria had suddenly emerged as one of the most advanced and dynamic regions in Asia, if not the world.

Progress in Manchuria was driven by a combination of opportunity and necessity. On the one hand, the promise of vast untapped economic potential prompted a steady flow of investment into industries such as transportation and mining, as well as a constant stream of migrants hoping to find a new life farming the black soil of Jilin, working in the collieries of Fushun, or carting on the dockyards of Dalian. Economic opportunity created boomtowns up and down the railway, which in turn allowed for next-generation thinking in areas such as urban planning, public health,

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and security. On the other hand, strategic competition gave these reforms a real urgency. The legacy of conflict between China, Russia, and Japan remained evident in the continued presence of the Japanese military in the Kantō 關東 Leased Territory and in garrison posts along the South Manchuria Railway. Conflict in and over the region was driven by both access to its resources and a strategic location that earned Manchuria such colorful monikers as the “cockpit of Asia” and the “cradle of conflict,” but the military race was only one of many engines that powered this dynamic region. Over the first half of the century, competition and innovation kept Manchuria at the cutting edge of a wide swath of enterprises ranging from soybean aggregation to avant-garde literature.¹

Beyond its strategic significance, Manchuria embodied multiple layers of iconic value. For many, it was a land of new beginnings. Like the American West, the rich Manchurian frontier had an appeal all its own. It beckoned to the adventurous and ambitious, to reformers and outlaws, missionaries and would-be tycoons. It was also remarkably cosmopolitan. Northern cities such as Harbin 哈爾濱 were home to tens of thousands of Russians, many of whom were left stateless after the formation of the Soviet Union.² Even as Russian influence waned, a current of Chinese activism aimed at affirming the city’s Chinese identity.³ Manchuria was Japan’s economic foothold on the continent, and after the war with Russia, many Japanese came to see it as the “lifeline” (*seimei sen* 生命線) of their nation’s security. As Louise Young has shown, the emotive and symbolic connection to Manchuria was often strongest for outside observers, those who never had and never would physically visit the region.⁴ It is this iconic value that the book seeks to capture by referring to the region as “Manchuria,” an anachronistic usage that even now evokes strong feelings, both positive and negative.⁵

¹ Yoshihisa Tak Matsusaka, *The Making of Japanese Manchuria, 1904–1932* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001). Norman Smith, *Resisting Manchukuo: Chinese Women Writers and the Japanese Occupation* (Vancouver: UBC Press). P. T. Etherton and Hubert Hessel Tillman, *Manchuria, the Cockpit of Asia* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1932).

² Olga Bakich, “Emigré Identity: The Case of Harbin,” in *Harbin and Manchuria: Place, Space and Identity*, ed. Thomas Lahusen (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 51–73, and Elena Chernolutskaia, “Religious Communities in Harbin and Ethnic Identity of Emigrés,” *ibid.*, 79–96.

³ James H. Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin: Nationalism in an International City, 1916–1932* (Ithaca, NY and London, Cornell University Press, 2002).

⁴ Louise Young, *Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Mark R. Peattie, *Ishiwara Kanji and Japan’s Confrontation with the West* (Princeton University Press, 1975).

⁵ On the use of the term Manchuria, as well as the larger issue of territorial naming, see Mark C. Elliott, “The Limits of Tartary: Manchuria in Imperial and National Geographies,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 59, 3 (2000): 603–646.

The iconic value of the region was magnified by the 1932 creation of the client state of Manchukuo (滿洲國, literally the “Nation of Manchuria”). Hastily formed after the seizure of power by the Japanese garrison force, Manchukuo became a vast experiment in nation building, one that its framers touted to the Japanese public as a shining example of the new order in Asia. For Chinese south of the Great Wall, the loss of the region was profoundly traumatic. More than any event before the 1937 attack on China itself, it was the seizure of the Northeast and creation of the Manchukuo state that prodded public and political opinion in China to action.

The significance of the region did not end at internal policy formation – events in Manchuria were watched and felt on a global stage. The effects of Japan’s 1905 successful defeat of tsarist Russia reverberated across Asia and the world. The quieter record of innovation in

Japanese Images of Manchuria



Figure 1.1. Manchuria as sacred ground: During the early twentieth century, sites from Japanese wars in Manchuria were reborn as a network of actual and imaginary battlefield tourism. Here, a former soldier makes a ritual offering for Japanese comrades who perished in the war with Russia. *Meiji sanjū shichi-hachi nen senseki kinen shashinchō* [Photographic record of the Meiji 37–38-year war], Lüshun 1920, p. 11.

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Figure 1.2. Manchuria as a land of glamor and adventure: Postcards portray Japanese tourists “stepping lightly from boulevard to boulevard” as they visit the exotic sights of Harbin. Lafayette College East Asia Image Collection.

agriculture, commerce, and warfare was at least as important. Twentieth-century Manchuria was a laboratory of new ideas and practices: many of the developmental schemes that were instituted or attempted there were more advanced and ambitious versions of policies that had been put in place one or two generations earlier in China or Japan. The often contentious path to political development made the region something of a bellwether, and occasionally a trendsetter in addressing the big issues of the twentieth century. The fluid and contested status of Manchuria raised uniquely modern questions of legality and jurisdiction: the identity of stateless populations, the precise outlines of extraterritoriality and consular autonomy, and most notably the legitimacy of the Manchukuo state itself. Manchuria was a test case for the emerging international order, and the influence of precedents established there can be seen today – most visibly in the absolute stance the current Chinese state takes towards issues of its own territorial sovereignty. Finally, just as in the political realm, Manchuria also had iconic value for social reformers and theorists far outside its borders. The attraction of Manchuria, and particularly of nominally independent Manchukuo, was the extent to which ambitious reforms enacted (or at least planned) there seemed to justify, exemplify,

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or contravene other global agendas of progress, however those might have been defined. While aware of the dangers that Japanese imperialism held for China, W. E. B. DuBois famously defended the externally reviled client state as more sincerely devoted than white societies to the ideals of racial harmony, adding that “a lynching in Manchoukuo would be unthinkable.”⁶ Whether the changes taking place there were seen as portents of good or of ill, Manchuria was a place to watch, and very much at the front lines of a number of global trends.⁷

But Is It Religion?

This book will discuss a different sort of frontier – the ways that the reconfiguration of social forces in Manchuria changed the meanings, practices, and institutions of religion. With young and relatively fluid political institutions, a cosmopolitan and mobile population, and high potential for material wealth, Manchuria beckoned to would-be reformers of all stripes. Under a patchwork of competing regimes, it became a crucible and laboratory of competing agendas of political and social reform. Just as in other fields, the opportunity to build new institutions from the ground up drew the most ambitious social reformers, ideologues, and zealots, who saw in Manchuria a blank canvas upon which the spirituality of a new Asia could be given life.

This book will examine religion as both a self-contained and self-identified entity, and as a counterpart to various ideas of state building and social reform. Within these two tasks, the idea of religion itself is the more clearly, if contentiously defined. This book originally set out to trace these definitions – treating the social, legal, and practical definition of religion as one of the great innovations that emerged from the larger transformation of Manchuria. It soon became clear that even this very broad problematic was still too self-limiting. One cannot understand the moving definition of what religion is without an equal understanding of what religion is *not*: those areas that are specifically defined as separate from, or unavailable to the experience, jurisdiction, or governance of religion.

⁶ DuBois also wrote that in Manchukuo the Japanese had created a degree of material progress that was “nothing less than marvelous” (*Pittsburgh Courier*, February 13, 1937), in W. E. B. DuBois, *Newspaper Columns*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (White Plains, NY: Kraus-Thomsen Organization, 1986), vol. I, 167–168. Reginald Kearney, “The Pro-Japanese Utterances of W.E.B. Du Bois,” *Contributions in Black Studies* 13, 7 (1995): 201–217.

⁷ The best examination of Manchuria as symptom and expression of a variety of discourses of global transformation is Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

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Just as with religion itself, we must also face the problem of giving shape – and especially a name – to this realm of non-religion, a process that is inherently problematic because it inevitably pulls towards the use of historical anachronisms. The term that is currently used for “religion” in both Japanese (*shūkyō* 宗教) and Chinese (*zongjiao*) is itself an invention of the late nineteenth century, as are many of the terms (such as secular or philanthropic) that derive in a relational manner from a particular image of where religion begins and ends. It is for this same reason that we must be careful in using these terms to describe a historical reality, but even more so why we cannot escape them in understanding the historical transformation that followed the formation of that reality. This terminological landscape – along with all of its overt and implicit meanings – existed and evolved in context. Changes to language and terminology gave structure to the deeper intellectual currents that defined what constitutes religion, the boundaries of its legitimate or illegitimate practice, and perhaps inevitably, the trajectory along which religion would develop within a modernizing society.

Scholars have spent decades exploring these pathways that conceptually shaped and defined religion. Wilfred Cantwell Smith was one of the first to advance the idea that anything we might identify as religion is socially constructed, and thus subject to change. Jonathan Z. Smith expressed a similar sentiment when he famously proclaimed religion to be “a product of the scholar’s study,” which is simply to say that religion as a social and experiential category is nothing more or less than what people imagine it to be.⁸ Even restricting ourselves solely to scholarly works, we find no shortage of essential and iconic definitions of what religion is and does. Marx dismissed religion as the “heart of a heartless world,” and more famously as the “opium of the masses,” while Freud called it mankind’s “universal neurosis.” The consummate modernist, Max Weber, anticipated that progress (not merely the theological rationalism of his own German Protestantism) would inevitably leave the world “disenchanted,” bereft of both mystery and idealism. At the other extreme, Martin Luther held religion to be the “wisdom born of personal experience,” while for Durkheim, it was the “collective effervescence” of the morals that any society holds dear.⁹

⁸ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1963). Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (University of Chicago Press, 1982), xi.

⁹ Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right 1834–1844* (Oxford University Press, 1970); Max Weber, “Science as Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958); Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1965).

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Such ideas were developed in the context of Judeo-Christian tradition, but took on particular significance in the ways that the Christian world historically came to understand and position itself in relation to its neighbors. Talal Asad first advanced the idea that Western portrayals of Islam might have less to do with an understanding or misunderstanding of Islam, and more with a changing point of reference on what Islam is not, i.e., Christianity. Peter van der Veer took this idea to its logical conclusion by examining closely the moment of colonial encounter, showing how British images of India often had very little to do with India itself, but were most clearly an expression of self-perception in reverse: if British authors increasingly portrayed India as spiritual, superstitious, and exotic, it was only because they had simultaneously come to see themselves as rational, grounded, and a little bit dull.¹⁰

The definition of what religion *is* cannot escape the question of what it *does*: whether religion is a positive or negative force, whether it represents a society's values or shapes them, and, most crucially, what will or should happen to it in the future. The intellectual interrelation of religion and society is quite clear in Western intellectual history, as one by one the great minds of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries addressed the big questions of religion, each in a way that was very much a product of the times in which they lived. When Karl Marx predicted that people would rise up to abolish the "illusory happiness" of religion, he was referring to the very specific social, economic, and political context of mid-nineteenth-century Europe, one in which organized churches wielded far greater power than they would a hundred years later. Max Weber's expectation of religion's inevitable march towards rationality was very much conditioned by the modernist assumptions of the early twentieth century. Different still is the more recent critique of someone like Richard Dawkins, for whom the "God delusion" derives less from society than from the cowardly and dysfunctional brain. We thus see three authors each predicting the decline of religion, but doing so in very different ways, and for very different reasons. The only tie that unites them is that each was a man of his times.¹¹

The legacy of underlying social assumptions is not restricted to religion's detractors. A close look at the work of missionaries – perhaps the most recognizable sort of religious advocates – shows the importance of

¹⁰ Talal Asad, "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category," in *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, ed. Talal Asad (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 27–54; Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹¹ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2006).

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understanding the often unspoken ideas that are inevitably carried along with religion itself. The obvious difficulty in doing so lies in separating the ideas of religion, for example as they are presented in scriptures, from the variety of political and social institutions that support religion in real life. Iberian missionaries of the sixteenth century, for example, carried with them the gospel, but they also brought national rivalries, as well as ideas of property ownership, political legitimacy, divine will, and physical modesty that appear nowhere in any sacred text, yet were nonetheless inseparable from the actual operational Catholic Church at the time. The picture of religious encounter as a complete package of ideas and practices becomes ever clearer over time. The historical spread of Christianity to the New World, of Buddhism to China and Japan, or of Islam through South and Southeast Asia was in each case inseparable from a much larger world of cultural transmission: the political, artistic, architectural, scientific, and commercial innovations that are even in retrospect often identified by their proximity to a religious tradition (e.g., “Buddhist medicine”).¹² Nor does this more inclusive view of religion derive solely (to draw on the metaphor of the marketplace) from those on the “supply” side. Even as Protestant missionaries of the nineteenth century tried to draw a line between the task of spreading what most would have seen as the superior civilization of the West and that of spreading the word of God (an attempt seen in various iterations of the “gospel only” movement), it became clear that the two were in practice very hard to separate, not only for the missionaries but also in the minds of potential converts. The inseparable appeal of Christianity and progress (a blending to which Ussama Makdisi refers as “evangelical modernity”) was such that some reformers in nineteenth-century China and Japan advocated the propagation of Christianity as a way of inculcating Western values, despite what was often an intense personal distaste for Christian theology, and in many cases, even for Christians themselves.¹³

¹² On the early spread of Buddhism, see Arthur F. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History* (Stanford University Press, 1959); Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Richard John Bowring, *The Religious Traditions of Japan, 500–1600* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). On the spread of Islam to Southeast Asia, Merle C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200* (Stanford University Press, 2001), and *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Norwalk, CT: EastBridge, 2006).

¹³ Ussama Makdisi, “Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism, and Evangelical Modernity,” *American Historical Review* 102, 3 (2007): 680–713; A. Hamish Ion, *American Missionaries, Christian Oyatoi, and Japan, 1859–73* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009).

Manchuria in a Global World

In bringing these questions to early twentieth-century Manchuria, this book has two separate goals. The first is to reorient the discussion of religion as a global phenomenon. As mentioned above, the extensive body of literature on the changing definition of religion is centered largely on or around the Christian world or, in the case of the imperial encounter, on the transmission of ideas from West to the non-West, broadly defined. There are a number of reasons why this discussion requires a more complete approach. Even if the claim is never explicitly made by the authors, it is hard not to equate the historical imposition of Christianity or Christian-derived models with an implicit Western triumphalism. Such is the charge behind Talal Asad's critique of the Christian assumptions that underlie the academic discipline of religious studies, or to quote the title of Tomoko Masuzawa's 2005 monograph, the idea that "European universalism was preserved in the language of pluralism."¹⁴

Without seeking to deny the global influence of Western ideas and institutions, even a cursory glance at developments in Manchuria shows quite plainly the weakness of conflating the appearance of Western forms with any manner of discursive dominance or intellectual hegemony. Clearly, the institutional development that may have in some cases started in the West was also internally or independently incubated in China, Japan, and elsewhere, and continued on the ground in Manchuria itself. To take just one example of this truly global flow of ideas, the characteristic plural ethnicity policy that was instituted in Manchukuo after 1934 (summed up in slogans touting the "unity of the five races" *gozoku kyōwa/wuzu gonghe* 五族共和) clearly drew on Western ideas of race (*minzoku/minzu* 民族: another neologism of roughly the same vintage), as well as administrative techniques of sorting and counting developed in places like British Malaya or the Soviet Union. Yet the Manchukuo ethnicity policy was equally beholden to native forms, such as Sun Yat-sen's multiethnic portrayal of the Chinese *minzu* (including his own idea of the "Unity of the Five Races"), and to transnational notions of collective unity such as the Japanese ideal of the "spirit of rising Asia" (*xing Ya jingshen* 興亞精神).¹⁵ Perhaps the greatest arbiter

¹⁴ Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

¹⁵ On the development of ethnic policy in Qing and Republican China, see James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenes Became Chinese* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Nor did this idea die with the widely reviled Manchukuo state. On the legacy in China, see Uradyn Erden Bulag, *Collaborative Nationalism: The Politics of Friendship on China's Mongolian Frontier* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 236.

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Figure 1.3. Japanese tourists posing in front of the St. Nikolas Orthodox church in Harbin. Lafayette College East Asia Image Collection

of all is the fact that whatever the provenance of these ideas, those who decided to adopt them into a political program did so because they found them appealing and useful.

Western ideas of religion made their way to East Asia via the same pathways of circulated knowledge, layered indigenization, and conscious manipulation of concepts and institutions. Returning to terminology, it has already been mentioned that the Chinese word for religion (*zongjiao*) was repurposed from a Japanese neologism (*shūkyō*). The Japanese term was itself created in a very Western context: the writing and rewriting of treaties with a variety of Western powers in the mid nineteenth century. But this creation was a conscious and creative process: rather than slavishly coining new words to match a Western reality, the early framers of Japanese “religion” were carefully laying a conceptual framework that would allow them to include or exclude elements such as the Christian mission, or to cast them off into the newly created dumping ground of “superstition” (*meishin/mixin* 迷信). In terms of historical causality, the mere adoption of terminology can tell us nothing definitive about the acceptance of an *idea*. In the same way that tourists could enjoy the ornamental value of Western religion on display in cities like Harbin, the creation of *shūkyō* reveals not the hapless absorption of Western ideas, but