Fleeing Defeat: The Japanese Exodus from Manchuria

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The Journal of Northeast Asian History
Volume 9 Number 1 (Summer 2012), 31-65

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The collapse of Japan's client state Manchoukuo (Manzhouguo) at the end of World War II brought about an exodus of Japanese immigrants desperate to return to their motherland. Their personal stories of the return diaspora enjoyed wide readership for decades. Although the genre tends to narrowly focus on the suffering of Japanese, the works nevertheless provide a valuable glimpse into a troubled time in East Asian history. This article seeks to expose an English-reading audience to this literary form of individual recollections, as well as to forward other perspectives that assist in providing a less lopsided picture of the exodus following the fall of Manchoukuo.

Keywords: Manchuria, Japanese repatriation, World War II, diaspora, *hikiage*

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Manchoukuo (Manzhouguo) has long since disappeared from maps but not from memory. This now defunct state, established under Japanese auspices in 1932, sat at the heart of East Asia for thirteen years and five months.[1] The scars from its violent birth are still visible and the repercussions of its death are still felt. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Japan actively exerted influence over its Asian neighbors. Molding Manchuria, the historic homeland of the Manchu people who founded China's last dynasty, into a Japanese client state is one way that this influence manifested itself. Waves of Japanese immigrants started arriving on the continent in the mid-1930s.[2] Those who moved to the cities helped modernize the urban landscape by improving infrastructure and advancing various industries. Japanese farmers were placed in the countryside to offset the Chinese presence and to watch the borders for incursions by the Soviet Union. While the Manchoukuo state greeted Japanese immigrants with open arms, the local people saw them as unwelcome guests.

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[1] In this article, Manchuria is the name of a geographic region and Manchoukuo is used solely in reference to the political entity that existed from 1932 to the end of World War II. Since many Manchoukuo-period toponyms do not correspond to current-day political divisions, period names and their romanizations have been kept. For more on Manchoukuo place names, consult the following sources: Yamazaki (1937); Sasaki (1942).

[2] Japanese immigrated to Manchuria earlier but not in significant numbers. There were only 3,600 farmers in 1931, for instance, a tiny fraction of the total number in Manchuria a decade later (Manchoukuo Year Book Co., 1940, p. 419).

The authors of leaflets, posters, books, and glossy magazine articles promoting Japanese immigration to Manchuria never anticipated defeat in 1945, the year their Utopian dreams crumbled as an empire lay dying. Allied victories in World War II across Asia and the Pacific led to the chaotic dissolution of Manchoukuo. The advancing sounds of gunfire and the rumblings of Soviet tanks triggered an exodus. The enthusiastic rush of migrants into Manchuria was only surpassed in intensity by their panicked rush out. Fearing the worst, Japanese ran for their lives. The long path back to the motherland was paved with pain and suffering. Their tales of woe—when told in the postwar years—inspired Japanese creative expression in song, film, theater, literature, art, and scholarship. Personal stories of the return diaspora, or *hikiage* (repatriation) literature, for decades enjoyed a wide readership.[3] *Hikiage* works are selective narratives of Japanese as victim instead of victimizer—not the sort of writings one would turn to for the unvarnished truth. Shortcomings aside, though, these accounts provide a glimpse into a troubled time in East Asian history. Despite the subgenre's enduring popularity in Japan, it has received short shrift from scholars in the West.[4] The objective of this article is to expose non-natives to this literary form of individual recollections and collective memory, as well as to forward other perspectives that assist in providing a more complete and less lopsided picture of the exodus from Manchuria. Before proceeding to the topic, some background information on Japanese immigration is necessary.

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[3] The term *hikiagesha* (repatriates) is not exclusively used for Japanese who repatriated from Manchuria. It typically applies to all Japanese residing in overseas colonies (formal and informal) at the end of World War II. For information on the *hikiagesha* located elsewhere, see Araragi (2011); Narita (2010); Kōseishō Engokyoku (1978); Kōseishō Engochō (1950).

[4] For notable exceptions, see Tamanoi (2009) and Watt (2009).

Immigration in Context

In the late nineteenth century, the Japanese archipelago was becoming too small for the rapidly growing Yamato (Japanese) race. Concerns about overpopulation echoed in the halls of government and found agreeing ears in academic circles. Eventually, hundreds of thousands of Japanese left for greener pastures in the United States, Brazil, and elsewhere. Starting a life in unfamiliar environment was not easy, especially for uneducated farmers, but it was an improvement from tilling crowded Japanese plots. Politicians and scholars came to realize that Japanese abroad only benefited Japan through their absence. The economic and strategic value of these people was largely lost when they labored under a foreign flag. Moreover, they were sometimes a political liability. All of the problems that necessitated and arose from Japanese emigration, it was thought during the interwar period (1918-1939), could be solved by establishing a colony or client state. The geography that most captured the imagination of Japanese statesmen was Manchuria.

A decade after its military success over the Ch'ing (Qing) dynasty, Japan fought Russia in 1904-05 for East Asian supremacy. Victory in these two wars made Japan a dominant power in Manchuria, where she sought ever more political, economical, and military control. With its wide prairies and vast resources, it was envisioned as a new frontier, a centerpiece in "Japan's Manifest Destiny."[5] A colonization scheme called the "covered-wagon movement" attempted to liken Japanese expansion into Manchuria to the early days of the American West (SMR, 1939, p. 117). A poster of the day read "Go young man, to the fertile land of North Manchuria."[6] This and other popular slogans were reminiscent of Horace Greeley's "Go West, young man, go West and grow up with the country." State sponsored campaigns, such as the Twenty-year Plan for Implanting 1,000,000 Japanese Families and Youth Volunteer Settlers, successfully enticed Japanese to Manchuria (Manchoukuo Year Book Co., 1940, p. 406; SMR, 1939, pp. 122-25).[7] In the early 1940s, almost half of the overseas Japanese population was located there (Asia Statistics Co., 1942, p. 510). The number of migrants would have continued to grow in number as well as proportion if it was not for the Allied victory in World War II.

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[5] Manifest Destiny as a concept managed to make its way into Japan through a number of different channels, thus giving rise to a number of different translations: *meihaku na unmei* and *meihaku na shimei* remain the most common. The Japanese understanding of Manifest Destiny in the 1930s and 1940s was often tainted by Social Darwinism and indigenous notions.

Colonists kept arriving from Japan long after it was clear that the war was lost. As late as April 1945, farmers and their families arrived at a settlement prepared for them in Kirin (Jilin) Province (Takahashi, 2002, p. 318). The Japanese effort expended in sending people to Manchuria was not matched in an attempt to recall them: in fact, in many cases there was no such effort at all. At war's end many Japanese migrants became *kimin* (throw away people), a group the authorities wrote off as unimportant and who were therefore left to their own devices.[8] Since many of the farming communities were located in remote areas, their escape from Manchuria was especially long and arduous. Due to the chaos of postwar East Asia, accurately counting the number of lost people is impossible. Bearing that in mind, the total number of Japanese who died in Manchuria is estimated at 176,000 out of a total population

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[6] "*Yuke wakōdo, Hokuman no yokuya e*" is the original Japanese. This slogan appeared on a Youth Corps poster. For a reproduction of this poster, see Gōda (1991, p. 202).

[7] The campaigns were called in Japanese *Manshū nōgyō imin 20 kanen 100 manko 500 mannin ijū keikaku* and *Manshū kaitaku seinen giyūtai*.

[8] *Kimin*, a two character combination of *ki* (discard or throw away) and *min* (people) is a term that was popular in the immediate post-World War II period.

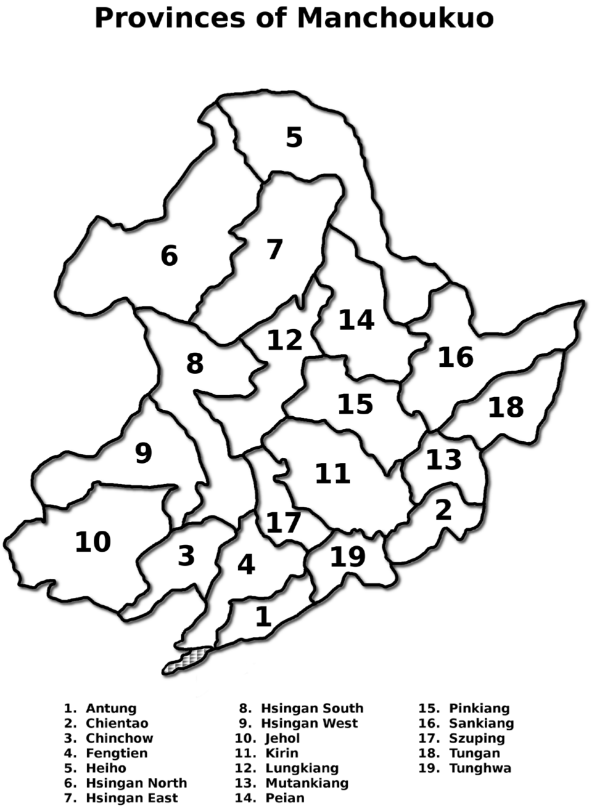
Provinces of Manchoukuo
5
6
7
14
12
8
16
15
18
9
13
11
2
17
10
3
4
19
1
1. Antung
2. Chientao
3. Chinchow
4. Fengtien
5. Heiho
6. Hsingan North
7. Hsingan East
8. Hsingan South
9. Hsingan West
10. Jehol
11. Kirin
12. Lungkiang
13. Mutankiang
14. Peian
15. Pinkiang
16. Sankiang
17. Szuping
18. Tungan
19. Tunghwa

Figure 1. The number of districts and provinces fluctuated over the course of Manchoukuo's short existence. Administrative tinkering occurred during World War II, but these changes were never fully implemented. For the purposes of this article the 1942 breakdown is sufficient.

of almost two million men, women, and children. Almost half of those who died were agrarian pioneers, although they only composed 14 percent of the population. This demographic suffered the longest and the most, so they naturally contribute disproportionately to the *hikiage* literature (Manmō Dōhō Engokai, 1962, p. 813).

Yamada Etsuko and the Japanese Exodus

In a village too close to the Soviet Union's border, the Yamada family heard the news that the enemy was approaching. The concerns of daily life became unimportant as panic ran through the settlement. In haste, people readied their departure. No one in the village knew it at the time but they were *kimin*. Ten-year-old Etsuko and the rest of the Yamada family gathered what they could. All eight family members prepared to depart, but only seven of them planned to leave. Etsuko's 85-year-old grandfather sat in a grassy field not far from the house, where he took his own life. According to his wife, he looked relieved just before he committed his final act (Gōda, 2003, p. 107).[9] This was a tragic scene but not an unusual one, as suicide in August of 1945 was becoming ordinary occurrence. Stories of people killing themselves abound in the literature. Why did the elder Yamada kill himself? If he was like his fellow aged countrymen and women, he did it out of fatigue, fear, or as a means to ensure that his family did not jeopardize their lives while trying to save his. His last moments suggest that he did it for the latter reason. He was lucky in a way. Other people's final moments were not so serene, as they too often spent their last minutes arguing with loved ones who objected to suicide. According to Yamada Tami (no known relation to Yamada Etsuko), during her trek to Harbin she witnessed elderly Japanese raise the topic of taking their own lives. She added that many of them had the determination to see it through (Hayashi, 1986, pp. 30-31).[10] In extreme cases, the elderly fought off relatives: an old woman, looking to lighten the burden upon her loved ones, dropped to the ground and sprawled out in a puddle of mud, making it impossible to move her. She eventually prevailed and her family was forced to leave her to die.[11] Some families did not require a fight, coercion, or even prompting to leave the elderly behind. When Yoneyama Yoshio was on the run, he witnessed people abandoning the very old and the very young in the mountains (Yoneyama, 1979, p. 183). The terrain certainly encouraged this, but so may have culture. Extant texts from the sixth century are the first to make mention of a practice called *obasute yama*, or the abandonment of old women on isolated mountains. It is unknown when this first began or how widespread it became, but in later periods *obasute yama* was mentioned with frequency in literary works.[12] This practice might well have been on the minds of historically literate Japanese. With little time to mourn, the seven remaining Yamadas along with the rest of the village headed for the nearby mountains.

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[9] The Yamada family was composed of the following members: Kumenosuke (age 85) grandfather, Sei (66) grandmother, Kimiko (29) mother, Makiko (?) older sister, Kazuko (8) younger sister, Isao (3) younger brother, Tsuyomi (1) baby girl. Etsuko was a ten year old girl and the age of her absent father, Yukio, was not provided. The plight of the Yamada family is found in Gōda (2003, pp. 107-108). Unless otherwise stated, all information about the Yamadas comes from this source. As an aside, there is also a mention of the Yamadas in Gōda (2000, pp. 108-113).

[10] Yamada Tami's own mother raised the topic of committing suicide. Kurota Taizō witnessed a group of elderly Japanese gathered to commit suicide with grenade (Kurota, 2008, p. 319).

Etsuko's father was not with the family during these trying times. Nor were the heads of most families since men of fighting age had been drafted into the armed services for the ongoing war. Mr. Sagara, who was presumably exempt from military service due to ill health, may have been the only younger man in the group. Without the help of fit men, the

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Accounts of elderly suicide are common in the literature.

[11] Some elderly gave into family demands to press forward, but when the opportunity presented itself, they took their own lives in secret. Haga Kimie witnessed an elderly woman lying on the ground crying. She refused to move until she was guilted into getting up. Later that night she hanged herself. Kimie also saw an elderly woman repeatedly bother her son to lighten his burden by killing her. Her son could not oblige, but eventually he was pestered into asking a soldier to fulfill his mother's wish (Minoguchi, 2005, pp. 208-209).

[12] Times of famine and strife, as one might expect, produced solutions that offend our modern sensibilities. *Obasute yama* is a well-known practice (legendary or real) where women too old to work were brought to a mountain by their children and left to die. This theme can be found in stories, Noh play, and dramas. *Nihon dai hyakka zensho*, s.vv, "*Obasute yama densetsu*," "Obasute." It is said that the Koreans had a similar custom called "*Goryeojang*."

group was vulnerable but they collectively put one foot in front of the other. They did not get very far, however, before the tragedy of war fell upon them. A group of Chinese took the villagers' possessions, but at least they did not steal away lives. Other fleeing pioneers had no such luck.[13] As the villagers of Ebara prepared to leave, to give an example, mobs of angry Chinese peasants gathered within view—a sight that scared the Japanese, who were barely armed and horribly outnumbered. Someone screamed for poison. Then someone else yelled that they had no wish to die by a foe's hand. Japanese should exit this world with grace a third person declared. These distraught people were forwarding an argument for suicide. The village headman mixed a noxious cocktail of morphine and potassium cyanide that he distributed. He fell unconscious after drinking the poison but did not die. The villagers then attempted to flee for safety. After a few confrontations and a couple of escapes, these Japanese villagers found themselves surrounded. Angry Chinese amassed, increasing their strength with each passing tick of the clock. The Chinese prevailed in the ensuing fight but people died on both sides, several hundred in total. Few Japanese still drew breath when it was over: the village headman was among them (Asada, 1986, pp. 23-28). The Chinese failed to kill him, just as he had failed to kill himself. Perhaps it was simply not his time to die.

At a village in Sankiang (Sanjiang) Province, not too far from Etsuko's home, enraged Chinese peasants armed with farming tools killed all the Japanese men. Their lust for blood did not stop there. Thirty-nine women and children had been tied up and bound together, then forcibly brought to a local cemetery where the Chinese killed them one by one. First with a sharpened bamboo spear, but when that broke they resorted to improvisation. A square timber was used to beat the rest over the head. Due to inattentiveness or just half-hearted beatings, some women survived to tell the tale (Hayashi, 1986, p. 28). In another case, over a hundred elderly men, women, and children, near Chiamussu (Jiamusi) in Sankiang Province spent their last moments in terror. Several hundred Chinese armed with farming tools (sickles, hatchets, pitchforks, etc.) cracked heads open, slit throats, and cut open bellies (Gotō, 1979, p. 209). Also in the same province, Chinese peasants attacked eighty women and children who had fled into an underground storehouse. Instead of placing themselves upon the mercy of their attackers, the Japanese drank poison, which records suggest was the preferred method of suicide for Japanese women of the era. Numerous accounts like this are known to exist. One of the most extreme cases took place in Peian (Beian) Province, where about 500 Japanese poisoned themselves (Asada, 1986, pp. 38-39).

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[13] Japanese often employed the term "*Manjin*" (Manchuria person). Narrowly, the term meant Han Chinese, but more broadly it referred to all peoples native to the area.

One might start to get the impression that the Chinese are a collection of cruel savages, but that is not the case at all. Each instance of savagery is bookended by instances of kindness. Chinese demonstrated their humanity towards needy Japanese by opening their homes to them, feeding them, adopting their children, and helping them cross difficult terrain. In short, acts of kindness outnumbered acts of cruelty in the literature. It is probably true that Chinese for the most part kept to themselves, avoiding or simply not interfering with evacuating Japanese when they saw them. This raises the question, why were some Chinese peasants so angry as to turn their farming tools into instruments of death? Evil doers most certainly existed in Manchuria as they did everywhere else, but while their existence can explain roving bands of thugs, it fails to explain the mobilization of hundreds of peasants determined to spill Japanese blood. Was it wounded national pride or something akin to this? To a degree, yes, but that is an incomplete explanation at best. Although many Chinese resented having Japanese neighbors, these people generally, from what can be gleaned from the sources, seemed content to watch the Japanese leave. What, then, drove some peasants to violence?

Put simply, revenge: revenge not for general offenses but for specific ones. In the aftermath of a Japanese defeat, local grudges superseded national ones. There is no way to present a perfect picture of what happened in 1945. There is also no way to count the number of victims. Likewise, there is no way to tally the wrong doings committed by Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Manchus, Mongols, Russians, or other peoples living in Manchuria. The best that can be put forward on a wide range of topics is a series of gross over-simplifications, and here is one of them. The root cause of violent unrest in parts of Manchuria owes its origins to Japanese activities. Although there are numerous reasons why Chinese carried out vendettas in the weeks and months following the collapse of Manchoukuo, brevity demands that only a couple be discussed here.

Abusive Japanese task masters created needless hardships for Chinese serving underneath them. It is not difficult to understand why such Japanese would be sought after by angry Chinese bent on revenge when the opportunity presented itself.[14] In one instance of payback, Chinese from a village in Lungkiang (Longjiang) Province called on a nearby Japanese settlement and demanded that four cruel racists be handed over to them. Japanese lied by claiming that the men had left the settlement, but one of the four was seen. On the following day two to three hundred Chinese amassed, carrying with them the same demands. Instead of trying to defuse the situation, a Japanese man ran into a crowd of Chinese swinging his sword. More Japanese did the same, cutting down Chinese peasants. A powerful retaliation followed. The Japanese buckled under the might of a superior force. When it was obvious that they had gotten the better of the Japanese, the Chinese stopped the killing. They took pity on the remaining Japanese and let them live

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[14] According to the Manmō Dōhō Engokai (Manchuria-Mongolia Compatriot Support Organization), Japanese through highhanded treatment of the locals brought about retaliation (Manmō Dōhō Engokai, 1962, p. 814).

(Sugawara, 1986, pp. 101-102).

The other motivation for Chinese seeking revenge is somewhat more complicated, and requires background information to be properly understood. When Japan and Nazi Germany won territorial possessions through military conquest they happily claimed the land but resented the fact it was already inhabited. In the case of Japan, continentals, be they industrious or not, far too often were seen as a nuisance since they occupied the ground that Hsinking (Xinjing) (the political center of Manchoukuo) and Tokyo wished to populate with Japanese. Indigenous industries also frustrated Japanese businesses because the Chinese produced competing products. Despite fancy rhetoric and a slew of catchy slogans, such as "concord of races" (J. *minzoku kyōwa*) and "Asia for the Asiatics" (J. *Ajiashugi*), the Japanese demonstrated that Asian overlords were no better than European ones, and when it came to land policies they could be much worse.

Despite the dissimilarities in geography, history, and culture, leading thinkers in both Japan and Germany during the first half of the twentieth century recognized commonality in the other. The Germans viewed themselves as a people without space (G. *volk ohne raum*), who required elbow room (G. *lebensraum*) and demonstrated their willingness to seize control of vast slices of geography (G. *grossraum*). The Japanese, too, had words for the same ideas. While it is true that aggressor states share the same vocabulary, it would be wrong to think that these two polities held like ideas due merely to convergence. Through actions and words they encouraged each other. Japan and Germany sought to achieve the idyllic agrarian society while also pursuing industrial ambitions at break-neck speed: spiritual cultivation through farming and worldly advancement through science and technology. Conquests on the Eurasian land mass by both nations could further those aims: land for farmers and raw materials for industrialists. Manchuria allowed the Japanese to hold onto the past while also embracing modernity. Etsuko may have been just a little girl but the hopes of a Japanese *lebensraum* rested upon her shoulders, as well as the shoulders of her fellow pioneers.

Chinese animosity towards their Japanese neighbors, as often as not, can be traced back to resentment over how Japanese acquired land for various colonization programs. Although set procedures had been outlined to minimize disruption to existing agricultural communities, according to Ronald Suleski, "Regulations were not strictly followed and ad hoc procedures were used instead. The ad hoc procedures were usually a combination of official policy and intimidation or outright force against the Chinese" (Suleski, 1981, p. 356). This was especially true in the early days. Instead of moving onto unused fields, which had the benefit of not alienating Chinese while also bringing new lands under cultivation, Japanese often sought already cleared and worked plots.[15] Through a number of underhanded means the Japanese pushed Chinese off their farms, and, to add insult to injury, under-compensated them as well (Suleski, 1981, pp. 357-359). "In some instances the Chinese tried to hide their land deeds by burying them in the walls of their houses. When the Japanese learned what the Chinese were doing, they sent in soldiers who with rifle butts smashed down the walls to recover the deeds" (Suleski, 1981, p. 359). When Manchoukuo collapsed, the day of reckoning arrived, but in many cases the Chinese exacted revenge on the wrong people. The Japanese pioneering families brought to Manchuria usually had little to do with land transactions.

Etsuko fled back to her village along with everyone else only to be greeted with more violence. The situation could be described as nothing less than dire. Minamikokusan was a village in Sankiang, the eastern-most province of Manchoukuo which had the misfortune to be bordered by the Soviet Union to the north and to the east. The village was so out of the way and insignificant that it was not even placed upon many period maps. Thus, it was unlikely that the cavalry would arrive. Soldiers, nevertheless, showed up in the village. They were not looking to save the women, children, and the elderly, but rather to save themselves. They were fleeing from the Soviet border. Regardless of why they had come, uniformed men must have been a comforting sight. Soldiers and civilians set out together, heading southwest, the most charmed direction given the surrounding geography. The march for Harbin, a city that lay about 149 miles (240 kilometers) away, took forty days. Long hours of walking through difficult terrain was the least of their troubles. Etsuko walked alongside her family, her neighbors, and of course the soldiers.

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[15] According to guidelines established by Japan's Takumushō (Ministry of Colonial Affairs), agrarian pioneers were to farm unoccupied lands. As was often the case, however, what was planned in Japan unfolded quite differently in Manchuria. The Takumushō produced a thirty-six page pamphlet where they stated their guideline in broad terms (Takumushō, 1940).

Just because the villagers were in the company of soldiers did not mean that they escaped the attention of roving bands of thugs and the ire of Chinese peasants seeking to satisfy their thirst for revenge. The latter, it must be said, sometimes exacted vengeance on surrogates: Japanese who were close at hand substituted for those who had wronged Chinese in some way but were out of reach. Etsuko's journey was repeatedly interrupted by violence. The soldiers fended off those they could and gave into the demands of those that they could not. Bandits took anything and everything of value. The constant stress of it all began to take its toll on both the villagers and the soldiers. The situation came to a head when a soldier became distressed over a crying baby.[16] He voiced his concern that sounds of crying would attract unwanted attention, which prompted an old man to rip the baby out of its mother's arms. With tears running down his face, the old man placed his hands around the infant's throat and squeezed until the little body fell limp. All the mother could do was watch. This triggered the killing of all of the children that, it was believed, could not fend for themselves.

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[16] In the literature, one finds several instances of soldiers getting upset with crying babies. In some of these cases, soldiers either killed the babies themselves or encouraged others to do it for them. For an account that contains some commonalities to the one in the text, see Koseko (1986, p. 190).

How these people reached this decision is perhaps beyond understanding, but they reached it nonetheless. One mother did not have the resolve to kill her child. She therefore asked a soldier to do it for her. He obliged with a bullet. An old woman placed an infant against her withered breast and walked into shoulder height water, washing away a life before it had ever lived. Etsuko was old enough to escape the fear-inspired violence. Her younger siblings were not so lucky. The fate of the boy toddler escaped reporting. The one-year-old baby girl was tossed into a well. At about this time Etsuko's grandmother, perhaps because she could no longer bear the madness, wandered away from the group to commit suicide. The four remaining Yamadas pressed forward.

Japanese had reason to fear angry peasants, enemy troops, bandits, and even their own people. Fukawa Kurako, a fifth grader, witnessed a Japanese man (probably a soldier) shoot elderly women and children without provocation. This man said, according to her, "For those who cannot fight, it is their place to die here" (Koseko, 1986, p. 164). While piling up the dead bodies, he sang *Umi yukaba* (*If We Go to Sea*) — a song produced in 1937 for the government's national mobilization efforts at the request of NHK (J. *Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai*), a radio company modeled after the BBC (Okeya, 2006, pp. 18-19; Cooper-Chen and Kodama, 1997, p. 181).[17] The song's popularity in the late 1930s and the early 1940s lead it to be informally called the second national anthem (Shinpo, 2006, p. 238). Although it is only four lines long, its lyrics are chillingly beautiful:

If we go to sea, may our corpses soak in the brine
If we go to mountains, may our corpses sprout grass

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[17] The lyrics of *Umi yukaba* are taken from a poem in the *Man'yōshū*, a collection of Japanese poetry that was compiled around the late eighth century. Several record companies sought to cash in on the song's popularity and made their own versions, not to mention off shoot songs.

May we have the honor to die at the feet of the Emperor
There is no looking back

Umi yukaba's artistic merits are perhaps debatable, but one can hardly argue that another song would have been more appropriate for these troubled times.

The villagers of Minamikokusan, Etsuko's people, and their soldier companions did not write the most extreme chapter in the book of suicide and murder in Manchuria. In fact, they did not even come close. In both brutality and body count they were outdone in numerous recorded instances. Near the Sungari River, for example, a band of fleeing Japanese grew concerned that they would be captured by Soviet troops. Men fearing torture and women fearing rape made a suicide pact, but they first needed to deal with the children. Disagreement arose over how everyone should die, not over the question of whether they should die. In this particular instance, the devil really was in the details. Deadlock over what to do meant that the village elders were going to have to decide for the group. They came up with a disturbing if not creative solution. All the children were to be thrown into a well along with dynamite, after which the adults were to blow themselves up too. Pale-faced, grief-stricken mothers ran over to a well shaft, where they dropped their children and ran away without looking back. The well was then exploded by dynamite. Now it was the adults' turn, but someone forwarded a compelling argument that now with the children gone they stood a chance of surviving. Liberated from the burden of caring for the children, they ran away (Gotō, 1979, pp. 202-204). Another story of slaughter comes to us from Mrs. Kumai, an owner and operator of a finishing school for girls. According to her, a group of Japanese pioneers buried their children in burning hay. The adults burned the children to death out of fear that the young would, through their incessant cries, alert the Soviets to the group's presence (Mochizuki, 1986, p. 74).

In a cornfield not too far from the city of Hsinking, villagers decided to kill themselves and their loved ones after they lost all hope of returning to Japan. Adults choked infants to death with their bare hands. This technique proved to be less successful on children since it was mainly women doing the strangulation and the children had more fight in them than the infants. A former nurse suggested that it would be more effective and humane to kill the children with taut cord. She demonstrated the technique to the others. Using cordage from their garments and corn stalks as levers for added torsion, the adults strangled the children with these improvised garrotes. To make the process quicker and thus more merciful in their view, the adults placed the children in defenseless positions so that the air could be kicked out of the children's lungs as the kimono cord tightened around their little necks. A 14-year-old boy named Kubota Isamu was pressured by the women to participate in the horror. In his memoir, he claims to have helped murder more than twenty children that day. The women then began killing each other. No less than seventy people lay dead when it was all over. The young teenager Isamu and Nakagawa Kōkichi, a 22-year-old man with a hearing problem, were all that was left. They planned to hang themselves with the cord used to kill the children, but they could not find a suitable tree. The two thought of various ways to end their lives. Kōkichi tried to bite through his wrists, but his teeth failed to find an artery to sever. Isamu had heard, perhaps from a school friend, that a strong blow between the eyebrows could kill a man. Standing face to face, the two firmly held one another by a shoulder with an extended arm. In their free hands they held rocks that they used to beat into each other's faces until both fell unconscious. They awoke hours later to discover that someone had stolen the clothing off their bodies. A Chinese man who spoke Japanese found them dazed and confused. After talking for awhile, he convinced them to stop trying to kill themselves. Isamu returned to Japan with emotional scars but physically no worse for ware. Kōkichi died of an illness in a refugee camp (Motojima, 2009, pp. 118-122).

Eight-year-old Suzuki Sachiko and her siblings were going to die—

the adults in the community decided to commit group suicide. Village leaders assigned several men the gruesome task of executing families. In preparation, mothers who were intent on filicide put blindfolds on their children. Sachiko heard a neighbor boy screaming at the top of his lungs, pleading for his young life. The boy yelled something to the effect of "I want to live" (Minoguchi, 2005, p. 22). His father responded by saying that he could not take him along. Sachiko never saw that boy again. In the confusion that accompanied the killings, she hid among the dead. When the sounds of violence gave way to quiet calm, little Sachiko stood up and looked around. Her mother as well as four of her siblings lay dead. One of her sisters also managed to escape death. Sachiko and her sister got up to move around but when they heard noises, they crawled under their mother's bloody corpse to hide, fearing the return of the Japanese executioners. In an interesting twist, the Soviets proved to be Sachiko's saviors. After finding the girls, the Soviets found Chinese who were willing to take care of them. These children were raised as Chinese for two years until their father somehow found them (Minoguchi, 2005, pp. 22-24, p. 29).[18] These girls managed to return to Japan, but many children in similar circumstances spent the rest of their days in China living as Chinese.

For the second grader Kodama Keiko, the killing began at Kokenmiao (Gegenmiao) as she waited for a train that never arrived. Instead of a boxcar rolling towards the station, she met with a shower of bullets. Soviet soldiers arrived with guns blazing, shooting into the crowd. Keiko, her mother, and others found refuge in a ditch. At night the girl awoke with a pain in her throat. She opened her eyes to see her mother in the act of stabbing her. Keiko's mother stopped when she saw her daughter looking back at her. Later that night, the distraught mother took her own life. Mrs. Okada, also in the ditch, began to lose her sanity. She slit open her baby's belly with the knife she took out of Keiko's mother's dead hand. Then she pushed the child's innards back in, fixed up its wrappings, and then began to feed the corpse as if it was a living baby. Keiko was to see more tragedy during her flight to safety, hiding along the way from both the Soviets and Chinese (Mori, 1988, pp. 84-87).

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[18] There is some disagreement as to the Soviet involvement, as two sources contain contradictions on this point (Minoguchi, 2005, pp. 24-25; Gōda, 2003, p. 104).

Etsuko lived too far from the rails. Keiko lived close enough but arrived too late. Just because people made it on the train, however, did not mean that they were out of harm's way. Sugawara Kōsuke, a young military policeman who was protecting the families of high officials, left Hsinking on a train steaming its way towards a waiting boat in the Korean peninsula. They departed with ample food but limited water, forcing a stop at a provincial river. People got out to refresh themselves. The engineer released the breaks and headed forward when bandits attacked. The unlucky and the slow were left behind. Several young mothers and their children ran after the train but could not catch up. They screamed then, and for decades thereafter continued to scream in Sugawara's nightmares (Kanagawa Shinbunsha, 2006, pp. 127-130). One can imagine these children running around in the safety of their school's playground just days before, but they might not have been any better off over there during these desperate times.

In a school not far from Peian, a group of adults had reached a fateful decision: to grenade a classroom with themselves inside. As events came to show, it was an idea that lent itself more to words than practice. A select few had the job of throwing grenades into the classroom. Since none of them had a military background, their knowledge of weapons was limited. The grenades were thrown into the enclosed space where they exploded, but somehow "living blood clots" stumbled out of the room. Some people had been blinded by the blast and all of them had charred flesh that was seeping blood. Those who could begged for the agony to end. The men who threw the grenades into the classroom now threw grenades at individuals. When it was all over, the executioners burned down the school and lived to tell their story (Sakamoto, 2000, pp. 175-177). Running from their imaginations of what was going to happen to them at the hands of their enemies drove Japanese to commit unspeakable horrors upon themselves and their loved ones.

Takayama Sumiko lied to her two children. She told her four-year-old son and two-year-old daughter that they could eat as much rice as they wanted if they placed their hands together, close their eyes, and prayed quietly. The children relished the thought of eating white rice. Mother and children knelt in a row. The executioner came as planned and shot the children. Before he was able to squeeze a bullet into Mrs. Takayama a Soviet shell exploded, killing him and leaving her dazed and confused. She ran around aimlessly until a Chinese family found her and took her in (Sugawara, 1986, pp. 93-95). She revisited the area in 1980 as a 58-year-old woman. With tears in her eyes, she spread white rice upon the ground. "Please forgive this mother who lied to you [my children]," she cried out (Sugawara, 1986, p. 96). There are a slew of accounts just like these. Group suicide was commonplace in Manchuria, which is why a book with the title *Shūdan jiketsu: Suterareta Manshū kaitakumin* (*Group Suicide: The Throw Away Pioneers in Manchuria*) could be written (Sakamoto, 2000). Had the author wished, his book could have been a multi-volume work. Such a book can exist, to put it bluntly, because Japanese back then had a propensity for choosing permanent solutions to temporary problems. Etsuko and her group continued towards Harbin minus the babies, the toddlers, and the very young.

Bandits, thugs, and other unpleasant men continued to bite at their heels. Eventually, they were again brutalized by Chinese and then by Soviet troops as well. It was not uncommon for the Soviets to detain Japanese civilians only to let them go after weeding out weapons and troublemakers. Unfortunately, sometimes these encounters ended tragically. Theft, rape, and beatings may not have been the norm but they were common enough. Soviet troops detained Ogata Kiyosaburō along with his beautiful wife and their four-year-old child. At least one of the soldiers became smitten with Mrs. Ogata. He reached for her, but Mr. Ogata protested. A bullet to the head stopped any further interference by the protective husband. Mrs. Ogata screamed and dropped to the ground. While clinching her husband's dead body, she was grabbed by the back of her neck and yanked to her feet. A solid punch found her left cheek. The force of the blow was so great that it popped out an eyeball. These soldiers took away her husband, took away her beauty, and now they proceeded to take away her life. She was strangled to death there and then. The four-year-old child was strangled, too, and then thrown on top of his/her parents (Suzuki, 1987, pp. 60-61). Beauty can be a liability as the case of Mrs. Ogata vividly shows. Japanese women aware of the danger shaved their heads, wore dirty clothes, covered their faces with soot, acted sickly, and purposefully maintained body odor in an effort to avoid unwanted attention.

Etsuko's older sister decided she had gone as far as she was willing to go. Makiko "voluntarily went with a Manchoukuoan," meaning that she married a Chinese man or entered into some other such arrangement. There are many instances of Japanese women marrying Chinese during this period. If not forced, some women did it for food, others for safety, while the rest grew tired of running and sought to make the most of their situation in China. What was in it for Chinese men? The simple answer is a free woman, or at the very least reasonably priced. Poor peasants could marry a Japanese woman without paying a dowry, which they might not have ever been able to afford (Yamakawa, 1995, p. 226). Ōno Katsuyo was the apple of Mr. Li's eye. He proposed to feed her group if he could have Katsuyo's hand. It sounded like a reasonable offer to a few of the group's members, who then attempted to pressure the girl into marriage. She refused with an emphatic *no* (Yamakawa, 1995, p. 227). Not all women were as strong-willed as Katsuyo and not all Japanese men were willing to accept no for an answer. Etō Taka was forced into prostitution, along with other women, by a Japanese acquaintance. She was sold many times over to Chinese men (Uemura, 1994, p. 117).

Violence begets more violence as tragedy becomes tragedies. A few years after Japan's capitulation, a number of women who had married Chinese men and even had children with them ran away when they heard that boats were taking Japanese back home. According to Yuzawa Masashi, more than 100 women arrived pregnant and sought to scratch away their shame of having lain with a Chinese. They also committed infanticide (Gōda, 2003, p. 116). Women who realized they were pregnant at sea sought abortions when they arrived back in Japan (Abe and Katō, 2004, p. 61). Japanese racism played no small part in these decisions. No one knows whatever became of Etsuko's older sister. She probably lived out the rest of her life in China, a common fate for someone in her position. The three remaining Yamadas continued onward.

Of the eight Yamadas, only Etsuko, her younger sister Kazuko, and her mother reached Harbin. It was October 3, 1945, and although the war had technically ended weeks before they reached Harbin, one would have hardly noticed given the conditions on the ground. Defeated, tired, hungry, and weak, the refugees huddled together in apprehension. Death rode the Siberian winds towards Harbin that winter, and the Japanese dropped one by one. Etsuko's mother and sister were among the unlucky. This was yet another horror for the little girl to endure. Etsuko was now all alone. As dysentery and disease spread through their camp, frozen corpses piled up outside. It was not long before wild dogs realized that they had something worth gnawing on. A funeral pyre was lit to prevent further desecration of the dead. It was considered more humane to let fire consume the corpses than dogs. The smell was so strong that it remained with Etsuko for life. After much suffering, she made her way to Japan. But what of her father? He did not escape the war either, leaving her an orphan. Etsuko moved in with relatives who saw her to adulthood.[19]

Experiences of Others

Japanese families who lived near the coast or inhabited the cities fared better than pioneers in the countryside. Moreover, those with means also fared better. The diary of Kurokawa Toku, the wife of a wealthy industrialist, relates inconveniences and minor complaints. She wrote about Chinese looters, Russian murderers, and Japanese suicides, but all of her anecdotes came from hearsay. While Japanese pioneers literally struggled to survive, Kurokawa filled pages of her diary with vitriolic prose about unmannered Chinese and Russians that, when viewed in the context of the times, seems out of touch with the larger problems of the day. She was irritated by the fact that even Chinese "toilet ladlers" (night-soil men) could voice disparaging remarks about Japanese. When seeing a Chinese man walking quickly with items in hand, she assumed that "he is thieving … probably from a Japanese" (Amo, 2004, p. 22). She also had a boundless contempt for Russians who, according to her, speak "*baka baka*" (idiot idiot) and "eat with their hands … and drink from the bottle" (Amo, 2004, pp. 20, 24). Ample use of the pejorative *Rosuke* (Ruskie) in her writing further illustrates her attitude towards Russians. Along with her fellow Japanese, Kurokawa lost the war, lost Manchoukuo, lost almost everything but at least she was able to emerge from the devastation with her snobbery, enmity, and prejudices intact.

The fall of Manchoukuo spelled doom not just for Japanese but for suspected collaborators as well, be they Chinese, Koreans, Russians, or others. These people were put on trial by the Republic of China (ROC), the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Soviet Union, and by other governments as well. If found guilty, the accused could be sentenced to death. Ri Kōran, a popular movie actress for the Manchoukuo Motion

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[19] Etsuko Yamada fled her village at age ten. One year older, Yoko Kawashima Watkins escaped from northern Korea at the end of the war. Her story is told in the adolescent-friendly book *So Far From the Bamboo Grove* (Watkins, 1986).

Picture Corporation (Manshū Eiga Kyōkai, or Man'ei for short), found herself accused of betraying her fellow Chinese for starring in several Japanese movie productions. Her acting ability was much better than her accusers realized. She was, in fact, a Japanese woman masquerading as a Chinese. At first the court refused to accept this, but a Russian friend was able to secure the proper documentation that verified Ri Kōran's true nationality (Yamaguchi, 2004, pp. 113-114). Her Chinese coworkers were not so fortunate. Li Ming, another Man'ei starlet, was sentenced to five years in prison and her possessions confiscated (Masui, 1977, p. 163). Due to missing records, the total number of Chinese who were found guilty remains unknown. With that said, one regional court during its first four months of operation passed judgment on about 2,000 people, with sentences ranging from a few years in prison to execution (Masui, 1977, pp. 31-32).

Russians were another group that had something to fear. In the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, tsarists and those who fell afoul of the new leadership wound up in the city of Harbin, which for a time was the largest Russian enclave outside of the country, hence the moniker "Oriental Moscow" (Shapiro, 2009, p. 8). When Soviet tanks rolled into Manchuria, Russian Harbinese with a troubled past needed to worry. Those caught by the Soviets were forcibly repatriated to work in labor camps or were executed like Grigory Semyonov, a leader of an anti-Soviet movement that had Japanese patrons (Stephan, 1994, pp. 332-333). Due to post-war politics in the former USSR and the PRC, few Russians live in Harbin today. East Asia was a dangerous place during and after the war, and not just for Japanese and Russians, but for Koreans as well.

When Japan annexed the Korean peninsula in 1910, some of the locals decided it was better to move north into Manchuria rather than remain in the peninsula. In the decades that followed more Koreans joined them: some ran away from hardship while others ran to opportunity. In 1937, nearly a million Koreans lived in Manchuria (SMR, 1939, p. 130; Asia Statistics Co., 1942, p. 509). Not all Korean immigrants were welcomed by the Chinese, Manchus, and others. Robbery, assault, rape, kidnapping, and murder remained a constant concern for some of the transplanted communities. With the establishment of Manchoukuo, the number of attacks on Koreans declined (Jinno, 1998, p. 147). The new state was not a cause for celebration, however, since many Koreans had left their motherland to get away from the Japanese meddling. With that said, other Koreans were quite willing to work with and for the Japanese—something that did not endear them to the Chinese who called the Japanese "devils" and the Koreans "devils' henchmen." The Japanese purposefully used the Koreans as bearers of bad news to the Chinese, intentionally creating a wedge between the groups (Jinno, 1998, p. 193). Heavy Korean involvement in the opium trade certainly did not win them friends either: "The participation of Koreans in this [opium] trade does not reflect credit upon the present and supposedly modern educated Koreans, who frequently appeal to world sympathy in connection with their independence aspirations," a journalist from *The China Review* wrote (Jennings, 1995, pp. 121-122, quoting Powell, 1929, p. 489).[20]

Japan's surrender was greeted with celebrations in Korean communities across Manchuria. Villagers and townsfolk alike made bonfires and lit firecrackers with the accompaniment of singing and dancing. Korean flags were hastily made and flown with pride. But all was not well. Some Koreans did not learn until it was too late that their Chinese neighbors harbored ill will towards them as well (Jinno, 1998, p. 193). A number of Korean villages were wiped off the map in a similar fashion to the Japanese ones. Koreans who suffered the same fate as the Japanese pioneers on the whole, however, did not behave as self-destructively. As had been the case too many times before, Koreans were caught in the middle of

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[20] For further information on the Koreans in the opium trade, see Jennings (1997).

East Asian turmoil. Hundreds of thousands of Koreans remained in Manchuria; today they number about 2 million (Joo and Kwak, 2001, p. 229). The end of World War II and its immediate aftermath did not see the end of Korean suffering. Whether they remained or repatriated, war was waiting for them: the Chinese Civil War (1946-1950) for the former and the Korean War (1950-1953 cease fire) for the latter. The plight of Koreans reveals yet another side to the Manchoukuo story. So too do Japanese minorities who, moreover, offer an interesting perspective on Japanese motivations and behaviors.

The Manchoukuo of books and articles was a wondrous place which, in the opinion of Kaizawa Tadashi, sharply contrasted with reality. Kaizawa was an Ainu (an ethnically distinct group indigenous to the Japanese island of Hokkaido) so he understood all too well Japanese racism and discrimination. Manchoukuo seemed an ideal place to start a life, with its bounty and purported racial harmony. Not long after arriving on the continent, though, he learned that words can be just as false when printed as they are when spoken. He gripes in his memoir about Japanese chauvinism and laziness. He moved to Manchuria to develop new lands but when he got there he was assigned a plot that was already under plow. According to Kaizawa, Japanese farmers dropped their hoes at the first opportunity to become overseers of Chinese working the land (Kaizawa, 1993, p. 20).[21] Some Japanese lived up to the ideals set forth but many clung to old prejudices. One event that really upset Kaizawa involved the burial of a dead baby. A young Japanese man married a Korean girl and went about starting a family. Unfortunately, the baby was born prematurely and died. The burial of the baby brought tensions in the village to a head. One man voiced his displeasure at the thought of a Korean being buried in the same ground his body was to rest in one day.

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[21] Another Japanese minority group, the Ryukyuans, also immigrated to Manchuria as agrarian pioneers. For more information on this topic, see Okinawa Joseishi o Kangaeru Kai (1999).

The Ainu in Kaizawa was deeply offended. “What about the principle of *gozoku kyōwa* (concord of five races),” he questioned aloud (Kaizawa, 1993, p. 20). The Japanese man was angered by Kaizawa’s insolence and pulled a gun on him. Fortunately for the Ainu, others stopped the man before he could pull the trigger (Kaizawa, 1993, pp. 20-21). Kaizawa, in the postwar years, became a well-known advocate for minority rights in Japan.

Not all Japanese minorities, however, embraced the ideals of *gozoku kyōwa* and *minzoku kyōwa* (racial harmony) like Kaizawa. In an attempt to escape poverty and discrimination, pioneering columns of *burakumin* (a Japanese social minority) left Japan looking for a better life. They “have the same racial, cultural, and national origins as their fellow Japanese,” but are guilty of having ancestors who engaged in tainted professions such as animal slaughter and the handling of the dead (Kodansha, 1993, pp. 146-147). It is something akin to Catholic notions of original sin but which can be neither washed away by baptism nor good deed. When one group arrived in Kirin Province during the summer of 1941, they witnessed Japan’s Kwantung (Guandong) Army evict Chinese from their homes to give them to the *burakumin*. This made them upset, but they quickly got over their feelings of guilt. In Manchoukuo, they felt “reborn” and for the first time “became proud of their heritage as Japanese” (Takahashi, 2002, p. 323). Despite their intimate understanding of being the downtrodden, these *burakumin* were all too quick to pick up the mantle of authority and abuser. They felt liberated from the poverty and discrimination that afflicted them in Japan, and enjoyed the coolie labor which they cruelly underpaid and intimidated with their relationship to the Kwantung Army (Takahashi, 2002, p. 323).[22] A history of abuse was not enough to dissuade these colonists from becoming abusers at the first opportunity. One might conclude that members of this *burakumin* village did not oppose unequal relationships back in Japan, they just opposed their position. It would be interesting to know how other Japanese responded to their tainted countrymen in Manchoukuo. *Burakumin* should have been cynical towards the slogans of the day that called for harmony between the races, since the *burakumin* experience told them that harmony was not even obtainable within a single race. Since Chinese and Soviet enmity did not distinguish between tainted and untainted Japanese, the exodus for *burakumin* was like that of the rest of their countrymen.

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[22] For further information on these *burakumin*, see Takahashi (1995).

Conclusion

The collapse of Manchoukuo could be told from countless perspectives and framed by as many methodologies. Japanese prefer personal stories of the return diaspora, or *hikiage* (repatriation) literature. Heart wrenching narratives may be credited for this subgenre's success, but so too must Japanese bias. The impulse to view Japanese as victim instead of victimizer is a national habit, one that writers and book publishers have been happy to feed. Even those Japanese who committed horrible acts upon their own people are usually seen through sympathetic eyes, an aspect of the literature that is largely lost in translation because certain Japanese cultural sensibilities of the age are, if not inexplicable, very difficult to convey to foreign audiences. Despite the exaltation of Japanese suffering during wartime, writers by and large avoid jingoistic and militaristic prose. Their narratives are Japanese-centric but not dogmatically nationalistic. The non-fiction *hikiage* subgenre is nearing the inevitable moment where all those who escaped death in the aftermath of World War II are now dead or dying of old age. Living monuments to this period of history are being replaced by chiseled stone of cenotaphs. The personal experiences of those fleeing for their lives will remain a powerful force in Japan's Manchoukuo corpus, but as memories fade and generations change, new perspectives will inevitably replace the old. The transition is already well underway.

The objective of this article was to expose an English-reading audience to the exodus from Manchuria as told in Japanese books and periodicals. This was done mainly by forwarding anecdotes that contained the literature's recurrent dark themes of starvation, disease, exhaustion, robbery, abandonment, forced marriage, rape, assault, torture, suicide, and murder. A variety of people committed these horrible acts, but debauched Soviets and predacious Chinese were the frequent antagonists of fleeing migrants. Group suicides and large scale parricide are rare phenomena in Western cultures, and thus makes Japanese behavior difficult for some to understand. Why did so many Japanese take their own lives and the lives of loved ones? This is a question that cannot be properly answered in a few sentences, but to oversimplify, a decade of persuasive propaganda before the attack on Pearl Harbor fed the historic distrust of outsiders, which at war's end saw Chinese, Soviets, and Americans as conquerors bent on slaughter. The position of suicide in Japanese culture, moreover, informed their thinking. Suicide in Japan had been a respected form of protest, a celebrated military tactic, and a time-honored means of atonement. Additionally, group suicide had been venerated in the performing arts for centuries. The killing of the young grew out of a twisted sense of responsibility, which for many held a higher position than life itself. A woman returnee claimed, "Killing a child is preferable to abandoning it to an unknown fate" (Jinno, 1982, pp. 144-145). Many Japanese when making life and death decisions agreed with her sentiment.

Personal accounts shed light on the past, but memoirs must be viewed with a degree of skepticism. Japanese in Manchuria—by their own words—demonstrated time and again an inability to empathize with outsiders, making their accounts ill-equipped to address a variety of academic concerns. As a concession to brevity, this article avoided numerous avenues of inquiry. The Japanese exodus from Manchuria is a topic too complex for a single article to shoulder. While a wealth of personal accounts are readily available for scholars to examine, too few critical studies have been written to date. More research and detached writing is required in both English and Japanese. The topic, additionally, would be richer if the viewpoints of different ethnic groups received more attention, but that is a project for another day.

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