

Colonial Empire and Mythology Studies

Research on Japanese Myth in the Early Shōwa Period

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Throughout the centuries the myths that head the two early national histories *Kojiki* (712) and *Nihon shoki* (720) have been subject to ongoing reinterpretation, with many finding in them an expression of the distinctive features of Japanese polity, identity, and religion, i.e., Shinto. In 1899 this long history of reinterpretation entered a new phase with the publication of an essay by the Meiji literary critic and commentator Takayama Chogyū 高山樗牛 (1871–1902) entitled “Myth and History in the Divine-age Chapter of the *Kojiki*” (*Kojiki jindaikan no shinwa oyobi reki-shi* 古事記神代巻の神話及歴史). In this essay Takayama compared Susanoo, the unruly younger brother of the sun goddess Amaterasu, with the figure of Indra in Indian mythology and concluded from their similarities that the Japanese people originally came from the south. The essay sparked a debate over the character of Susanoo, a debate that in turn spurred the development of the modern study of mythology in Japan.¹ From the publication of Takayama’s article to the present day, Japanese mythology studies have had a strong comparative orientation. Researchers have sought to compare Japanese myths with mythologies from other places in the world with the aim of discovering which regions influenced Japanese mythology and determining to which typology Japanese myths belong. Intertwined with this focus on comparative typology has been a concern for mythology as an expression of national character, or ethnicity.² Below I will explore some of the forms

1. For a detailed analysis of the “Susanoo debate” and the work of Takayama Chogyū, see Hirafuji 2001, 2004, 2005, and 2006.

2. The term *minzokusei* 民族性, which in some cases has been translated as “ethnic nationality,” is rendered in this article by both “ethnic character” and “ethnic-

that this dual focus on comparative typology and ethnicity took in the period when Japan claimed status as an imperial power and holder of colonies. I will pay attention in particular to the period following the Manchurian Incident of 1931 so as to see the impact on these orientations of the steady move towards a wartime footing.³

JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY STUDIES IN THE EARLY SHŌWA PERIOD

Specialists in the study of mythology such as Ōbayashi Taryō 大林太良 (1929–2001) and Matsumura Kazuo 松村一男 (b. 1953) have previously undertaken to survey the modern history of the field in Japan. In his *History of Japanese Mythological Studies* (*Nihon shinwa no kenkyūshi*, Ōbayashi 1972), Ōbayashi Taryō, a scholar of cultural anthropology and mythology, demarcated mythology studies in modern Japan into four periods: 1) 1899 to 1921; 2) 1922 to 1945; 3) 1945 to 1958; 4) 1958 to the present (1972). The second period covers the era addressed in the present essay. According to Ōbayashi,

... the second period started in 1922, when Matsumura Takeo published two articles in the academic journals *Kokugakuin zasshi* 国学院雑誌 and *Chūō shidan* 中央史壇, articles that can be called a prototype of Japanese mythology studies. This period lasted until the Japanese defeat in 1945. [...] The most important feature of this

ity.” The word is derived from *minzoku* (“ethnos,” “ethnic group,” “people”), which is in itself a controversial term that has been compared to “race” in racist discourse. These terms are all rather imprecise, however, *minzoku* corresponding best to the German “Volk,” which in the interwar period also included nationalistic overtones (Doak 2001, pp. 3–10). *Minzokusei*, therefore, seems to correspond well to the German “*Volksgeist*” or “*Volkscharakter*,” terms that can frequently be found in National-Socialist discourse. At the same time, however, *minzokugaku* 民族学 (lit. “study of the *minzoku*”) is also a standard translation for “ethnology.” [Translator’s note.]

3. Some scholars, including in recent times the Jungian scholar Kawai Hayao 河合隼雄 (1928–2007), have taken a psychological approach to the issue of myth and ethnicity, seeking in the myths evidence of the distinct national character of the Japanese. I will omit this approach from consideration here.

period is the emergence of a new approach, which applied ethnological knowledge and theories to the field of Japanese mythology.⁴

Ōbayashi further explains that “from the late 1920s onward, new scholars appeared on the stage who greatly advanced the study of Japanese myths.” Among these scholars, in addition to Matsumura Takeo 松村武雄 (1883–1969), Ōbayashi mentions Matsumoto Nobuhiro 松本信広 (1897–1981), Oka Masao 岡正雄 (1889–1982), Mishina Shōei 三品彰英 (1902–1971), and Numazawa Kiichi 沼沢喜市 (1907–1980). Matsumura Kazuo, who arrives at a similar periodization of mythology studies, lists the same names, with the exception of Numazawa.⁵

I certainly agree with Ōbayashi and Matsumura Kazuo that scholars such as Matsumura Takeo, Matsumoto Nobuhiro, Oka Masao, and Mishina Shōei established the foundations of the modern study of mythology in Japan. Active before and after the Pacific War, the four have exerted a tremendous influence on later researchers, particularly the first postwar generation of scholars of the Japanese myths. However, very little research has been done about the character of the mythology studies that these four men conducted under the Fascist regime of the 1930s and 1940s, or how their mythology studies were related to the sociopolitical conditions of this time.⁶ It is this issue that I shall focus on below.

JAPANESE MYTHS AND ETHNICITY: MATSUMURA TAKEO

A graduate of the English Department of Tokyo Imperial University, Matsumura Takeo took an interest in mythology from his days as an undergraduate and wrote his doctoral dissertation on the mythology of ancient Greece. Apart from teaching English at Urawa Higher School, he lectured on mythology at Tokyo Imperial University and Kokugakuin University and in 1922

4. Ōbayashi 1972, p. 163.

5. Matsumura's periods are 1) Meiji and Taishō, 2) Early Shōwa, and 3) Later Shōwa to present (Matsumura 1997).

6. In fact, a few recent studies have been done on Oka and his cooperation with the war effort as an ethnologist, including establishment in the midst of the war of the Ethnic Research Institute (see below, pp. 98–99). These studies do not mention Oka's treatment of mythology, however.

also obtained a government scholarship to study mythology in Europe. He is perhaps best known as the author of *Fundamentals of Mythology* (*Shinwagaku genron* 神話学原論, 1940–1941), wherein he discusses a wide range of Western theories on mythology, and for his postwar four-volume work *Studies of Japanese Myth* (*Nihon shinwa no kenkyū* 日本神話の研究, 1955–1958), which aims at a comprehensive analysis of the elements of Japanese mythology. Praised by colleagues as “the highest authority of Japanese mythology studies,” he is indeed the most eminent scholar of mythology in the early Shōwa period.

During his long career, beginning in the 1920s and lasting until his death in 1969, Matsumura published a large number of articles and books. Ōbayashi Taryō (1971a) divides Matsumura’s oeuvre into two phases: those of his “formative period” (1921–1929) and the “mature” works of the 1940s and 1950s. Strangely, Ōbayashi does not mention Matsumura’s output from the 1930s at all, and thus it appears almost as if Matsumura did no research during this decade. This, however, is not the case. As might be expected from his academic background, Matsumura’s overall approach to the subject of mythology is rooted in comparative typology. From the mid-1930s to 1945, however, he also published several works dealing with the relationship between Japanese myths and Japanese ethnic character (*minzokusei*).

In 1934, for instance, Matsumura published *Ethnic Character and Myth* (*Minzokusei to shinwa* 民族性と神話), wherein he takes up the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Northern Europeans, Celts, and Japanese, and examines how the ethnic character of these peoples are reflected in their respective mythologies. He finds the distinctive feature of Japanese myth to lie in the pervasive presence of the “founding spirit (*kenkoku seishin* 建国精神) focused on the nation and the emperor.” Another defining characteristic of the Japanese is their abhorrence of impurity (*kegare*) and darkness, manifested in the mythical episodes of Izanagi’s escape from the land of the dead and subsequent ablutions to purify himself from its pollution and the banishment of Susanoo from the High Plain of Heaven for his destructive and defiling actions there. This fastidiousness led to the development of specific purification rituals (*misogi harae*). Matsumura explains this as follows:

[The Japanese] have been more sensitive than many other peoples (*minzoku*) to impurity (*kegare*) and defilement (*tsumi*) and concerned to cleanse themselves physically and spiritually. Therefore

they have not only developed immensely complicated purification rituals, but have also preserved them through the ages. These are important points to keep in mind.⁷

To be sure, other peoples also have purification rituals, but, Matsumura argues, in the Japanese case they are distinct in terms of 1) the variety of methods employed, 2) thoroughness in practice, 3) continuity and ubiquity, and 4) multiplicity of deities associated with such rituals, thus showing that the Japanese are particularly anxious to rid themselves of impurity and defilement.

In this publication, Matsumura deduces the ethnic characteristics of the Japanese from his interpretation of their myths, but he treats these myths as being of a comparable nature to those of other regions and does not conclude that the Japanese are superior to other ethnic groups. According to his own testimony, he “avoided all value judgments as far as possible and simply sought to group elements according to their similarities and differences and the sources of those similarities and differences” (Matsumura 1934a, p. 436). Despite the commitment to scientific objectivity that he shows here, Matsumura exhibits a quite different stance in an article entitled “Japanese Mentality as It Appears in Folktales and Folk Beliefs” (*Mintan minzoku shinkō ni arawaretaru Nihon seishin* 民譚民俗信仰に現れたる日本精神), which appeared the same year (1934) in volume 8 of a series called *Lectures on the Japanese Mind* (*Nihon seishin kōza* 日本精神講座).

Lectures on the Japanese Mind was put out from 1933 to 1935 in twelve volumes by the publishing house Shinchōsha and included laudatory messages from Konoe Fumimaro 近衛文麿 (1891–1945), then president of the House of Peers and later prime minister, and Tokutomi Sohō 徳富蘇峰 (1863–1957), a leading figure in the ideological mobilization of the nation for war. In his commendation Tokutomi wrote:

For Japan in the present time of crisis, national unity is of utmost necessity. To realize this goal, people must be separated from slavish admiration and imitation of Western thought in order to awaken to the just and impartial Imperial Way (*kōdō* 皇道). [...] Promotion

7. Matsumura 1934a, p. 417.

of this Imperial Way is the main purpose of *Lectures on the Japanese Mind*.⁸

This citation illustrates quite vividly the tone of the series, and indeed, Minami Hiroshi 南博 has called it a “compilation of Fascist *nihonjinron*.”⁹

Matsumura’s contribution to these *Lectures* overlaps in theme with *Ethnic Character and Myth*, but is far less measured in tone and content. Matsumura gives as the definitive features of the Japanese mind: “1) a unique devotion to the nation and the emperor, 2) a sturdy and straightforward sense of purity, and 3) a noble and refined simplicity.”¹⁰ He gives particular attention to the implications of “devotion to the nation and the emperor.” Among other things he draws significance from the fact that the episode of Izanagi and Izanami giving birth to the land mentions the different regions that they produce one by one. This, he holds, demonstrates that the Japanese people had a remarkably well-developed “concept of the nation” (*kokka kannen* 国家観念) such as was not to be found in the mythologies of other peoples. Moreover, the relationship between the emperor (*tennō*) and the people is not that of ruler and ruled, but “main and branch houses.” In other words, the Japanese people as a whole were part of a large family structure headed by the emperor. “Keeping this precious relationship between emperor and people constantly in their minds, the Japanese strive day and night for the prosperity of their emperor and their nation. This must be called the loftiest characteristic of the Japanese mind.”¹¹ In addition to this greater emphasis on *tennō*ism, Matsumura states in a stronger form the points about the concern for purity that he had already singled out in *Ethnic Character and Myth* as a characteristic of the Japanese outlook. The Japanese are not simply more sensitive to impurity than “many other peoples”; they are more sensitive than “all other peoples.”

A similar “ethnicist” interpretation of myth can be found in Matsumura’s article “The Japanese View of Life as It Appears in Folklore” (*Denshō ni arawaretaru Nihon minzoku no seikatsu ri’nen* 伝承に現れたる日本民族の理念), published in 1943, in which Matsumura again ponders the relationship between the Japanese people and the *tennō*. While other ethnic groups, as

8. Tokutomi 1933, p. iv.

9. Minami 1994, p. 155.

10. Matsumura 1934b, p. 72.

11. Matsumura 1934b, p. 82.

for instance the Greeks, did not regard their kings as divine beings, “for our Japanese people, the tennō was indeed a god. He was a living deity.”¹² He further asserts that it can be read from the Japanese myths that the Japanese people took “serving the emperor as the highest and utmost ideal of their life.” Underlying this ideal was the perception that both the Japanese land and Amaterasu, the ancestral deity of the tennō, were alike products of the divine couple Izanagi and Izanami. Therefore, Matsumura argues, for the Japanese people the land where they lived was inseparable from the imperial house.

Despite the focus on ethnic character in the above-mentioned works, in his two-volume *Fundamentals of Mythology*, published in 1940 and 1941, which deals with mythology in general rather than Japanese mythology as such, Matsumura hardly touches on the link between ethnic character and myth. Instead he addresses topics such as the definition of myth, how myths develop and change, and the intellectual history of mythological interpretation. Similarly his four-volume *Studies of Japanese Myth*, published between 1955 and 1958, which sums up his research on Japanese mythology, does not address the link between myth and devotion to the imperial house that he had taken up in the wartime years and makes virtually no attempt to draw connections between the myths and Japanese “ethnic character.” This seems to imply that the attempt to discuss ethnic characteristics on the basis of mythology lay outside the mainstream of Matsumura’s own research interests. This would also explain a rather equivocal remark that he makes in the preface to *Ethnic Character and Myth*. Here he states that in the course of his studies he had become aware of the importance of the relationship between myth and ethnic character or mentality, and thus had decided to take up this topic; with regard to his personal approach to mythology, however, such research was “a kind of digression.”¹³ This is presumably the reason why he did not include “ethnicist” topics in works such as *Fundamentals of Mythology* and *Studies of Japanese Myth*, which represent the main themes of his academic studies.

Whether because Matsumura himself characterized them as a digression or his wartime writings on ethnicity were later seen as being of little value, postwar researchers have almost entirely ignored them. Surely, however, we

12. Matsumura 1943.

13. Matsumura 1934a, p. 2.

should keep them in mind as an example of how research on the Japanese myths functioned ideologically to strengthen devotion to the imperial house and tennōism in the wartime years.

JAPANESE MYTHS AND SOUTHEAST ASIA: MATSUMOTO NOBUHIRO

The second eminent figure in mythology studies of the early Shōwa era, Matsumoto Nobuhiro, is known for having exerted a major influence on theories on the origin of Japanese myths through his detailed demonstration of the similarities that they shared with myths from Southeast Asia (*nanpō* 南方). Matsumoto studied Oriental history at Keiō University and went to study in Paris, a center of Chinese studies at the time (1924). Like Matsumura, Matsumoto initially emphasized comparative typology. In the 1930s, however, his interests shifted, more fundamentally than with Matsumura, toward questions of ethnicity, and his research from this perspective came to take on a strong political coloration.

In Paris Matsumoto initially studied under the famous sinologist Marcel Granet (1884–1940), but gradually he seems to have become interested in Indochina, and in the end he wrote his doctoral thesis on the topic “Japanese and Austro-Asian Languages” (*Le japonais et les langues austroasiatiques: Étude de vocabulaire comparé*) under the guidance of Jean Przyluski (1885–1944), a scholar of linguistics and Buddhism. According to the French system at that time, to obtain a doctoral degree it was necessary to submit a second thesis together with the main one. For his second thesis Matsumoto first planned to write on the Ainu under Granet’s guidance, but he also studied with the anthropologist and scholar of comparative religion Marcel Mauss (1872–1950), who pointed out to him the similarities between Japanese and Polynesian mythologies and urged him to explore this topic. For his second thesis Matsumoto thus carried out comparative research on Japanese and Southeast Asian myths. This thesis, published in 1928 under the title *Essai sur la mythologie japonaise*, was the first French study on mythology by a Japanese author. Following his return to Japan, Matsumoto also published a Japanese translation in 1931.

This study is marked by two novel features: firstly, Matsumoto interpreted Japanese mythical episodes by relating them to concrete rituals;

and secondly, he compared them with myths of a “southern” typology from Southeast Asia or the Austro-Pacific region, pointing out their similarities. He notes, for instance, the resemblance between the story of the Maori hero Maui, who fishes land from the ocean, and Izanagi and Izanami’s creation of the first Japanese island by stirring a spear in the sea. Similarly, he compares the wedding of Izanagi and Izanami to the marriage of siblings in the myth of the Ami people of Taiwan. Throughout he repeatedly calls attention to the presence of such “southern” elements in the Japanese myths. In the words of Ōbayashi Taryō, the value of Matsumoto’s study lies in the fact that

... he interpreted the myths as connected to rituals, in particular seasonal ceremonies, thereby looking at myth in the context of ritualistic organizations. Moreover, he made use of mythology research from abroad, thus opening the path to a truly comparative approach in the field of Japanese mythology. We should remember [Matsumoto’s] *Essai* not only as the starting point of his own studies, but also as a work that elevated the overall standard of Japanese mythology studies and introduced research on the Japanese myths by Japanese scholars to an international audience.¹⁴

Upon his return to Japan, Matsumoto established himself as a specialist in typological research on Japanese mythology as well as of Indochinese studies. He became more and more interested in Southeast Asia, especially after a one-month journey to Indochina in 1933,¹⁵ and also shifted increasingly from philological to ethnological methods of investigation.

At about the same time as his trip to Indochina, Matsumoto began to comment on the political implications of mythology studies, and also to speak about Japanese colonial policy. In 1934, for instance, in an article on the Japanese myths that he contributed to a multivolume series on Japanese history published by Iwanami Shoten he emphasized the importance of research on the myths as “the fount of our national essence (*kokutai*)” and “the sustenance of our national faith.”¹⁶ In another article of the same year, he argued that, judging from evidence in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, relations between Japan and Korea in antiquity had not been that of military

14. Ōbayashi 1971b, p. 402.

15. On the significance of this journey for Matsumoto’s research, see Itō 1988.

16. Matsumoto 1978a [1934], p. 125.

conqueror and conquered but had been based on trade. Amaterasu, he held, is portrayed as having shown an attitude of compassion and love in unifying Japan and extending her rule overseas. As such the myth of Amaterasu carried lessons for the present.¹⁷ Clearly, in making such statements Matsumoto had in mind the contemporary policies of Japanese colonial rule of Korea.

In the same way, Matsumoto began to make political comments on the relationship between Japanese and Southeast Asian mythologies that went far beyond the identification of Southeast Asian elements in Japanese myths as found in his *Essai sur la mythologie japonaise*. For instance, in *Peoples and Cultures of Indochina* (*Indoshina no minzoku to bunka* 印度支那の民族と文化), published in 1942, he argued that mythological and linguistic similarities indicated that the Japanese shared the blood of ethnic groups from Southeast Asia. He inferred from this that in their advance into Southeast Asia the Japanese were in a more advantageous position than the white Western powers such as the French who currently controlled the region politically.¹⁸

Similar arguments can be found in an article of the same year entitled “The Ethno-historic Significance of the Great East Asian War” (*Dai tōa sensō no minzokuteki igi* 大東亜戦争の民族的意義). Here Matsumoto maintained that Japan’s expansion into the vast region extending from north to south that had become the stage of the Great East Asian War was only possible due to the fact that the Japanese people incorporated elements from both northern and southern Asia.¹⁹

From the mid-1930s onward, there had been loud calls for Japan to advance its interests in Southeast Asia—the so-called “southern expansion doctrine” (*nanshinron* 南進論)—and the military had begun to extend its position in Southeast Asian regions such as Indochina. It seems likely that in these circumstances Matsumoto’s research on comparative mythology and Indochina received increasing attention. His above-mentioned remarks from 1942 about Japan’s links with Southeast Asia should be seen in this context. In 1940 the Research Council for National Policy (Kokusaku Kenkyūkai 国策研究会), an influential private organization with close ties to the military and government established in 1933 to carry out research in various areas

17. Matsumoto 1978b [1934], p. 228.

18. Matsumoto 1942a, p. 335.

19. Matsumoto 1942b.

and formulate policy proposals, had created as a subunit the Study Group for Ethnic Questions (Minzoku Mondai Kenkyūkai 民族問題研究会). This subunit, of which Matsumoto became a member, conducted research on conditions among the peoples of Southeast Asia and how Japan should deal with them. As a specialist on Indochina, Matsumoto also was appointed to another subunit established by the Research Council for National Policy, the Study Group on Ethnic Groups of the Southern Regions (Nanpō Shominzoku Jijō Kenkyūkai 南方諸民族事情研究会). From these facts we can surmise that Matsumoto's research assumed importance in the context of the formulation of policy proposals calling for Japan to put greater weight on Southeast Asia. Matsumoto himself seems to have understood that his research had an important role to play in these circumstances. In the above-mentioned article on the significance of the war (Matsumoto 1942b), for instance, he called for major changes in the field of ethnology so that it could contribute to the education of Southeast Asian ethnic peoples as loyal subjects of Imperial Japan.

As already mentioned, Matsumoto's research on the relationships between Japanese and Southeast Asian mythology was originally inspired by Marcel Mauss. At that time, no entity such as the "Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" as yet existed, nor was his research motivated by political intent. As the policy of expansion into Southeast Asia began to take shape in the 1930s, however, the parallels between Japanese myths and those of Southeast Asia that Matsumoto had identified took on a political significance, since they could be used to justify the "Southern expansion doctrine." Matsumoto, too, seems to have seen the value of his research as lying in this point and to have used the same argument to stress his studies' importance. Today, the influence of Southeast Asia on aspects of Japanese mythology is commonly recognized, and Matsumoto is credited as the first scholar to have perceived these links. We should also recall, however, that at the time when the notion of a Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was being loudly touted, the affirmation of those links also served to legitimize Japanese colonial rule.

JAPANESE MYTHS AND THE NORTH: MISHINA SHŌEI

In discussions of the history of Japanese mythological studies, Matsumoto Nobuhiro, who emphasized the "southern" typology of Japanese myths, is

standardly paired with Mishina Shōei, who instead compared them with “northern” mythologies.

Mishina studied history at the Kyoto Imperial University, specializing particularly in ancient Korean history. From 1928 to the end of the war, he was engaged as a professor at the Naval Engineering College in Maizuru. In 1937 he was posted to the United States where he acted as a visiting professor at Yale and continued his studies under the anthropologist Robert H. Lowie.²⁰ After the war, he taught at Ōtani and Dōshisha Universities.

Mishina adhered primarily to empirical historical methods, but also applied the concept of “culture areas,” which he had encountered in his studies with Lowie. He used this concept, for instance, in his comparison of Japanese and Korean myths, an approach that has been highly praised. The scholar of religious anthropology Sasaki Kōkan 佐々木宏幹, for instance, situates Mishina in the history of studies of Japanese mythology as follows:

Along with Matsumoto, it was Mishina Shōei who contributed significantly to the comparative study of Japanese mythology. Like Matsumoto, Mishina started from historical and philological methods. He painstakingly collected material for comparison from the northern parts of Asia, in particular from China and Korea, and established a new typology of features characteristic for Nippo-Korean myths.²¹

In a similar way, Yoda Chihoko 依田千百子, a scholar of Korean mythology and folklore studies, has praised Mishina’s work as “the foundation of Korean mythology studies,” pointing out that “he studied myths from different angles, including the relation of myth to ritual, the critical evaluation of text sources, and the impact of economic and social developments on myths.”²²

Yet, it is important to note as well that Mishina conducted his major comparative studies of Japanese and Korean myths in the period of Japan’s colonization of Korea. We must therefore ask whether the power relations between ruling Japan and ruled Korea had an impact on his research and

20. Born in Vienna, Austria, Lowie (1883–1957) was one of the most productive and influential students of the “father of American anthropology,” Franz Boas.

21. Sasaki 1977, p. 42.

22. Yoda 1991, p. 10.

in what ways his perspective on Korean myths may have been related to the circumstances of colonization.

Mishina's most important prewar works on mythology are *Theories on National Founding Myths* (*Kenkoku shinwa ronkō* 建国神話論考, 1937), *Studies on Nippo-Korean Myths and Legends* (*Nissen shinwa densetsu no kenkyū* 日鮮神話伝説の研究, 1943), and *Myth and Culture Area* (*Shinwa to bunka kyōiki* 神話と文化境域, 1948).²³ In addition, Mishina also discusses Korean myths in a chapter on "Myth and the Spirit of the Age" (*Shinwa to jidai seishin* 神話と時代精神) in his *Outline of Korean History* (*Chōsenshi gaisetsu*, 1940), an introductory work for general readership. Below I would like to use these texts to explore Mishina's stance on several points relevant to questions of ethnicity and comparative approaches to cultural relations between Korea and Japan.

One telling issue is Mishina's approach to the story of Dangun 檀君, the legendary founder of an ancient Korean kingdom, supposed to have been established in 2333 BCE. At the time the evaluation of the tale of Dangun, who had come to be regarded in Korea as the ancestor of the Korean people,²⁴ was a matter of debate between Japanese and Korean scholars. In 1929, Imanishi Ryū 今西龍 (1875–1932), a specialist in Korean history and archaeology who was then concurrently professor at Kyoto Imperial University and Keijō Imperial University (in present-day Seoul) published an article titled "Thoughts on Dangun" (*Dankun-kō* 檀君考) in which he argued that the tale of Dangun, the earliest known mention of which is in *Samguk yusa* 三国遺事, dating from the late thirteenth century, was not in fact of ancient origin. Although the story might be based on that of an old local god, the form in which it appears in *Samguk yusa* had been constructed, Imanishi asserted, in the mid-Goryeo period (918–1392) out of Buddhist and Daoist elements.²⁵

23. *Myth and Culture Area* was originally written before 1944.

24. Dangun has continued to be revered as the "national founder" in Korea down to recent times. In the postcolonial period, in South Korea the calendar was officially dated from 2333 BCE, the alleged beginning of Dangun's rule, until 1961. In North Korea, an excavation in 1993 of the site held to be Dangun's grave reportedly discovered "Dangun's bones," thereby proving his historicity. On present understanding of the Dangun story from the perspective of mythology, see Matsubara 1997 and Nozaki 1998.

25. Imanishi 1970.

Imanishi was also a member of the editorial board for a history of Korea published between 1932 and 1942 in thirty-seven volumes by the Japanese Governor-General of Korea. This publication project further fueled the Dangun debate. While Korean scholars called for the history to start with the account of Dangun's founding of the original Korean kingdom, the Japanese scholars involved, headed by the eminent historian of Japan and professor at Tokyo Imperial University Kuroita Katsumi 黒板勝美 (1874–1946), rejected this demand on the grounds that Dangun was nothing more than a mythological figure.²⁶ Regarding this response, the present-day researcher Kawamura Minato 川村湊 has noted that the rejection of the Dangun myth by Japanese scholars shows “elements of an ideological battle in which mythologies of the ruled people were oppressed by the ruling people” since the same scholars were ready to begin accounts of Japanese history with the myths of Izanagi and Izanami and Amaterasu.²⁷

What was Mishina's position on the Dangun issue? Mishina had studied under Imanishi at Kyoto Imperial University. Indeed he begins *Studies on Nippo-Korean Myths and Legends* with a eulogy for his former professor in which he notes that Imanishi's lectures were what introduced him to Korean history. It is thus perhaps not surprising that Mishina's view of Dangun was quite similar to Imanishi's. In *Outline of Korean History* he writes that since the Dangun legend “first appears in *Samguk yusa*, present scholarship regards it as dating from the mid-Goryeo period.”²⁸ Pointing to Buddhist elements in the legend, he further asserts that these are evidence that it was a product of the mid-Goryeo period, the apex of Korean Buddhism. Indeed, he shows a quite dismissive attitude toward the legend, holding that as a representative expression of the medieval (rather than ancient) Korean mentality, “from the perspective of the study of mythology, its content is of no particular interest.” Of greater “significance as cultural history” is another legend, that of the founding of the kingdom of Silla by Hyeokgeose 赫居世 in the first century BCE.²⁹ This latter legend, which is recorded in *Samguk sagi* 三国史記

26. On this Dangun debate, see Kawamura 1996, Lee 2005, and Nozaki 1998.

27. Kawamura 1996, p. 27.

28. Mishina 1940, p. 26.

29. Mishina 1940, p. 24.

(1145), written a century before *Samguk yusa*, can be taken, Mishina holds, as a more genuine expression of the ancient Korean mentality.³⁰

Evidence of Mishina's stance regarding comparative studies can be found particularly clearly in his *Studies on Nippo-Korean Myths and Legends*. In this work he argues that the comparative study of mythology demonstrates, on the one hand, the relationship between the Japanese and Korean peoples as "compatriots" (*dōhō* 同胞). On the other, having historically been subject to the sway of its continental neighbors—the Chinese, Manchus, and Mongols—Korea, in contrast to Japan, had failed to preserve and develop the original true ethnic character expressed through mythology.

In the preface, Mishina noted the implications of this situation for the contemporary relationship between Japan and Korea. Although Korea may have appeared to have lost its intrinsic ethnic characteristics as a result of its long subjection to its continental neighbors, those characteristics could be extracted through close analysis of what myths and legends remained. Further, comparison of these myths and legends with those of Japan would prove the closeness of the Japanese and Korean peoples and enable Koreans to discover their own image in the ancient culture of Japan. At the end of the preface, Mishina writes:

For [Japanese and Koreans] who today have been able to become compatriots under the scepter of our emperor, ancient culture is truly an appropriate means. To become real compatriots, we must first return to our ethnic origins in the Age of the Gods and start from there. It would mean unprecedented pleasure to this author if his book were to succeed to at least some extent in drawing a picture, from mythical accounts, of how we compatriots were raised in the same cradle.

Just as I was preparing the manuscript for the present book, it was announced that military conscription is to be implemented on the Korean peninsula. I therefore lay down my brush convinced that the day is not far ahead when these two compatriot peoples, who in

30. Mishina also expressed reservations about the significance as mythology of a third legendary founder, Gija 箕子, who was equated with a scion of the ancient Chinese Yin dynasty described in the Book of History (*Shangshu* 尚書). This legend, with its Confucian overtones, Mishina took to be a product of the early modern period.

antiquity grew up together, will join in leading forward the various peoples of Great East Asia under the scepter of our emperor.³¹

In other words, present-day Japanese and Koreans could be turned into “real compatriots” (*shin no dōhō* 真の同胞) by “returning to our ethnic origins in the Age of the Gods” through mythology studies, which would show that Japanese and Koreans were such compatriots in ancient times.

Mishina sets out his argument about the relative state of preservation and development of mythology in Korea and Japan in the following opening chapter, “Japanese Myth Seen from the Perspective of East Asian Mythology.” Noting that it is generally understood that Japanese myths are intimately related to the four regions of “Manchu-Korea, the Southern Regions (*nan'yō* 南洋), India, and China (Shina 支那),” he continues that the Southern Regions and India were “not a matter of immediate concern,” and that instead he would largely focus on the relationship with “Shina” and “Manchu-Korea.”

Regarding China, Mishina states that in spite of the great influence of Chinese culture on ancient Japan, Chinese myths and legends had surprisingly little impact on Japanese mythology. Of course, this did not mean that there was no Chinese influence at all, but already in early times Chinese culture had developed under Confucian influence in an “intellectualist and realist” (*jissai shugiteki* 実証主義的) direction. As a consequence, “the Chinese people had lost their ‘feeling for myth’ (*shinwa suru kokoro* 神話する心).” In Japan, by contrast, “Even in the present age of intellectualism, our own people have not lost this ‘feeling for myth’.”³² Therefore, Mishina argues, China’s legends and tales did not have the power to leave an imprint on Japanese mythology.

As for relations between Japan and the Manchu-Korean region, although cultural contacts had always been close, as far as mythology was concerned, the myths of this region had remained “underdeveloped” and therefore were by no means equal to those in Japan. In the case of the Manchu peoples, the primary reason for this “underdevelopment” was that they had continued to rely on a seminomadic form of agriculture and thus had not achieved the ritual sophistication of true agricultural ethnic groups. Moreover, they lacked inquisitiveness and therefore remained “a people unaccomplished in mythology.” Koreans, on the other hand, were an agricultural people and

31. Mishina 1943, p. 3.

32. Mishina 1943, p. 5.

were known for having highly developed ritualism. One would thus expect them to have developed myths as well. The reality, however, was different. This was due to the influence of “Chinese intellectualism and realism.” Like China itself, Korea “became indifferent to myths, unable to love and foster myths” (p. 10). Fortunately a few tales of founder heroes, such as the above-mentioned story of Hyeokgeose, had been transmitted to later generations. Owing to the surrounding general circumstances, these had been “preserved in their undeveloped form until later ages.” Precisely for this reason, from the perspective of comparative mythology, they were of particular value as source material in order to understand the “original form of our own mythology, which in later ages underwent a remarkable development both as myth and in terms of its political significance. [...] In any event, Korean myths and legends provide a most important reference for the study of our own ancient mythology” (p. 11).

Thus, Mishina acknowledges the closeness and importance of ancient relations between China and “Manchu-Korea” on the one hand, and Japan on the other. Nevertheless, he contrasts China and Japan as societies that have or have not lost their “feeling for myth.” In a similar way, while acknowledging that Korean legends could be used to understand the original form of Japanese myths as well as vice-versa, he juxtaposes Japan and “Manchu-Korea” in terms of the development or underdevelopment of myth.³³

We can see a similar tendency in Mishina’s employment of the concept of “culture area.” This concept, articulated by the American cultural anthropologist Clark Wissler (1870–1947) focuses on similarities in cultural phenomena such as diet, religion, and social structure to be found in neighboring cultural communities, and tries to demarcate the range where such common elements can be identified. In *Myth and Culture Area*, Mishina adopted this method to explain the cultural characteristics of myths on the Korean peninsula, particularly the legends of founding heroes like Hyeokgeose and Talhae 脱解 of Silla and Jumong 朱蒙 of Goguryeo.

Mishina first identified four types of founder hero stories: the egg-born type (the hero is born from an egg), ark-drifter type (the hero is set adrift in a boat), divine-procreation type (the hero’s mother is impregnated by sunrays,

33. Mishina repeats the argument about how Japanese myth developed in contrast to what happened in Korea in a later chapter where he takes up the implications of the existence of multiple variants in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* of the story of “the descent of the Heavenly Grandson” as the ruler of Japan.

etc.), and beast type (the first ancestor is held to be an animal). To establish the typologies characteristic of Korea, he went on to evaluate how this typology applies to myths from regions bordering the Korean peninsula that had historical contacts with it, examined the distribution of stories of the same type, and identified the culture area to which this type belongs. He arrived at the conclusion that the egg-born type and the ark-drifter type were related to the peoples of the southern maritime region, i.e., Indonesia, Indochina, and Taiwan, while the beast type and the divine-procreation type bore connections with northern peoples like the Manchus and the Mongols. He noted, however, that the beast type could not be found in Korea. The reason, he surmised, was that this type originated from nomadic culture areas and therefore did not develop in the agrarian Korean society.

Based on this analysis, Mishina argued that Korean founding hero stories possessed a composite structure: while they were fundamentally based on southern elements, superimposed on these were Manchurian and Mongolian elements as well as Buddhist and Daoist legends. This composite structure, Mishina asserted, was typical of Korean culture in general:

The composite structure detected in the myths of Korean founding heroes can be found not only in myths but must be called a characteristic of Korean culture in general. Mythology unquestionably serves to alert us to the distinguishing features of Korean culture. Putting aside the basic issue whether history may be said to unfold and cultural structure develop in a dialectical way or not, we can at least say that in more than two thousand years of Korean history, traces of a dialectical development are extremely rare. Rather, it shows a clear heteronomous pattern, having been shaped by waves of dominant cultures and political powers arriving from all directions—southern regions, northern regions, China, and India. Even in the most representative product of primitive culture, in mythology, this characteristic is already clearly apparent.³⁴

In contrast to this view of Korean myth and culture as exhibiting a composite nature shaped by “heteronomous” influences, Mishina reached a quite different conclusion regarding Japanese founder hero myths. “While Japan is situated at the center of a [larger] culture area, our ethnic founder hero

34. Mishina 1948, p. 266.

myths show the characteristics of a unique culture area.”³⁵ Mishina’s general position was that the founder hero legends of various peoples were suitable subjects of analysis for identifying cultural characteristics because they generally preserved old traditions. In the case of Japan, however, the situation was different:

This special place that we occupy within the primitive culture area centered on our land suggests that we need to think of it in terms of historical rather than geographical circumstances. The fact that our founding myths do not share the features of those of the surrounding primitive culture area indicates that they are culturally and chronologically new phenomena or that they have been transmitted within a culturally advanced ethnic society.³⁶

The fact that the myths of deities like Amaterasu or Susanoo—what could be considered Japan’s founder hero myths—were preserved in many different variants in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* was, Mishina asserted, another indication that they had “the characteristics of the mythology of a highly advanced culture.”³⁷

Thus, in his comparison of Japanese and Korean myths, Mishina pointed out their close relatedness and mutual influences, but he also contrasted them by attributing a composite character that remained stagnant and underdeveloped to Korean myths and a distinctive, advanced mythology to Japan. In this manner of comparison, we may well find a reflection of the actual contemporary power relations between the objects of his research, Japan as ruler, on the one hand, and Korea as ruled, on the other.

If we move from mythology to his general view of Korean history and the Korean people, we see a similar perspective. In the preface to his *Outline of Korean History* (1940), which was, as mentioned above, written for a broad audience, Mishina explains the necessity of studying Korean history as follows:

For us, who are striving to build a new East Asian world, our compatriots on the peninsula are the people we can rely upon most fully,

35. Ibid.

36. Mishina 1948, p. 268.

37. Ibid.

and this will certainly be always the case. In fact the shared ancestry (*dōsosei* 同祖性) of the Japanese and Korean peoples is currently the topic of investigation, and in the future the two necessarily must become true compatriots able to walk united under the imperial roof stretching to the eight corners of the world. The author, who believes this firmly, also is convinced that we must feel the same empathy for their history and study it as we would our own.³⁸

Mishina titled the first chapter of his history of this “compatriot” country “The Heteronomous Character of Korean History.” In it he argued that the “heteronomy” that was the fundamental feature of Korean history had been determined by Korea’s peninsular geographical position. As a peninsula, Korea was constantly affected by the waves of change on the continent, but because it was situated on the periphery, it always stood apart from the mainstream of such change. Thus Korean history also came to be marked by “dependency” (*fuzui sei* 附随性).³⁹ In addition to its peripheral geographic position, Korea was situated between the powerful nations of China and Japan. Nevertheless, Korea proved unable to develop under the influence of these neighbors:

Should one try to explain Korean history on the basis of the historical concept of “development,” one cannot avoid the realization that there is very little evidence of historical dialectical development. In terms of objective trends, Korea has had extremely limited independence in its history.⁴⁰

Musing on the external powers that affected Korea, Mishina maintains that Korea’s attitude of obedience had resulted in its being used by the Chinese with their “ceremonialism,” “intellectualism,” and “pragmatism.” As a consequence the country had been placed in a predicament and left to suffer disasters. The Mongol and Manchu forces, on the other hand, had carried out a “military conquest.” This had been conducted with a “certain attitude of expansiveness typical of nomadic peoples,” but it was ultimately based

38. Mishina 1940, preface, p. 2.

39. Ibid.

40. Mishina 1940, p. 4.

simply on force unaccompanied by government or culture. Regarding Japan, Mishina argues:

The Korean enterprises of our country in antiquity as well as in more recent years were marked neither by subjugation nor by mere self-interest. In antiquity, Japan protected both Kudara [=Baekje] and Mimana [=Kaya], thus enabling them to establish their own states. This was a peaceful, benevolent kind of dominance, not the Mongolian type, which deliberately aimed at conquest, or the Chinese, which was intellectual and formalistic. If we put it in one word, we may call Japan's attitude empathic or protective, transcending the difference between self and other in order to build a beneficial common world. This was and will always be the basic spirit of our country. [...] This country of Japan, which in the past grew up sharing the same spirit as Korea and which today has matured so remarkably and is building a splendid historical world, has embraced the Koreans as compatriots and called them back to their native home. Here, for first time, Korea is able to make a fresh start in its true form.⁴¹

In this passage, Mishina infers from the examples of ancient Baekje and Kaya that the Japanese manner of ruling Korea was marked by empathy and protection. Korea's foreign relations with other peoples had resulted in its "becoming dependent on outside authority and its spirit of self-assertion lacking a quality of autonomy. Instead an attitude has been nurtured of partisan factionalism, in which people look to depend on others" (p. 8). This mentality that "derived from an attitude of dependence on outside authority" also showed itself in the general patterns of thought of the Korean people (p. 9). Now, however, it was possible for Korea, "supported by Japanese empathy, for the first time to sublate [in a dialectical sense] its peninsular historical character."

Thus, Mishina maintains that Japan and Korea were intimately related to each other, "sharing the same spirit," but that Japan had matured to greatness while Korea had not. In addition, Korea became dependent on "external powers" due to the influence of neighboring countries. Only through Japanese empathy would Korea be able to overcome its "peninsular historical

41. Mishina 1940, pp. 6–7.

character” of dependence, peripherality, and heteronomy. It is understandable that in his recent analysis of Japanese research on Korean history, Lee Man-yol 李萬烈 has severely criticized *Outline of Korean History*, in which Mishina developed this perspective, for creating “a systematic theoretical foundation for the colonialist view of Korean history characteristic of Japanese imperialism.”⁴²

To see how comparative approaches and notions of ethnicity figured in such a perspective, it will be instructive to briefly set it against the backdrop of the general discourse on Korea current among Japanese intellectuals of the time. Mishina was far from alone in his view of Korea as undeveloped and in regarding heteronomy as the ethnic characteristic of the Korean people. From the Meiji period on Japanese intellectuals had subscribed widely to the image of a “backward Korea,” and the thesis that the Korean people lacked a sense of national autonomy because from antiquity they had come under the sway of neighboring areas such as Japan and China had served in tandem with discourses on “the common Nippo-Korean ancestry” (*Nissen dōsoron* 日鮮同祖論) to justify Japanese colonial rule over the peninsula.⁴³

The historian Kida Sadakichi 喜田貞吉 (1871–1939), who taught at Kyoto and Tōhoku Imperial University and is known among other things for his advocacy of “the common Nippo-Korean ancestry” thesis is a case in point. In his *Korean Annexation and Japanese History* (*Kankoku heigō to kokushi* 韓国併合と国史, 1910), Kida argued that because the northwestern part of the peninsula was linked to the continent, while the southeastern part was oriented towards Japan, the Korean people had never managed to establish a sovereign state, or to interact with China and Japan on an equal level. Several kingdoms had come into existence in the course of Korean history, but none had developed into a strong, independent state. Rather, they had sustained themselves by heeding what was happening in the countries around them and by “following the major country.” Japan, on the other hand, Kida held, had never treated foreign cultures or races badly, but assimilated them with magnanimity. Kida therefore acclaimed the annexation of Korea, likening it to a prosperous stem family (Japan) taking in and protecting a weak branch family (Korea).

42. Lee 2005.

43. For theories on Korean stagnation and dependency, c.f. Lee 2005, Duus and Kobayashi 1998, and Kang 2004. For a discussion of general Japanese discourses on Korea in the modern period, see Kang 1984.

Mishina shared much with Kida in his perspective on Korean history. To be sure, he kept a certain distance from outright advocacy of theories on common ancestry. As we saw above, in his *Outline of Korean History* he simply mentions that the issue is currently the subject of investigation, and in his essay “Japanese Myths seen from Oriental Mythology,”⁴⁴ he states that “many further considerations are necessary before we can fully acknowledge a common ancestry of Japan and Korea, as is maintained by parts of the academic community.”⁴⁵ Yet, when it comes to Mishina’s conviction that Japan, which had achieved a civilized state, should “embrace” Korea, trapped by its traditional heteronomy in a stage of cultural retardation, we certainly have to position his ideas within the framework of colonialist discourse, as Lee points out in his critical analysis.⁴⁶

Mishina portrayed ancient Korea and Japan as intimately related to each other, with their myths showing them to be “compatriots raised from the same cradle.” At the same time, he contrasted Korean mythology, which remained in an undeveloped state, with the highly developed Japanese mythology. In his research on culture areas, he pointed out the composite and heteronomous nature of myths from the peninsula, on the one hand, while on the other he presented Japanese myths as having developed in a fashion that showed them to be the product of a distinctive culture area. This comparison of Japanese and Korean mythology in terms of underdevelopment and heteronomy clearly belongs to a colonialist discourse. Much the same must be said of his contention that the Dangun myth was a creation of Korea’s medieval period, not of antiquity. Given the context of the ongoing debate between Japanese and Korean scholars over this issue and the fact that Mishina put forward this view in an influential publication meant for the general reader, Kawamura Minato is undoubtedly correct that in effect this amounted to the “repression of ethnic mythology.”⁴⁷

44. *Tōyō shinwagaku yori mitaru Nihon shinwa* 東洋神話学より観たる日本神話 (Mishina 1943), first published in 1940.

45. Mishina, 1943, p.10.

46. Mishina’s *Outline of Korean History* was republished after the war in 1952. A few expressions regarding the “heteronomous character of Korean history” were modified, but by and large the text remained unchanged.

47. Kawamura 1996.

OKA MASAO AND JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY: THE IMPACT OF THE VIENNESE SCHOOL OF ETHNOLOGY

The published oeuvre of Oka Masao is comparatively small, but his attempts to explain the heterogeneity of Japanese culture as the result of the overlapping of different culture complexes that had come into Japan from elsewhere in antiquity had a tremendous influence on the postwar academic community. In the words of Ōbayashi Taryō and Yamada Ryūji 山田隆治, “If one views research on Japanese historical ethnology by the postwar generation as a whole, no single scholar left a larger impact than Oka Masao.”⁴⁸ Sasaki Kōkan likewise describes Oka’s studies as having exerted an immense influence on Japanese postwar studies of myth from an ethnological perspective.⁴⁹ On the other hand, several authors have shown that Oka was also a representative figure in the wartime collaboration of ethnology and the military, since he put great effort into the establishment of the Ethnic Research Institute (Minzoku Kenkyūjo 民族研究所) in 1942–1943 and played a central role in its activities, which were supported by the military regime.

After graduating from the Department of Sociology at Tokyo Imperial University in 1924, Oka studied for some time under Yanagita Kunio 柳田邦夫 (1875–1962) and helped to put out the journal *Minzoku* 民族 (Ethnos). In 1929, he made his way to Vienna in order to continue his studies at the Institute for Ethnology of Vienna University. There he was deeply inspired by scholars like Wilhelm Schmidt (1868–1954) and the Southeast Asian specialist Robert Heine-Geldern (1885–1968). In 1930–1933, Oka drafted a doctoral dissertation titled “Kulturschichten in Alt-Japan” (Cultural Strata in Ancient Japan) that was clearly indebted to Schmidt’s theory of “cultural circles” or complexes (*Kulturkreislehre*). The dissertation, coming to 1,452 pages in the original manuscript, has been published only in 2012, and I have only had access to a translation of the table of contents, but I could gather its contents to some extent through explanations by Sumiya Kazuhiko⁵⁰ and through the postwar symposium “The Japanese People: Cultural Origins,” held in 1948, that was largely based on this work (for this symposium, see below).

48. Ōbayashi and Yamada 1966, p. 9.

49. Sasaki 1977.

50. See Sumiya 1979 and 1988.

In “Kulturschichten” Oka tried to reconstruct the ethnic groups of ancient Japan, i.e., the ethnic culture complexes that formed Japanese culture. In doing so, Oka also dealt with mythology, which he analyzed from the perspective of cultural circles in the same way as language or material culture. Oka’s particular focus on mythology was probably due to the fact that Schmidt’s Viennese school of historical ethnology also emphasized mythology, holding that mythological comparisons could be used to determine the cultural circle to which the bearers of a given myth belonged, and ultimately to detect the historical development of this cultural circle.

In 1935 Oka went back to Japan but he returned to Vienna in 1938 to take up an appointment as visiting professor and head of the newly founded Institute for Japanese Studies at the University of Vienna.⁵¹ His lectures there dealt with “Japanese ethnology, prehistory, language, as well as myth and religion.”⁵² In addition, he traveled to the Balkans and lectured as a visiting professor in Budapest.

Oka again returned temporarily to Japan in 1940 to assist the sociologist of religion Furuno Kiyoto 古野清人 (1899–1979) and others in the movement to establish a national institute for ethnic studies. With the outbreak of war between Germany and Russia, it became difficult for him to go back to Europe, so he resigned his visiting professorship in Vienna and devoted all his energies to the establishment of an institute of ethnic studies in Japan. In 1942 it was decided to establish the Ethnic Research Institute under the direct administration of the Ministry for Education, and it was officially inaugurated the following year. The explicit purpose of this institute was the study of ethnic groups in order to facilitate the smooth operation of colonial administration. Its operating funds came from military circles, in considerable measure owing to Oka’s excellent relations with people from the army. While the institute was nominally headed by the sociologist Takata Yasuma

51. At that time, this institute was on Berggasse in Vienna’s ninth district. Some say that it was located at Berggasse 7, where Sigmund Freud had had his famous psychoanalytical practice. According to Josef Kreiner, who studied under Oka’s successor in Vienna, however, the institute was situated in a neighboring building (Kreiner 1979, p. 472).

52. Kreiner 1979, p. 471.

高田保馬 (1883–1972), Oka became its executive director and remained its central figure until the end of the war.⁵³

Subsequent to an article published in 1935 titled “The Tale of Shooting the Sun” (*Taiyō o iru hanashi* 太陽を射る話), in which he took up the distribution of this legend, Oka seems to have ceased undertaking research on Japanese myths. A key reason seems to be a general change in his attitude towards ethnological studies. According to Nakao Katsumi 中生勝美, Oka’s travels in the Balkans during his second stay in Vienna had led him “to harbor doubts about the approach of the Viennese School and to shift his attention to the current state of living societies and to Anglophone theories of social anthropology.”⁵⁴

This shift in his perspective is apparent in the lecture “Various Problems of Current Ethnology” that he gave at the first Seminar of Ethnological Studies held in October 1942. Here he stated that none of the three main trends in ethnological studies—evolutionism, cultural historicism, and functionalism—had led to satisfactory results in studies relevant to the East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere. What was needed was an “ethnology focused on present circumstances” (*genzaigakuteki minzokugaku* 現在学的民族学). A “presentist ethnology” was one that would engage in research on the ethnic groups that were the objects of governmental administration so as to contribute to the formulation of appropriate ethnic policies. Oka argued for the necessity of such an approach as follows:

Essentially, an ethnic group is an entity marked by specific historical and sociological conditions, but together with its historical structure it is also an actual living organism endowed with future potential. Therefore, ethnic research requires investigation of present circumstances as well as historical research. Study of ethnic policies, ethnic government, and ethnic movements is thus something closely linked to ethnology; indeed, it is its foundation. Ethnology must become the cornerstone of ethnic policies by clarifying the present actual character or structure of an ethnic group that is the object of governmental rule, by investigating its ethnic consciousness, intentions and the nature of its activities and inclina-

53. For details on Oka Masao and the Ethnic Research Institute, see Nakao 1997 and Sakano 2005. For an essay in English, see Doak 2001.

54. Nakao 1997, p. 58.

tions as they are structured by the group's experience and feelings. [...] The immediate tasks of Japanese ethnology are truly immense, but I believe that through our common effort we can surmount this crisis, nurture Japan's own ethnology, and thereby respond to the demands of the present situation.⁵⁵

In other words, Oka had come to see ethnology's *raison d'être* as lying in participation in the formulation of ethnic policies in order to rule effectively a given ethnic group. For this purpose, the methods of Anglophone social anthropology, which emphasized actual fieldwork, were of much greater service than the historical methods of the Viennese school of ethnology. According to Nakao Katsumi, although the example of the ethnology of Nazi Germany was a factor in the founding the Ethnic Research Institute, the actual research conducted there did not look at all to German ethnology. Rather the books translated at the institute reflect the strong influence of Anglophone social anthropology.⁵⁶ We may conclude that Oka's ethno-historical research on Japanese mythology was abandoned in the midst of his quest for an ethnology that would be of use in the war.

When the Ethnic Research Institute was dissolved after the war, Oka moved from Tokyo to Nakano Prefecture, where he lived from hand to mouth. He was drawn back into academic life only in 1948, when Egami Namio 江上波夫 (1906–2002), Yawata Ichirō 八幡一郎 (1902–1987), and Ishida Eiichirō 石田英一郎 (1903–1968) staged a symposium with the title "The Japanese People: Cultural Origins and the Formation of the Japanese State." This symposium started from a discussion of Oka's Viennese dissertation on "Kulturschichten." As a consequence Oka once again began research on the formation of Japanese culture and resumed investigation of myths as one aspect of that research. In other words, he returned to the historical approach favored by the Viennese school of ethnology.

While Oka's theories are no longer accepted as is, in a modified and amplified form they constitute one of the starting points for discussion of the typology of Japanese myths, as can be seen from the research of Ōbayashi Taryō and others. We may attribute the disjuncture in Oka's academic career, his separation of himself from the Viennese School and even from the study of Japanese myths, to the circumstances of the time. Conversely, just

55. Oka 1942, pp. 121–22.

56. Nakao 1997, p. 58.

such a process helps explain why the approach of the Viennese school of ethnology became the focus of attention in postwar Japan, whereas its heyday in Europe was, in fact, long past.

EPILOGUE

The 1948 symposium on Japan's ethnic and cultural origins is famous for the so-called horse-rider theory presented by Egami Namio, who argued that the kings of ancient Japan derived from horse-riding tribes coming from the continent. In the wake of the ensuing debate about the origins of Japanese culture, research on Japanese mythology again became relevant.

Works by Matsumoto, Mishina, and Oka, especially those that were unrelated to colonization and contained no political statements, were reprinted after the war and were widely acclaimed for their academic value. Matsumura Takeo likewise put together a compendium of his scholarly oeuvre, but did not refer to his research on ethnicity and myth. As a result, the research of these scholars during the war and their political statements at that time were largely ignored. Scholars like Ōbayashi Taryō, who began their careers after the war, selected only those parts of the work of the prewar scholars that they considered to be of a high academic level, and from these segments constructed a history of mythology studies in Japan.

Mythology often deals with the origins of a people or a state, which is why research on myths is easily connected to ethnic identity or nationalism. As we have seen, Japanese mythology research during the war was conducted with an awareness of the relationship between Japan and its colonies. Postwar research on Japanese mythology has paid little attention to this point, and even today, prewar mythology studies are often cited uncritically or used for facile *nihonjinron* theories about the origins of the Japanese people or the typology of Japanese culture. The present essay cannot take up this issue in detail, but it is surely necessary for those engaged in the study of mythology today to have a clear idea of the circumstances of wartime studies on Japanese myths and to keep in mind the ways in which scholars of that period were involved in a nationalistic agenda.

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