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The Fractured Transnational Lens: Motives, Representations & Historiographies in Deguchi Onisaburō's 1924 Mongolian Expedition.

Dr Ian Rapley,

Lecturer in Asian History, Cardiff University, UK

Abstract:

In 1924, Deguchi Onisaburō, head of the Japanese religion, Ōmoto, skipped bail to flee to Manchuria, where he joined a Mongolian bandit by the name of Lu Zhankui on an armed expedition into Inner Mongolia. However, the mission ended in collapse, with Lu shot and Deguchi sent back to Japan in shackles.

The expedition is an example of practical Pan-Asianism. Because it has typically been studied as a political idea, an instance of Pan-Asianism on-the-ground offers new ways of studying the ideology. In particular the case shines a light on the “continental adventurers”, a critical group of Japanese active in Manchuria who were vital links in the “colonial realities” of Japan’s informal empire.

The article adopts a transnational methodology, arguing that this offers a wider possibility for the study of Pan-Asianism: enabling the recognition of the tensions inherent within the ideology without seeking to reduce them to a “paradox”.

Keywords: Transnational History, Japan, Pan-Asianism, Ōmoto, Mongolia, Manchuria, Japanese Empire

Introduction¹

On the morning of 8th February 1924, the charismatic Japanese religious leader Deguchi Onisaburō (出口王仁三郎) was smuggled out of Japan, where he had been under house arrest since 1921, charged with *lèse-majesté* against the Imperial family.² From Kyoto he travelled with three followers, out of the country and across Korea into Manchuria. By the 15th of February he had reached the town of Fengtian.³ That night, in a secret location and still under cover due to the official Japanese presence in Manchuria, he met Lu Zhankui (盧占魁), a Manchurian-Mongolian soldier, for the first time. Theirs was an unlikely alliance – Deguchi’s spiritual mission and professions of pacifism were not an obvious match for Lu’s past as a bandit-cum-independence fighter, and they had no common language.⁴ However, the Japanese “continental adventurers” who brought them together had obviously seen some potential – with the aid of an interpreter the two men hit it off and Deguchi joined Lu on a mission launched by the local Chinese warlord, Zhang Zuolin (張作霖), that rode out into Inner Mongolia with two thousand soldiers.

The objectives that were projected onto this expedition (known from the Japanese perspective as the *Nyūmō*, 入蒙, the “entry into Mongolia”) were manifold – to act as a strategic bulwark in the struggles between different Chinese factions, to spread a religious

¹ I would like to express my thanks to the editors of the *Journal of Northeast Asian History*, and the reviewers, for their help with this article.

² Li Narangoa, “Universal Values and Pan-Asianism: The Vision of Omotokyo”, in *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, Regionalism and Borders*, ed. by V Koschmann and S Saaler (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p.59

³ Contemporary Shengyan, Fengtian (奉天) was known by the Japanese as Hōten, and most commonly in the West as Mukden.

⁴ According to Deguchi, they relied upon an interpreter and, at times, on the “brush-talk” of written Chinese (Deguchi Onisaburō, *Deguchi Onisaburō Zenshū, Volume 6: Nyūmōki*, (Ayabe: Tenseisha, 1998) p.51, p.189)

message, to create an independent Inner Mongolia, to liberate Outer Mongolia from communism, even to search for hidden treasure.⁵ However, after several months in the saddle, it was to end in ignominy. Lu, along with his core subordinates, was shot by his erstwhile sponsor, Zhang Zuolin, whilst the other bandits who had joined Lu's cause melted back into their previous lives. Deguchi and the other Japanese who had accompanied him were reportedly only rescued from the firing squad by the intervention of Japanese consular officials, who described Deguchi weeping tears of joy at the news that he was to be returned to Japan to stand trial.⁶

On one level, the account of Deguchi's mission to Inner Mongolia is an adventure story – the tale of an audacious expedition that ended in disaster, an expensive and tragic fiasco. But at the same time it represents a case study of Pan-Asianism in action. The historiography of Japanese Pan-Asian movements prior to the launch of the Second World War has tended to see them through the lens of political philosophy and lobbying, but examples of the ideology put into actual practice on-the-ground are rather rarer.⁷ Thus this case offers the chance to map the complex networks of intellectual and social connections between various Japanese groups and their continental allies, exploring the everyday on-the-ground realities of Japan's growing engaging in China.

In particular, the Mongolian expedition casts a light on the "*tairiku rōnin*" (大陸浪人), or "continental adventurers": a shadowy group of Japanese adventurers who are revealed as a vital glue between Chinese and Japanese interests. This article argues that they deserve

⁵ J.G. Boyd, "Faith, Race and Strategy: Japanese-Mongolian Relations, 1873-1945", (Murdoch University, 2008), pp.186-188

⁶ "Kuromaki ha Yobi-Taisa", *Osaka Mainichi Shinbun*, 2nd July 1924

⁷ One counter example to this is the early attempt by the Japanese to support a popular rebellion in the Philippines, see Marius B Jansen, *The Japanese and Sun Yat-Sen*, (Stanford University Press, 1970), pp.68-74

greater scrutiny for their capacity to reveal a deeper understanding of Pan-Asianism as a practice as well as an ideology.

The article examines the Mongolian expedition from inception to execution to its downfall, and its subsequent contested interpretation, exploring the different motives and meanings embedded within it. After examining three perspectives – how the mission came together, what happened, and then how it was reinterpreted after its end – the article revisits the scholarship on Pan-Asianism, arguing that the transnational methodology mobilized to study the Nyūmō represents an alternative way of approaching Pan-Asianism, one that recognizes the tensions inherent within Pan-Asian coalitions without reducing them to a “paradox”, or privileging one reading over another.

Deguchi, Lu, and Zhang

Transnational events are, by their very definition, the coming together of multiple different groups or individuals, each with their own perspectives and motivations. While we often concentrate on the common ground that they made possible, these links are nevertheless commonalities found within difference. The Nyūmō was an example of a transnational event par excellence: the two main protagonists brought very different perspectives to the expedition they engaged on together, and yet they were able to make common cause.

Examining the different motives and hopes which were written into the Mongolian expedition at its outset, by Deguchi, Lu and others, reveals a complex set of different visions embedded into a network of social relationships, demonstrating how Pan-Asianism was itself embedded into the realities of the Japanese imperial presence in Asia from its very outset.

First Deguchi Onisaburō. Deguchi was the second leader of the Shinto-based religion, Ōmoto, which had risen from rural roots in western Japan to become the largest of the Japanese “new” religions.⁸ Deguchi was a charismatic leader whose message went beyond the religion’s initial appeal to those disadvantaged Japanese modernization to attract “an amazing multitude of... all classes, “patrioteers”, megalomaniacs, earnest seekers... especially from the ranks of the retired officers of the army and navy.”⁹ Indeed, Deguchi was so successful and his reluctance to submit to state regulation such that, in 1921, the government moved to suppress Ōmoto, perceiving its growing voice as a threat to the domestic order.¹⁰ The state seized assets, destroyed property, and arrested key leaders, charging Deguchi and some others with crimes related to Ōmoto’s ownership of a national newspaper, the *Taishō Nichinichi Shimbun* (大正日日新聞).¹¹

In response to this suppression, Deguchi made some efforts to reform the religion, replacing practices and texts which the state perceived as problematic and launching what has become known as Ōmoto’s international phase. Persecuted and discredited at home, the religion turned abroad to seek succor, forging connections with religions across Asia, engaging with the international language Esperanto, and opening an office in Paris.¹²

The Nyūmō then was a part of Deguchi’s attempt to find a new source of legitimacy in the face of domestic assault, running from the shadow of prosecution in Japan and seeking to

⁸ For an overview of Ōmoto’s history, see Thomas Nadolski, “The Socio-Political Background of the 1921 and 1935 Ōmoto Suppressions in Japan”, (University of Pennsylvania, 1975); or Nancy K Stalker, *Prophet Motive: Deguchi Onisaburō, Oomoto, and the Rise of New Religions in Imperial Japan*, (University of Hawaii Press, 2008).

⁹ Kenneth Saunders, “Glimpses of the Religious Life of New Japan”, *The Journal of Religion*, 2 (1922), p.76

¹⁰ A more comprehensive account of Ōmoto’s complex relationship to the state’s regulatory framework is contained within Sheldon M Garon, “State and Religion in Imperial Japan, 1912-1945”, *Journal of Japanese Studies*, (1986).

¹¹ Stalker, *Prophet Motive*, p.97-99

¹² *Ibid.* pp.99-101, p.148

promote efforts at international expansion. However, what exactly Deguchi hoped to achieve in Manchuria is less clear. Whilst he produced an account of the expedition, this must be read carefully as a text, recognizing it as an attempt to justify the mission to his followers in the light of its collapse.¹³ Holding this in mind, we can nevertheless still read it as a rich account of Deguchi's views of the mission. He suggested that his aims were:

to go where people do not go... to make clear to the world the great spirit of the Japanese nation and to show the world, far and wide, the peerless majesty of the unbroken imperial line. Moreover [to show] that the spirit of the Japanese nation is not conquest, is not aggression, but to guide the peoples of the nations of the world to the path of the gods, by means of the power of the beautiful and virtuous language. To rule the people of the world, military force and intellect are useless; ultimately it will be spiritual union. Only new religions, unencumbered by the old customs, have the power.¹⁴

A visiting card Deguchi carried with him in Mongolia offers some corroboration not coloured by hindsight. On it, he laid claim to a variety of religious identities – as leader of Ōmoto, of course, but also ties to the “five Chinese religions” (中国五大教), Fukakyō (a Korean new

¹³ Deguchi's account was first published in early 1925, the year after he had returned to Japan. He published it with the title *Ōni Mōko Iri Ki* (An Account of Oni[saburō]'s Mongolian Trip) using the pseudonym Ueno Kōen. It was later amended and republished, this time as a part of the *Reikai Monogatari*, a vast religious text that Deguchi dictated to followers in the years either side of the mission. This paper uses a copy of the *Reikai Monogatari* version of the account. However, various passages of the original *Ōni Mōko Iri* version are available in Ōmoto's internal history (*Ōmoto Nanajūnen Shi Hensankai, Ōmoto Nanajūnen Shi*, (Kyoto: Ōmoto, 1964)), in Deguchi Kyōtarō's biography of Onisaburō (*Deguchi Kyōtarō, Kyōjin: Deguchi Onisaburō*, (Kodansha, 1975)) and elsewhere. Examination of these excerpts reveals that they are in almost all cases word for word matches for the later version used in this paper.

¹⁴ Deguchi, *Deguchi Onisaburō Zenshū*, p.38

religion, 普化教), and the titles Dalai Lama and “Susano Khan”, as well as Chairman of the Society For The Spread Of World Language (i.e. Esperanto).¹⁵ Whilst the link to Fukakyō was reportedly a means of skirting a ban on Japanese religious missionary activity in Manchuria, the others reveal a syncretic attitude to religious allegiance, and an approach that fused Asian (and international) identity.

Whilst this is somewhat fuzzy, cast in the evocative language of the new religion, the broad aim seems to have been to continue to expand Ōmoto’s base of support to constituencies beyond the Japanese homeland and potentially even to establish some form of religious community in the space of northern China. This latter aim seems superficially unlikely, and with the wisdom of hindsight, even foolhardy, but in the context of Taishō era Japan it can be read alongside other experimental communities such as the Atarashiki Mura, Arashima Takeo’s liberated farm, and (later) Miyazawa Kenji’s Rasuchijin Association. These were each an attempt to form a real community grounded in a set of philosophical ideas. Whilst they were based around the Japanese village and Deguchi’s mission took place in Mongolia, drawing on Pan-Asian ideas, nevertheless there is a thread of continuity between them. Deguchi’s aims were unlikely perhaps and even grandiose, then, but not unprecedented.¹⁶ Running from persecution at home, and carrying an idiosyncratic vision of Asian religious union, Deguchi landed in the midst of a complex and unstable setting, in which his partner-to-be Lu Zhankui was only a minor player. Manchuria in the early 1920s was an uneasy borderland between different powers. The warlord Zhang Zuolin controlled the area but had to deal with both the Japanese and the Russians, through their respective railway

¹⁵ Kazuaki Deguchi, *Onisaburō Nyūmō Hiwa*, (Idzutomidzu, 1985), p.79

¹⁶ Angela Yiu, “Atarashikimura: The Intellectual and Literary Contexts of a Taishō Utopian Village”, *Nichibunken Japan Review*, (2008). Notably the Atarashiki Mura continues to the present day.

concessions. Moreover, the factional struggles that had rolled over China since the fall of the Qing government in 1911 meant that there was a shifting series of rivals, allies and enemies to the south. Zhang's Fengtian clique had shared control over Beijing between 1920 and 1922 together with Cao Kun (曹錕), at the head of the Zhili (直隸) faction.

However, their alliance broke down and Zhang's armies were sent into retreat. Back in Manchuria, he had begun to rebuild, preparing for a new round of conflict.¹⁷

Despite the presence of Russia and Japan, Manchuria represented a fairly strategically advantageous base. The key threats from other warlords were concentrated to the south through a relatively narrow corridor bounded by the sea and by mountains. The only potential risk of a second flank came via Inner Mongolia. As a consequence of this, Inner Mongolia was a site of significant strategic importance in the early 1920s. To complicate matters further, Outer Mongolia had declared independence in 1911 after the collapse of the Qing, eventually falling under the control of Communist forces supported by the Soviet Union. Zhang Zuolin, then, wanted to fill the vacuum in Inner Mongolia before his rivals did so, plug a strategic gap, potentially recruit more troops from the region, and ultimately even perhaps look towards expelling the communists from Urga to the north.

The man Zhang selected in order to pursue these goals was Lu Zhankui. Lu was a soldier/bandit of mixed Manchurian and Mongolian heritage, who had been involved in previous military endeavors in Inner Mongolia, most notably an ill-fated attempt at

¹⁷ Gavan McCormack, *Chang Tso Lin in Northeast China, 1911-1928: China, Japan and the Manchurian Idea*, (Folkestone: Dawson, 1978), p.62 et seq.

independence by a Mongolian prince, Babojab (巴布扎布), in 1916.¹⁸ After the failure of that mission, Lu threw his lot in with Zhang Zuolin, remaining in Fengtian until Zhang looked to him to secure his Mongolian flank. Zhang's plan was, in the first instance, to station as many as 7,000 troops in the strategically important space, under Lu's control, with a view to expanding the mission as it developed.¹⁹ Whilst Lu accepted the commission from Zhang, and seemed to welcome the chance to get back out into the saddle after time spent kicking his heels in Fengtian, he perhaps also harboured goals of reviving the dream of Inner Mongolian autonomy alongside his direct orders.²⁰

Colonial realities and the *Tairiku Rōnin*

The ease with which Deguchi went from life at home in Kyoto prefecture to joining a band of Mongolian soldiers on the steppes of North-East Asia is indicative of the connection between Japanese daily life & society and the very limits of Japanese continental influence. Manchuria and Mongolia were at once a distant, alien and yet romantic borderland and, at the same time, also geographically close and integrally connected to Japanese society.

Likewise, whilst Deguchi and Lu were very different figures with different backgrounds and motivations, their meeting did not occur by chance: it was brokered by a set of intermediaries, the "Continental Adventurers". Known in Japanese as the *Tairiku Rōnin*, or the *Shina Rōnin*, these were a loose set of Japanese, usually ex-soldiers, who were active in various ways on the Asian continent. Their position – on the margins of the Mongolian

¹⁸ Japan Center for Asian Historical Records, JACAR.or.jp, B Series (Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Ref. B03050190400, "*Rō Sen Kai no Kōdōni kan suru ken*", p.15; For some background on the Babojab incident, see McCormack, *Chang Tso Lin*, pp.28-30.

¹⁹ McCormack, *Chang Tso Lin*, pp.118-119

²⁰ Gojū Tōjin, "Yume No Mōko Ōkoku", in *Taiyō*, November December 1924, January 1925. Pt.2 p.208

mission yet integral in getting it off the ground – reflects accurately their broader position in the Japanese informal empire. Whilst they have been somewhat overlooked, they occupied a vital role in between the various different Japanese factions and the locals, linking Japan and China, and bringing their own visions of Asian unity with them.

The first of these adventurers to bring Manchuria to Deguchi's attention was Hino Tsuyoshi (日野強). Hino was a Russo-Japanese War veteran who remained on the continent after his service as an explorer. He was best known for the account of a trip he made across China and the Himalayas into India, *Iri Kiko* (「伊犁紀行」).²¹ Back in Japan, Hino reportedly regaled Deguchi with tales from his own adventures, pushing him to take Ōmoto's message overseas.²²

Hino died in 1920, before any concrete opportunity presented itself, so it was another two continental adventurers who were most directly involved in convincing Deguchi to leave Kyoto. Their names were Yano Yūtarō (矢野祐太郎) and Okasaki Tesshu (岡崎鉄首), and both were ex-soldiers based in Manchuria: Yano an arms trader in Fengtian and an Ōmoto follower, and Okasaki linked to printing activities for Zhang Zuolin's armies.²³ By Deguchi's account, Okasaki in particular was a boisterous figure, berating those about him regularly and serving as a symbol of the aggressive Japanese stance towards China.²⁴

²¹ Nadolski, "The Socio-Political Background of the Ōmoto Suppressions", p.127; Tsuyoshi Hino, *Iri Kikō*, (Fuyō Shobō, 1973).

²² Stalker, *Propher Motive*, p.147.

²³ Gojū, "Yume No Mōko Ōkoku". pt.3 p.210; Michihito Tsushima, "Emperor and World Renewal in the New Religions: The Case of Shinsei Ryūjinkai", *Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religions*, 2: New Religions (1991).

²⁴ Deguchi, *Deguchi Onisaburō Zenshū*, pp.84-5

The continental adventurers occupy a fairly marginal position in the historiography of Japan's colonial presence on the Asian mainland: unofficial, and often acting in a clandestine fashion on behalf of the Japanese army, they left little concrete documentary trace – what stories do remain often make more for conspiracy theory and rumor than solid history. However, they were an integral part of the growing Japanese presence in Manchuria and surrounding regions, forming an invisible web of connections between the various groups of military and civilian, Japanese, Chinese and others – the “colonial realities” of Japan's informal empire.²⁵

That the adventurers embraced the name “rōnin” was no coincidence: they saw themselves as the spiritual descendants of the *Shishi*, the Bakumatsu era rōnin (renegade samurai) who had agitated for pro-Emperor and anti-Western causes.²⁶ The continental adventurers aimed to bring the lessons of the Meiji Ishin to wider Asia. They were active on two fronts: on the continent, in their role as conduits between different factions, and at home, where they engaged in political pressure through the “patriotic” or “political associations”. The best known of these were the Gen'yōsha (玄洋社) and the Kokuryūkai (黒龍会): they form the bulk of our understanding of these figures and their role in Japanese Pan-Asianism. Whilst the continental adventurers were often acting in secret in Manchuria, the patriotic associations conducted much of their business entirely in the open.²⁷

²⁵ The phrase “colonial realities” is from Yoshihisa Tak Matsusaka, *The Making of Japanese Manchuria, 1904-1932*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Asia Center, 2001); another concept that is helpful in thinking about the rich and direct connections between Japan and its presence on the continent is Louise Young's “Total Empire”, Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire : Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism*, (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1998).

²⁶ E. Herbert Norman, “The Genyosha: A Study in the Origins of Japanese Imperialism”, *Pacific Affairs*, 17 (1944), p.263-4

²⁷ For example, Gavan McCormack's study of Zhang Zuolin notes the difficulty in really tracking the activities of even the official advisors embedded in Chinese factions (McCormack, *Chang Tso Lin*, pp.119-124), whereas Sven Saaler is able to trace the Kokuryūkai from their public magazines (Sven Saaler, “The Kokuryūkai (Black

Sven Saaler notes that the associations lacked a particularly wide social base, and so tended to operate as a political lobby rather than a mass movement in Japan, seeking to influence politics through a variety of means – culturing networks of contacts, writing memoranda and newspaper articles, and even using menace and threat.²⁸ However, paying closer attention to the adventurers’ activities in north-eastern China through events such as the Nyūmō opens up another dimension to their activity: influencing the practical nature of Japan’s presence in China, mediating between various different groups and extending the military’s informal reach.

Scholarship, from the Second World War onwards, has marked these figures and the patriotic societies they formed as ultranationalist, noting the uncompromising approaches they took in trying to promote Japanese expansion.²⁹ However, the portrayal of them as ardent Japanese nationalists is complicated by the relative ease with they found partners from Asia – for example, Kokuryūkai links to the Ilchinhoe (一進會, 일진회) in pre-annexation Korea, or leaders Uchida Ryōhei and Tōyama Mitsuru's associations with Sun Yat-sen.³⁰ This highlights a tension inherent within turn of the century Pan-Asianism identified by Christopher Szpilman: “Japanese Pan-Asianism was a contradictory doctrine.... it was anti-Western, but was partly inspired by Western writings; though it promoted

Dragon Society) and the Rise of Nationalism, Pan-Asianism, and Militarism in Japan, 1901-1925”, *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 11 (2014)).

²⁸ Sven Saaler, “Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History”, in *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, Regionalism and Borders*, ed. by Sven Saaler and J Victor Koschmann (Routledge, 2007), p.14-15, and Sven Saaler, “The Kokuryūkai and the Rise of Nationalism”, pp.134-137.

²⁹ See Hilary Conroy, *The Japanese Seizure of Korea, 1868-1910 : A Study of Realism and Idealism in International Relations*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), Norman, “The Genyōsha”, and Jansen, *The Japanese and Sun Yat-Sen*. The Kokuryūkai (“Black Dragon Society”) and the Gen’yōsha (“Dark Ocean Society”) were both named after geographical markers of Asia: the Amur river on the China/Siberia border & the sea between Japan and Korea respectively.

³⁰ Eri Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War 1931-1945*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), Prasenjit Duara, “The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism”, *Journal of World History*, 12 (2001), p.112; Jansen, *The Japanese and Sun Yat-Sen*.

egalitarianism Asian brotherhood, it insisted on Japanese superiority.”³¹ The continental adventurers were at the cutting edge of this tension, and so it is important that we pay closer attention to them and their actions.

Whilst Deguchi and Lu were the most prominent faces of the Mongolian expedition, the continental adventurers were important participants as well, and they also brought their own idealistic dimension to the mission. This is best seen through one of the smaller patriotic associations, the Chōkokukai (肇国会). The Chōkokukai was an offshoot of the likes of the Gen'yōsha and the Kokuryūkai which existed to advocate for the establishment of an idealized Asian state & society in North-East Asia, covering parts of Manchuria, Siberia, Mongolia, and Korea.³² The state was to be called Great Kōrai (大高麗, after the ancient Korean kingdom Goryeo) and it was the idea of Suenaga Misao (末永節), a Japanese scholar.

Suenaga’s first work was a 1917 treatise entitled “China is already a failed state”(「支那はすでに亡国せり」), which argued that Japan had a pressing need to act to protect the people of China from the vacuum created by the failure of the Chinese government.³³ In contrast with this fairly realist approach, Great Kōrai was, whilst motivated by similar concerns, a much more idealistic, utopian vision. Suenaga proposed a multiethnic state taking the rough shape of a bird with spread wings, ruled in accordance with a mix of

³¹ Christopher WA Szpilman, “Between Pan-Asianism and Nationalism. Mitsukawa Kametarō and His Campaign to Reform Japan and Liberate Asia”, in *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, Regionalism and Borders*, ed. by Sven Saaler and J Victor Koschmann (Routledge, 2007), pp. 87-100., p.85

³² Yuichi Hasegawa, “Taishō Chūki Tairiku Kokka He No Ime-Ji: “Dai-Kōraikoku” Kōsō to Sono Shūhen”, *Kokusai Seiji*, #71 (August) (1982).

³³ Kokuryūkai, *Tōa Senkaku Shishi Kiden*, (Tokyo, 1936), p.21

different Asian traditions and principles including communal ownership of land and racial equality.³⁴ Suenaga's proposal received its first public articulation through Ōmoto's newspaper, the *Taisho Nichinichi Shinbun*.³⁵ An even more direct connection to the mission was the figure of Okasaki Tesshu, one of the participants on the expedition mentioned earlier, who was a prominent member of the Chōkokukai.³⁶

Deguchi, then, arrived in Fengtian to find a coalition of different groups – Zhang eager to shore up his northern flank, Lu harboring dreams of independence back out on the steppe, and the continental adventurers with their complex vision of Japanese leadership and Pan-Asian alliance. Photographs of the start of the expedition reveal the men in high spirits, eager to get out on the road.³⁷ In March 1924, two of the continental adventurers (Yano Yutarō and Ōishi Ryō) remained in Fengtian to coordinate supplies, whilst Deguchi, Okasaki, and three other Japanese who had accompanied Deguchi from Kyoto, set out to the north.³⁸

The Nyūmō from Outside and In

Lu and Deguchi departed from Fengtian separately, apparently to keep their alliance from coming to wider attention.³⁹ Deguchi departed, dressed as a lama, in a pair of cars and

³⁴ Hasegawa, "Taishō Chūki Tairiku Kokka He No Ime-Ji", p.95; see also Kimitada Miwa, "Pan-Asianism in Modern Japan: Nationalism, Regionalism and Universalism", in *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History. Colonialism, Regionalism and Borders*, ed. by Sven Saaler and J. Victor Koschmann (Routledge, 2007), pp. 21-33. p.27 – this description doesn't explicitly reference Suenaga's plan, but the timing, location and details make it almost certain that it is the same one.

³⁵ Hasegawa, "Taishō Chūki Tairiku Kokka He No Ime-Ji", p.94, fn 6 – the article was published in March 1921, shortly after Ōmoto had purchased the newspaper.

³⁶ Gojū, "Yume No Mōko Ōkoku". pt. 3, p.208; *Ōmoto Nanajūnen Shi*. p.729. The Japanese state remained interested in the Chōkokukai (and its relations to Ōmoto) after the Mongolian expedition was over (JACAR, B03050772200, p.2)

³⁷ For example, Deguchi, *Onisaburō Nyūmō Hiwa*. p.20.

³⁸ One of the followers who accompanied Deguchi from Japan was Ueshiba Morihei (植芝盛平), who was the founder of Aikido. Ōishi Ryō (大石良) is a less well documented figure, who may have represented a behind the scenes connection to the Japanese military.

³⁹ The precise details of Deguchi's relationship to Zhang and thus his overt connection to the mission are unclear: some (e.g. Itō Masao (ed.), *Gendaishi Shiryō*, Vol. 32: *Mantetsu Part 2*, (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobo, 1966),

accompanied by the other Japanese participants. They moved north towards the towns of Tongliao (通遼) and Taonan (洮南), at the end of the railway lines which were the lifeblood of Manchurian development. From this jumping off point, they continued into Inner Mongolia, further north, where they were finally reunited with Lu and his troops. Throughout April, more troops joined the group and they relocated to Sōron (索倫), an old Russian emplacement.⁴⁰ Eventually there were some 2000 troops under Lu's command, together with a fluctuating number of Japanese: Deguchi, the followers who had accompanied him from Kyoto, and Okasaki Tesshu were permanent residents, while there were occasional Japanese visitors from Fengtian, bringing messages, winter clothes and the like.⁴¹

There is something of an absence at the heart of the Nyūmō: whilst the details of the protagonists and their motivations is well known, and the aftermath is also well documented, what actually took place once they reached Inner Mongolia is much more obscure. Photos depict Deguchi, often on a white horse, and clad in a range of outfits, interacting with the troops and residents of the Mongolian settlements they visited, as well as travelling through the steppe.⁴² However, there is little in the way of really authoritative

p.272) suggest that Deguchi had Zhang's explicit approval, whereas others indicate he only managed this by using a pseudonym, ("Rei no Onisaburō", *Asahi Shinbun*, 3rd May 1924). Indeed, the Japanese participants began the mission by taking on Chinese names and dress (*Ōmoto Nanajūnen Shi*. p.733), so it is possible that the separate departures of Lu and Deguchi was designed to maintain some level of deception.

⁴⁰ Itō, *Gss Vol.32*, p.269

⁴¹ The most detailed estimate for troop numbers comes from JACAR, B03050190400, *Kakkoku Naisei Zassan: Manshū #14*, p.41 and is higher than some other estimates. This was still significantly short of the original plan which called for seven thousand men for the march into Outer Mongolia (Itō, *Gss Vol.32*. pp.271-2 "Chōnan-ha Shussho Jōhō")

⁴² There are a number of photographs from the mission (including an iconic picture of the Japanese members of the force after they were rescued from arrest), Deguchi's calling card discussed earlier, and a map of where the expedition went over the months they were in the saddle, reportedly drawn by Deguchi soon after the mission was over. These are most comprehensively collected in *Ōmoto Nanajūnen Shi*, chapter 3: "Ōnisaburō ni Nyūmō" pp.716-760.

detail of the activities of the army beyond Deguchi's own account which, as discussed earlier, must be read with some caution. Nevertheless, this relative lack of direct evidence can be offset somewhat by a number of external sources which can be read alongside the lone internal account. Japanese officials stationed in Manchuria documented events as news began to filter back to them, and domestic newspapers too, reported on events (with an even greater lag). Together, these various different sources allow some sort of picture of Deguchi and Lu's progress over the course of the spring and summer. The nature of the source base is important because it means that the most pressing question: why the mission failed and Zhang Zuolin went from supporting Lu and his men to running them to ground, remains hard to answer.

In mid April, the army received a shipment of arms from Fengtian – some 200 guns, 30,000 rounds of ammunition, and a number of machine guns, observed by Japanese officials as originally marked for Taonan, but routed onwards to Lu.⁴³ At this point the army was presumably still supported by Zhang. However, a short time later, Lu changed the name of his force from the “North-Western Autonomous Army” (given to him by Zhang Zuolin) to the “Inner/Outer Mongolian Independence Army”, also taking up a new banner.⁴⁴ The decision to change name seems to have been a mark of growing independence from his original sponsor.

Even without Deguchi's presence, it is far from clear whether the army led by Lu was a stable coalition, given Lu's prior history and the addition of the Japanese continental adventurers, but the late addition of the Japanese religious leader was both a symbol of

⁴³ Itō, *Gss Vol.32*. p.272

⁴⁴ Ōmoto *Nanajūnen Shi*. pp.738-9.

competing visions of the expedition and an additional source of potential discord. In particular, Deguchi brought with him another source of funds for the army – the mass following Ōmoto had in Japan gave it serious financial resources, and estimates of how much Deguchi took to Manchuria with him range between ¥200,000 and ¥300,000.⁴⁵ To Lu, this presented the possibility of independence from Zhang Zuolin – without an alternative source of monetary support, the tensions evident in Lu and Zhang’s ideas might have remained dormant as Lu was forced by economics to toe Zhang’s line. But with a competing source of funding came a competing set of loyalties, and the challenge of serving two masters.

Accounts differ about quite what happened to drive the wedge between Zhang and Lu – from late May into June, rumors of Lu betraying Zhang by making contact with the Zhili faction began to circulate, but there was also news of bandits running amok, and fingers pointed at Deguchi as a source of instability, including the suggestion that his increasingly outspoken preaching had led Zhang Zuolin to insert a spy amid the troops.⁴⁶

Whatever the cause, from that point things unraveled rapidly. Zhang announced that he was sending troops north to suppress the increase in bandit activity.⁴⁷ Under fire from an unexpected direction and with his numbers dwindling by the day, Lu marched south to try

⁴⁵ Estimates include: ¥230,000 (Gojū, “Yume No Mōko Ōkoku”. p.129), ¥250,000 (Nadolski, “The Socio-Political Background of the Ōmoto Suppressions”. p.126), ¥260,000 (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, July 19th 1924), and ¥280,000 (in both Eiji Deguchi, *Deguchi Eiji Senshū*, (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1979), p.116 and Masa (ed.) Nishikawa, *Shisō Kenkyū Shiryō; Volume 66, Kōdō Ōmotokyō Jiken Ni Kansuru Kenkyū*, (Kyoto: Tōyō Bunka, 1977), p.276). This last comes from a transcript of an interview with Onisaburō himself.

⁴⁶ For the most part, the consular accounts focus on the Chinese/Mongolian strategic elements of the expedition, and stress the banditry or Lu’s allegiance as reasons for the split, whereas the Japanese press was more interested in Deguchi’s presence and the impact of his preaching. E.g. “Oni no konkoyochi he tōbatsutai shingunsu”, *Osaka Mainichi Shinbun*, 21st June 1924; “Oni no Teikyo wo Waga Ryōji ni Yōkyū”, *Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun*, 28th May 1924.

⁴⁷ Even here quite what happened is unclear: Lu is reported to have claimed that this was a ruse planned in advance to encourage further consolidation of the bandit groups under his umbrella (*Ōmoto Nanajūnen Shi*. p.744).

to meet and reach a rapprochement with Zhang. Lu initially sent some of the Japanese continental adventurers to mediate on his behalf, but when they failed to make progress he entered Liaotang (通辽) himself to seek a parlay.⁴⁸ Zhang was in no mood for negotiations however – on the 21st of June, Lu and the 30 or so men he had taken with him were seized and shot, whilst Deguchi and the five other remaining Japanese were also taken into custody by Zhang Zuolin’s men.⁴⁹ According to some accounts, Deguchi and the other Japanese were rescued by consular officials only shortly before they were to be shot; regardless of whether this was hyperbole, or even a ploy to frighten the Japanese captives, a photo of them shows six bedraggled men, shackled at the ankles.⁵⁰ From Manchuria, they were shipped back to Osaka to await trial.

Interpreting the Nyūmō and Revisiting the “Paradox” of Pan-Asianism

According to observers, then, the mission fell apart because of some combination of Lu’s inability to control the local bandits he’d been sent to corral, his own insubordination, and perhaps also Deguchi’s presence sparking a greater degree of willfulness within Lu and his subordinates. Deguchi’s part in the story was also contested – was he indeed the fly in the ointment or was he a dupe who had been taken advantage of (by both Lu and perhaps also the Japanese adventurers) due to his naivety, “a feeble-minded child [who] had 260 thousand yen taken from his own pocket by bandits.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Itō, *Gss Vol.32*. p.804

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p.804

⁵⁰ E.g. Stalker, *Prophet Motive*. p.151

⁵¹ “Mondai no hito: Deguchi Onisaburō”, *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 23rd July 1924; “Oni wa 26man’en Bō ni Futta: Shina Rōnin ni Riyō sareta”, *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 19th July 1924.

The ambiguity inherent in the mission evident as the events were occurring did not clear with the passage of time. Deguchi's account, the only one which was written by participants in the expedition, unsurprisingly, portrays Deguchi himself in a more positive light than other accounts. The end of the mission is perhaps the most direct demonstration of this: Deguchi claimed to have met the firing squad with resolve, crying three Banzais for Japan and three for Ōmoto, where the press reported him crying with relief at the news that he was being transferred to Japanese consular jurisdiction.⁵²

Whilst there was much coverage in the daily newspapers, it was fragmentary day-by-day reporting, so did not amount to a sustained narrative of the mission. However, a rival account of the expedition did emerge in late 1924/early 1925. Stretching over three issues of the major monthly magazine *Taiyō* (太陽), "Yume no Mōko Ōkoku" ("Mongolian Kingdom of Dreams", 「夢の蒙古王国」) elaborated a tale that was rich with "the excitement of detective fiction yet entirely real", exploring the multiple perspectives of Deguchi, Lu, Zhang Zuolin, and the Japanese nationalists.⁵³ Who was behind the article is unclear: it was written under the pseudonym Gojū Tōjin (五重塔人, "Five Story Pagoda"), but the author claimed both a fascination with Deguchi born of a chance meeting two years before and expert knowledge of Fengtian and parts of Inner Mongolia, including the site where Lu was shot. The article characterizes Deguchi as a complex individual: casting him in a romantic light, but also mocking him by comparing his adventures to those of Don Quixote, stressing the

⁵² "Kuromaku ha Yobi-Taisa", *Osaka Mainichi Shinbun*, 2nd July 1924; Deguchi, *Deguchi Onisaburō Zenshū Vol.6*, pp.240-244

⁵³ Gojū, "Yume No Mōko Ōkoku". pt.1 p.124

incongruity of his luxurious life in Japan put next to the hardships he underwent in Mongolia, and highlighting the megalomania of some of his claims to religious identity.

At a time when Japanese interests in Manchuria were continuing to develop, and hence the everyday transnational, multi ethnic reality of life on the continent was projecting its influence back to mainland Japan via growing levels of trade and individual travel, the article can be seen as more than just the retelling of an adventure story. Rather it is an exploration of the growing connections between Japan and Manchuria – the presence of Japanese in Manchuria, but also the proximity of events on the continent to everyday domestic Japanese life. Whilst the railway lines were at the heart of development in Manchuria, and hence the “railway territory” – the thin strip of land along the railway lines, and the towns it connected – were the core of these “colonial realities”, even the very desolate and alien frontier into which Deguchi had ventured were integrally connected to Japan through its expanding presence in regional affairs and increasing economic expansion.

Between Deguchi, Japanese officials, the daily press and *Taiyō*'s in-depth investigation, a range of interpretations emerged, stressing variously Deguchi's own self-aggrandizement, the strategic dimensions of bandits and armies in China, the scandal and gossip of Deguchi's fall, and even the developing relationships between Chinese and Japanese, Manchuria and homeland Japan. Together they map the different elements of the Nyūmō coalition and represent a mirror to the range of motivations explored in the first sections of this article.

There is, however, one final account to consider, one which emerged fully 12 years after the events had come to a conclusion. It came, in 1936, as a part of the Kokuryūkai's history of activities in continental Asia. Entitled *Tōa Senkaku Shishi Kiden* (東亜先覚志士記伝, “A Record of the Pioneering Heroes of East Asia”), this text looked a long sweep of Japanese

involvement in China and North-East Asia, seeking to place the 1931 Manchurian incident into a broader narrative of struggles for Asian independence and development. Deguchi's expedition was included alongside Suenaga Misao's Chokokukai project and Lu's prior attempts to free Inner Mongolia, and described as "an attempt to peacefully establish a Mongolian kingdom and realize an Asian league."⁵⁴

By the mid-1930s the overlap between Ōmoto believers and the nationalist groups which helped prompt the Nyūmō had developed into a close relationship between Deguchi himself and the leaders of some of the key associations, such as Tōyama Mitsuru and Uchida Ryōhei.⁵⁵ This marked what has been seen as a "patriotic turn" away from Ōmoto's internationalist phase in the 1920s, although as I will explore later in this article, this chronology is open to criticism. Nancy Stalker links the transition to Deguchi's entrepreneurial sense and ability to reposition the religion to better reflect the prevailing sentiment in Japanese society.⁵⁶ These connections led the state to a second intervention in the religion, this time acting more finally to prevent Ōmoto's activity and holding Deguchi more successfully.⁵⁷

By the mid 1930s, of course, Japan's relationship with China had changed and intensified. The Kokuryūkai history was published a year before war broke out between the two nation-states, whilst the range of possibilities offered by Pan-Asianism changed, too, narrowing until it eventually became no more than a hollow justification of the war effort expanding across Asia and the Pacific Ocean.

⁵⁴ Kokuryūkai (ed.), *Tōa Senkaku Shishi Kiden*, (Tokyo, 1936), p.28

⁵⁵ Nadolski, "The Socio-Political Background of the Ōmoto Suppressions". p.165, pp.199-201, p.227

⁵⁶ Stalker, *Prophet Motive*.

⁵⁷ According to Thomas Nadolski, Deguchi was quite plausibly tied to one of the attempted coups during the early 1930s (Nadolski, "The Socio-Political Background of the Ōmoto Suppressions". pp.199-201)

A central question, therefore, about 1920s Pan-Asianism is whether this reduction of the ideology into a justification for Japanese aggression was inevitable – was the reality of Pan-Asianism the triumph of Japanese national interest over Asian collaboration, or were other possible outcomes embedded within it? The purpose of this article has been to argue that the Mongolian expedition, as an example of Pan-Asianism in action, represents an alternative perspective on the tensions inherent within Pan-Asianism, and hence a chance to develop new understandings of them.

Historians have looked to various methods to analyze the internal dynamics of Pan-Asianism. For Marius Jansen, it was a shared antipathy to the West which allowed the formation of an unlikely coalition of non-Japanese Asians (such as Sun Yat-Sen) and a range of Japanese patriots, liberals and democrats.⁵⁸ Other scholars have sought to segment the space of Pan-Asianism in various ways. So, for example, Miwa Kimitada identifies a split between Pan-Asianisms based upon the identification of Western superiority (hence arguing for Asian unity) and those based upon Japanese strength (thus looking more towards Japanese leadership).⁵⁹ Eri Hotta, by contrast, identifies a nested sequence of forms, from the identification of cultural affinity (“teism”), to proposals for political alliance, to the identification of Japan as savior. This structure effectively forms a map between chronology and the sphere of operation, arguing that as time passed, the dominant form of Pan-Asianism changed, and shifted the sphere in which it manifested, from culture, to politics, to the military.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Jansen, *The Japanese and Sun Yat-Sen*. pp.4-5

⁵⁹ Miwa, “Pan-Asianism in Modern Japan”. p.21

⁶⁰ Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War 1931-1945.*, chapter 1.

The conventional periodization of the history of Ōmoto-kyō confronts a similar problem and uses a similar strategy of segmentation. As discussed, the period of about 15 years between the first state suppression (1921) and the second, more final one (1935) is typically divided into two periods: an “international” phase, in which Deguchi pushed the religion towards the syncretic ties with other religions in Asia and Europe, followed by a “patriotic” phase in which he drew close to some of the nationalist groups agitating for a “Shōwa Ishin” (昭和維新).⁶¹ Close scrutiny of the Nyūmō, however, reveals this periodization as quite problematic.

It took place at the high point of the international phase but it grew out of ties between Ōmoto and the continental adventurers, and revealed Deguchi as surprisingly comfortable with military power for someone often described as a pacifist.⁶² The inconvenient reality is that Ōmoto’s ties to nationalists and the military long predated the Manchurian Incident, whilst the internationalist activity continued even after the religion’s patriotic turn.⁶³ Whilst this periodization identifies different aspects of Deguchi and Ōmoto’s philosophy, disaggregating them into distinct phases is too simplistic.

This complex relationship between nationalist and internationalist impulses prompts one final interpretive strategy for historical consideration of Japanese Pan-Asianism in the 1920s and 30s: the suggestion that it was “contradictory”⁶⁴ or even “paradoxical”.⁶⁵ Whilst fully recognizing and acknowledging the interpretive difficulties that give rise to this characterization, I am somewhat cautious about the use of the terms. It seems to me that

⁶¹ See Nadolski, “The Socio-Political Background of the Ōmoto Suppressions”, or Stalker, *Prophet Motive* for periodization.

⁶² Narangoa, “The Vision of Omotokyo”. p.54-55

⁶³ Nancy Stalker alludes to this categorical complexity by labelling the first phase as “paradoxical internationalism” (Stalker, *Prophet Motive*. Chapter 5).

⁶⁴ Szpilman, “Between Pan-Asianism and Nationalism”. p.85

⁶⁵ Savitri Vishwanathan, “Paradox of Japan's Nationalism: Relations with Asia”, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 10 (3-4) (1975).

there is a risk of anachronism or teleology in using them: that is, I think we should seriously consider the possibility that we only identify a paradox at the heart of 1920s Pan-Asianism because of what we know about the “dark valley of Showa” and Japan’s descent into war which followed. Rather than prefigure the 1930s by marking interwar Pan-Asianism as inherently contradictory, I would prefer to examine these internal tensions in their own terms, and seek to understand how they were recognized and reconciled in at the time.

In this light, this article proposes a new way of examining the diversity inherent within Pan-Asianism, one which neither denies the tension between different forms, nor seeks to reduce it to a “paradox”. By examining the complex of motives which got the Nyūmō off the ground, how they struggled to coexist, and then the different interpretations and meanings which were projected onto events after their conclusion, I have sought to use a transnational method which overlays the different readings of the mission without privileging one over another, or arguing for a single correct understanding. This polyvocal approach requires the use of a diverse set of sources drawing on different perspectives, and it forces us as historians to recognize that we cannot come to a final conclusion about what exactly happened on the steppe of Inner Mongolia to bring the mission crashing down. However, by doing this, I believe that we can gain access to an understanding of the dynamics of different elements within Pan-Asianism in action that more top-down approaches cannot. This micro history of practical Pan-Asianism demonstrates the activities of coalition forming and execution, and the ways in which the stresses within the different participants’ different visions represent a microcosm of wider Asian and Pan-Asian ideologies.

Conclusion

Deguchi Onisaburō escaped the fate of his partner Lu Zhankui, but in being shipped back to Japan he nevertheless faced the likelihood of severe official sanction. His trial for *lèse-majesté* had commenced in his absence, both prompted and compounded by his flight. After being found guilty, he was sentenced to 5 years of hard labour; however, he was released after 4 months on parole, and indeed was fully pardoned in 1927 as a part of a general amnesty tied to the death of the Taishō emperor.⁶⁶ Although Deguchi never returned to Manchuria, Ōmoto remained active in the region, even as war spread across the continent.⁶⁷

It is hard to trace any lasting effects of the Mongolian expedition in China either: it doesn't seem to have had a dramatic impact in the second Zhili-Fengtian war, which broke out in late 1924 despite Zhang's inability to shore up the Mongolian flank. Nevertheless, as demonstrated in this article, it was an important event, not for its longer term consequences, but rather for what it tells us about Pan-Asian movements in the 1920s, the complex intellectual, political and social coalitions which formed around ideas of Asian unity, and the tensions which lay inherent within them. From brokered beginning to contested aftermath, the *Nyūmō* was an example of how Japanese, Chinese, and Mongolians came together in the borderlands of Manchuria-Mongolia.

To elucidate these connections, the article adopts what I have termed a transnational method: explicitly recognizing the event as a confluence of participants and motives, and therefore seeking to enumerate these in their multiplicity, rather than adopt a single

⁶⁶ Sheldon Garon, *Moulding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life*, Princeton University Press, 1998, p.74

⁶⁷ Stalker, *Prophet Motive*, p.163-164

dominant frame. There are difficulties to this polyphonic approach – the Japanese perspectives are better documented and so it is hard to avoid privileging them over the Chinese perspectives (especially those of Lu Zhankui and others who did not survive the expedition). However, I believe that the method pays dividends. In particular, the structure of this paper is intended to suggest connections between the different levels at which we can look at the mission: multiple motives produced multiple ways of seeing the unfolding of events, which in turn led to multiple interpretations and even multiple possible historiographies. Remaining aware of these layered spectra is a corrective to the risk of focusing on one, partial historiographical interpretation.

The other key argument that this article aims to advance is that there are also insights to be gained from looking at an example of Pan-Asianism in practice, rather than Pan-Asianism as idea. Again, there are difficulties to be faced in seeking to read meaning into sets of events rather than political or philosophical texts. However I believe again that there are historiographical consequences: highlighting the need for a greater understanding of the role of the continental adventurers as agents at the fringes of Japanese influence, recognizing the direct connections between Japanese imperial and domestic affairs, and challenging straightforward models of the relationship between ideas of Pan-Asianism, nationalisms and internationalisms, with implications for our conventional categories and chronologies.

Examining how people put their ideas of Asian unity into actual practice on the ground represents an opportunity to expand how we understand the possibilities, tensions, and challenges faced by the ideology. Moreover, by retaining awareness of the different

perspectives on a single event we can remain alert to the multiple readings that are embedded within it.

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