



Mariko Asano Tamanoi, *Memory Maps: The State and Manchuria in Postwar Japan*

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008. 224 pages. Hardcover, US\$51.00. ISBN 978-0-8248-3267-4.

THE JAPANESE experiment in Manchuria has received a great deal of scholarly attention. Recent work by historians has shown the degree to which the 1931 occupation of Manchuria by the Kwantung Army transformed both Japan and China, while the social and political legacy of the state of Manchukuo lasted long beyond its short thirteen-year lifespan. Both at the time, and in later history, Manchukuo had a unique power to exercise the imagination: the formation of the state energized the Japanese public, and goaded Chinese patriots into action. It continues to stand as a symbol of proxy imperialism.

The emotive power of this experiment makes it a particularly appropriate focus for the study of memory. While historians such as Rana Mitter and James Lebold have examined the legacy of Manchukuo in the formation of national discourse of shame and patriotism, their story has generally been a flat analysis of the domination and appropriation of history by the Chinese state.

In this regard, Mariko Tamanoi's book is a unique and welcome contribution to the study of memory and the history of postwar Japan. Tamanoi focuses on the fate of the Japanese agrarian settlers in Manchuria, the hundreds of thousands of poor farmers who were enticed or goaded into moving to Manchukuo after 1936. It is perhaps no surprise that as a group, these settlers have been alternately vilified, eulogized, and forgotten by the Japanese state, the media, and their former friends and neighbors. What Tamanoi shows is the complexity on all sides. The settlers included men and women, successes and failures, those who returned to Japan, and those who stayed in China. Those who chose to remember their time in Manchuria did so in different ways: through memoirs, poetry, or interviews. Tamanoi is particularly sensitive to the voices that are *not* heard: those who chose remain silent about their experience, or those who were silenced by shame or death. As she often reminds the reader, these are only the stories of the survivors.

The book is structured around four chapters, which are the four titular “memory maps.” The first is the oral histories of repatriates. Using interviews collected in Onihata, one of the major emigrant-producing villages in Nagano, Tamanoi addresses the returnees’ memory of Manchuria, why they went, and the role of the state in sending them. They emphasized that they had answered the call of the state to emigrate, but had never seen themselves as colonizers. Rather, they were its victims. They were falsely promised a *terra nullis*, a vast expanse of untilled land, and learned only too late that they would displace Chinese farmers. The second memory map is from the written memoirs of returnees. Unlike oral interviews, written memoirs represent a conscious decision to publicly act out a memory, and show the greater tendency to conform to the conventions of collective memory. Tamanoi finds certain themes that recur in these memoirs: their suffering at the hands of “Manchurian bandits” and Russian soldiers, the traumas of rape, starvation, and compulsory group suicide, and their callous abandonment by the Kwantung Army and Japanese state. This litany of suffering is broken by a few bright spots: the behavior of ordinary Chinese and particularly of the Chinese Communists. Tamanoi does not doubt these memories, but constantly asks what has been added, and what has been left out. How does one recount a group suicide? And if only a small number of people chose to recount their memories in writing, what shall we make of the many more who were unable or unwilling to do so?

The third memory map comes from those who remained in China, the women and orphans who were abandoned or sold in the final rush to escape Manchuria. The women who married Chinese were older at the time of capitulation, and thus had longer memories than the orphans, many of whom grew up entirely unaware of their Japanese parentage. An even greater distinction between these two groups is in their treatment by postwar Japan. While the women found it relatively easier to return to Japan, the orphans faced a much greater struggle in proving their parentage, locating relatives, and adjusting to Japanese society. Many of those who chose to remain in Japan did so in order to send financial support to their adoptive parents in China. The final memory map is of the Chinese themselves. This includes the interviews of peasants as part of the government-sponsored oral project published under the name *wenshi ziliao*. As the only one that was collected under official auspices, these histories present a rather uneven comparison with the others, but still reveal certain themes. Not surprisingly, the most prominent is that of exploitation: Japanese are generally treated as cruel, arrogant, and violent, with the harshest treatment being reserved for those in positions of authority. A more subtle form of memory comes from the adoptive parents of Japanese children, and those adopted children who chose not to seek repatriation, and instead embraced their Chinese identity. Yet, even without the filter of official historiography, these memories return to what has by now become a familiar theme: placing blame on the Japanese state for shirking its responsibility to the orphans, or by extension, for its actions in Asia.

Although this book raises a number of theoretical issues and models, its fundamental message is simple and quite powerful: memory is a very complicated phenomenon. It is both collective and individual. It changes with time, and with

the circumstances of recollection. As a historian, I especially appreciated Tamanoi's attention to the selectivity of voices that produce historical memory. Most of the Nagano settlers to Manchuria died there. Only one in three returned home, and those who did return dominate our memory of events that we never saw. Tamanoi consistently reminds the reader that the great majority of voices are kept silent: the starved children, the victims of compulsory group suicide, the "kamikaze" prostitutes who gave their bodies to Russian soldiers.

The book does have a few problems. I found the theoretical discussion a bit overworked, and at times repetitive. The content occasionally feels a bit thin, as though the author was trying to stretch her material. Conversely, I would have appreciated a more in-depth discussion of China. The fourth chapter is intriguing, but ultimately disappointing. Having raised the constraints of state-dominated oral history in Chinese materials, it neglects to make the same sort of connection to off-the-record spoken memory in interviews. Such an omission is especially disappointing, as the book has already explored this point in the first chapter.

These points aside, I found the book enlightening and enjoyable. It is well-written, and whenever possible includes the words of the original speaker. The stories they recount are heartbreaking, but the book somehow avoids becoming maudlin.

Thomas David DuBois
National University of Singapore