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Agreeing to Differ, Albeit Slightly: Pan-Asianism in the Wartime Writings of the Faculty Members at Kenkoku University in Japanese Occupied Manchuria

Examines conceptions of Pan-Asianism as reflected in the wartime writings of Asian faculty members of Kenkoku (Nation-Building) University in Japanese occupied Manchuria in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Manchukuo’s stated commitment to the goal of minzoku kyōwa (“ethnic harmony”) and the University’s promise of Asian equality ensured, in theory, free exchange of ideas among its constituents. While limits to such supposed equitarian relationships are obvious, one can find a variety of views expressed by the faculty members. While Japanese faculty members tended to see Japan’s role as central in forging an Asian unity, they presented distinct explanations for Japan’s relationship with Asia and the motives of Asian participation in the Pan-Asian crusade against the West. Meanwhile, although non-Japanese faculty members did not oppose the Japanese Empire in their writings, they subtly challenged the Japan-centered approach to the ongoing Pan-Asianist endeavor. This conclusion complicates the picture of Japan’s wartime ideology by bringing in non-Japanese people’s perspectives. It also challenges the binary narratives of wartime relations between Japanese and non-Japanese as resistance to or collaboration with Japanese imperialism.


Invigoration of the “artistic spirit of the defeated nation” was one of the implicit aims of the new governmental program in 1950s Japan designating individuals as “Holders of Important Intangible Cultural Property” (Jūyō mukei bunkazai hōjisha) for craft. Colloquially known as the system for “Living National Treasures” (ningen kokuhō), it marked a manifestation of cultural preservation on an official administrative scale never before seen in Japan or elsewhere. In 1955, ceramist Tomimoto Kenkichi (1886-1963) was one of the first individuals to receive this designation. At the time of the award, the 69 year old was at his career’s peak—actively
fulfilling commissions for the imperial household, sending his porcelain to international exhibitions, and commanding the highest prices of the time for contemporary ceramics. But why exactly was Tomimoto selected? To address this question, this chapter of the manuscript *Tomimoto Kenkichi and the Art of Modern Japanese Ceramics* probes the program’s purported goals of preserving tradition and protecting cultural patrimony. By focusing on Tomimoto’s praxis and art as a case study, this analysis uncovers the ways in which the Living National Treasure program pacified lingering attitudes towards Japan as a militaristic aggressor while maintaining value systems and institutions with wartime and pre-World War II origins.

**HOTEL:** SHERATON AT THE FALLS 300 Third Street, Niagara Falls, New York 14303 1-716-285-3361  1-800-953-2557: Reservations will have to be made by March 24, 2015 in order to get the event rate, which is $119 per night.

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