

The Resident Enemy:
A Study of Civilian Anti-Semitism in World War II Japan

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Preface

The plight of the Jewish people throughout the 20th century has been and remains one of the most researched and discussed topics in the field of history. The Holocaust is an especially evocative event, and although Adolf Hitler and the Nazis' fundamentally racist doctrine is a crucial case study in both defining and interpreting elements of modern anti-Semitism, the scope of that ideology's influence—that is, its reach beyond Germany and Europe—is somewhat lacking in contemporary scholarship. Indeed, Nazi Germany and its territories were hotbeds for Hitler's particular kind of anti-Semitism, but derivative forms manifested and took root in nations as geographically isolated and culturally distinct from Germany as Japan.

Despite the Japanese Empire and Germany's wartime alliance, Japan's government never explicitly upheld the anti-Semitic crux of Nazism; if anything, the foundation of the pact was far more reliant on militaristic stratagem than an ideological impetus. A majority of the Japanese population had never had the experience of meeting a Jewish person, let alone developed the ability to distinguish one from their German allies. How then, could a people so foreign be stigmatized in a country where they did not exist? Could this very unfamiliarity elicit the development of a distant and unique form of anti-Semitism, far from its ideological epicenter? This paper hopes to reconstruct and interpret the varying degrees of civilian anti-Semitism in Japan through the detailed accounts of two German Jews who witnessed it, albeit very differently, firsthand.

The whole relationship of the Japanese to the West is necessarily discordant and ambivalent: one admires *and* loathes Western civilization... [then] one demands idealism of oneself.¹

Karl Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*

¹ Karl Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 228.

Antecedents

The anomalous nature of Japanese anti-Semitism can first be derived from its unique culture—one that is rooted in folklore heavily influenced by the country’s long history of isolation. The Japanese, despite their relatively late exposure to Judaism and its followers, had for centuries maintained a uniform perception of “foreigners” in the broadest sense; the artistic and oral expressions of those who were both unfamiliar and unseen were persistent however lacking in factual evidence or sheer contact. Foreigners in the Japanese mind have, for the most part, been regarded with contempt and suspicion as indicated by a supernatural being known as *marebito* in ancient Shinto myth. According to Iwai Hiroshi’s *Encyclopedia of Shinto* the *marebito* is defined as follows:²

“Rare person. A term originally referring to a visitor. Orikuchi Shinobu defined *marebito* as spiritual entities that periodically visit village communities from the other world — the “everlasting world” (*tokoyo*) across the sea — to bring their residents happiness and good fortune. Orikuchi traced the prototype of the *marebito* to ancestral spirits (*sorei*). Despite the dread and disdain of community residents for the *marebito*, their belief that the *marebito* bring blessings led to the development of customs for and notions of welcoming the *marebito*.”³

Although the *marebito* were known to bear gifts, the uneasiness associated with “visitors from afar” on native soil had evolved over time, eventually becoming anthropomorphized into a major figure of Japanese Shinto lore: the *oni*.

The *oni* is considered to be *yōkai* (loosely translated to “bewitching,” “apparition,” or “mystery”), a class of supernatural spirits often characterized as malevolent and mischievous, and has been interpreted as representative of the “foreigner” since its rather ambiguous conception. While its artistic depictions vary, the *oni* typically takes the form of a hideous and horned ogre-like creature. It has long and unkempt black hair, claws, and a curved horn on either

² Japanese names in the text and notes appear in the Japanese order, surname first.

³ Hiroshi Iwai, *Encyclopedia of Shinto* trans. *Shinto Jiten* (Shibuya-kyu Tokyo: Kokugakuin University Press, 2004): 102-3.

side of its head; its skin is most commonly blue or red (see figure 1).⁴ The *oni*'s distinctive build, movements, and wide-mouthed maniacal laughter in early folk art resemble the barbarity ascribed to Japanese caricatures of Occidentals. The *oni* is notorious for its trickery and ability to corrupt, thus its victims are primarily archetypal Japanese women—porcelain and frail—who symbolically embody the essence of Japan's spiritual purity. This character's significance, however, resides in its role within a fundamental structure of Shinto myths—that is, the invocation, propitiation, and ultimate expulsion of an encroaching, evil deity.⁵

The conflicting paradigms of the *marebito* and *oni* conditioned the way in which Japanese people would later conceive Jews. German

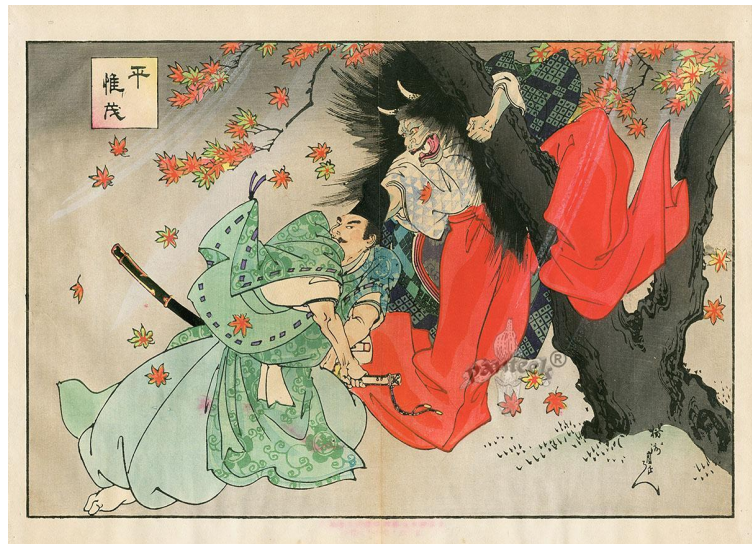


Figure 1: A traditional depiction of a samurai battling an *oni*.
Source: Artist unknown, woodblock print

Jews however, belonged to two categories of the foreigner in Japanese mythology. Whereas the “enlightened” German scholars who represented westernness and civilization aligned with the *marebito*, the deviance associated with Jews in 19th and 20th century European anti-Semitic thought matched that of the *oni*. The duality of German Jews profoundly contributed to the ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding their status during World War II; they were simultaneously imagined as dangerous “visitors from afar” by virtue of sensationalized Jewish stereotypes, and as admirable members of a highly esteemed German culture.

⁴ James F. Davidson, “Memory of Defeat in Japan: A Reappraisal of ‘Rashomon,’” *The Antioch Review* Vol. 14, no.4 (December 1954): 497.

⁵ David G. Goodman, and Masanori Miyazawa, *Jews in the Japanese Mind* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1995), 16.

Furthermore the properties of the “foreigner” have, throughout Japanese history, been cyclically propagated depending on the most menacing cultural competitor of the time. Similarly the broad categories of *oni* and *marebito* were applied to peoples and nations, acting as hollow vessels to be filled by any relevant “other.” Each peril exhibited some or all of the following: adherence to an occult religion; pursuit of a grand conspiracy for global conquest geographically, culturally, and spiritually (or creation of a single world order); an overwhelming desire to destroy Japan’s national identity.⁶

Japan’s obsession with its self-proclaimed uniqueness can perhaps be traced back to China’s direct and indirect guidance in constructing Japan’s culture. In the early Edo period, Japan idealized Chinese civilization and for centuries borrowed freely from it: language, religion, government, architecture, and art among many others. By the 19th century however, Japanese intellectuals claimed their nation had surpassed China, and the masses were subsequently conditioned to adopt a cultural contempt for their new rival. Citizens completely transformed their perception of a country which had in elemental ways given shape to their own society.⁷ In a psychological study of Japanese consciousness, experts concluded that substantial similarities between Japanese culture and its Chinese predecessors threatened strengthening notions of Japanese exceptionalism.⁸ By fabricating a rivalry between nations, Japanese intellectuals sought to perhaps destroy any lingering sense of cultural debt that stood in the way of Japan’s uniqueness.⁹ Pejorative racial depictions of China, especially popularized throughout the Meiji

⁶ Seishisai Aizawa, *Shinron* (1825), 55.

⁷ Louise Young and Frank Dikotter, “Rethinking Race for Manchukuo: Self and Other in the Colonial Context” in *Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997), 158-76.

⁸ Stanley Rosenman, “Japanese Anti-Semitism: Conjuring up Conspiratorial Jews in a Land without Jews” in *The Journal of Psychology* vol. 25 (Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis, 1997), 2-32.

⁹ Young, “Rethinking,” 159.

period, provided a foil against which Japan confirmed its own national identity—one independent and superior to that of any other country.

Even before Japan's exposure to 20th century anti-Semitism, nationalists had already developed a theory of an alien occult religion whose global conspiracy would destroy Japan's "pure" national essence. Thus Japanese anti-Semitism cannot completely be attributed to the cultural-religious models mentioned above. Its emergence prior to World War II was preceded by the "Christian threat," articulated and urgently disseminated by Japanese nationalist Aizawa Seishisai's *Shinron* of 1825:

"They all believe in the same religion, Christianity, which they use to... destroy native houses of worship, deceive the local peoples, and seize those lands. These barbarians will settle for nothing less than subjugating the rulers of all nations and conscripting all peoples into their ranks. And they are becoming aggressive. Having overthrown [other] native regimes... they turned their predatory eyes on our Divine Realm."¹⁰

Although Europeans remained largely out of sight in early Japanese history, Western nations entered the forefront of Japanese concerns as they dominated the global sphere through political interference, spiritual condescension, and economic exploitation.¹¹ Within this context two key incidents elicited Aizawa's writings. First, China's humiliating defeat against Britain during the Opium War (1842) reduced the country to a semi-colonial status; second, the religious institutions governing Japanese spirituality had been steadily declining for two centuries.¹² Fearing Japan's potential spiritual subversion by a western power, Aizawa created a terrifying portrait of the "Christian barbarian." Over time he, alongside a committee of zealous bureaucrats and nationalists, generated a sense of national urgency in the face of this approaching beast.

¹⁰ Seishisai Aizawa, "Shinron" in *Meiji bunka zenshu*, vol. 15 (Kyoto: Nihon hyoron-sha, 1929): 24-25.

¹¹ Löwith, *Martin Heidegger*, 228.

¹² Goodman, *Jews in*, 19.

These figures negotiated the establishment of State Shinto, an all-encompassing governing system that will be discussed later.

Ironically, however, this recurrent plot's intent was never to instill a genuine or lasting sense of hatred for another group or peoples. Instead, the elaborate construction of a dangerous "other" reawakened preexisting notions of Japanese exceptionalism within the collective psyche during periods of spiritual or political atrophy. It demanded total participation in the heroic defense of this mythical uniqueness. By propagating a conspiracy that could theoretically result in Japan's demise, leaders mobilized the citizenry to pursue ulterior agendas—for example, justification to declare war.

Between the Chinese, Christians, and Hitler's 20th century "Jewish Menace," the driving force of Japanese history was seemingly the fear of cultural and spiritual collapse, especially by the hegemonic hand of the Occident. The Jews would experience the same pattern of exploitation on the eve of World War II: Japanese anti-Semitism was, above all else, strategic in nature, manipulating threats both real and imagined to galvanize the nation's spirit and ease profound anxieties of cultural atrophy and the usurpation of its identity.¹³ As a result, the anti-Semitism exhibited by Japanese civilians was shallow, temporary, and a direct product of the government's ever-fluctuating wartime stance on the "Jewish Question." Moreover the public's general lack of uniformity was evident as nuanced degrees and expressions of anti-Semitism existed within different socio-economic classes. By juxtaposing the memoir of Karl Löwith, an esteemed intellectual, with that of Heinz Altschul, a modest blue-collar worker, this paper will elucidate such discrepancies of anti-Semitic behavior in Japan.

Germany and Japan are the unheavenly twins of post-war history.¹⁴

¹³ Goodman, *Jews in*, 24.

¹⁴ Bernd Martin, *Japan and Germany in the Modern World* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995), 12.

Martin Bernd, *Japan and Germany in the Modern World*

An Unusual Alliance

The post-World War I conferences of Versailles and Washington established a new order defended primarily by the Western powers, namely the United States, Great Britain, and France. Japan was welcomed into the victor's circle, having received recognition of its own imperial ambitions in the Pacific; however, interwar aggression against China provoked Western nations to embargo Japan's crucial wartime materials such as oil, rubber, and iron, resulting in contention between the countries. While the great powers did maintain the status quo through the interwar years, a reinvigorated Germany and the emerging Japanese Empire presented challenges to the forces in control: both were led by fiercely right-wing nationalist governments that sought to antagonize the Western superpowers and expand their borders. By 1933, Japan and Germany withdrew from the League of Nations and grew increasingly isolated. Under these circumstances, Adolf Hitler considered Japan to be a potential ally. Perhaps his earliest image of Japan as the victor over Russia in 1904-1905 continued to shape Hitler's thought. To an extent he even admired the Japanese, having on several occasions compared Aryan heroism to that of the Japanese *samurai* and later expressed a desire to utilize the *kamikaze's* sacrificial and loyal spirit

as a model for German soldiers.¹⁵ However it was by virtue of their mutual adversary, Communist Russia, that Hitler opted for a Japanese-German alliance. This would eventually amount to the Anti-Comintern Pact, concluded on November 25, 1936 (see figure 2).



Figure 2: Japanese Ambassador Kintomo Mushakoji signing the Anti-Comintern Pact; to his right, German representatives Joachim von Ribbentrop and Dr. Hermann von Raumer; to his left, German diplomat Otto von Erdmannsdorff; in the background from left, Captain Kojima, Dr. Theodor Böttiger, General Hiroshi Oshima, Kojiro Inoue, legation secretaries Yanai and Furuuchi

The ideological dissonance between Germany and Japan made the Anti-Comintern Pact all the more startling. The foundation of Nazism can be derived from Hitler's ideological manifesto, *Mein Kampf*, in which he details a hierarchy of racial superiority in the following categories: "the founders of culture, the bearers of culture, and the destroyers of

culture, [with] only the Aryan considered as the representative of the first group."¹⁶ How could Japan, whose peoples were classified as inferior within his structure, find a German alliance appealing? Moreover, the Japanese Empire had declared itself and its "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" a champion of racial equality—why should they embrace an ally whose ideology sanctioned the persecution of an entire ethnic group?¹⁷

Official circles in Japan—except for the few pro-German groups within the Navy—kept their distance from National Socialism. Though the Japanese feared the danger of communist

¹⁵ Adolf Hitler and Martin Bormann, *The Political Testament of Adolf Hitler: the Hitler-Bormann Documents, February-April 1945*, ed. L. Craig Fraser (CPA Book Publisher, 1945), 16-28.

¹⁶ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* trans. Ralph Manheim (Munich: Eher Verlag, 1994), 241.

¹⁷ Ben-Ami Shillony, *Politics and Culture in Wartime Japan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 163.

infiltration and greatly abhorred Soviet Russia's ideology, if Hitler wanted to gain Japanese support against the Soviet Union the race question had to be resolved. In his own analysis of World War I, Hitler suggested that encirclement had been Germany's undoing; in any future war he wanted to ensure Germany was "back free" when attacking its opponents.¹⁸ Japan acted as both a counterweight against the Soviet Union and an ally against Western powers, whose colonial holdings in Asia made them vulnerable to Japanese expansion.

Although high-ranking Party members found ideological compromise to be unthinkable, the German Foreign Office repeatedly tried to define "Non-Aryan" in such a way that it sounded acceptable to Japanese ears.¹⁹ The practical benefits of a Japanese ally proved too great for Nazi leadership, and so Japan was promoted to an "honorary Aryan" status.²⁰ The Japanese interpreted the pact solely as an anti-Soviet defense alliance to strengthen her Manchurian and Chinese territories. Hitler, on the other hand, simply used the Anti-Comintern Pact to declare Nazi Germany's claim to worldwide power—the agreement would be rendered meaningless soon after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939.²¹ It was within this context of secrecy, deception, and ideological dissonance that the Anti-Comintern Pact was formalized, perhaps resulting in the lasting contention regarding Japan's unresolved stance on her ally's "Jewish Question."

Whatever is still true culture in contemporary Japan, particularly simplicity, politesse, and beauty, is nothing new but rather something which preserves what is ancient.²²

Karl Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*

Karl Löwith

¹⁸ Hitler, *Mein*, 80.

¹⁹ Martin, *Japan*, 216.

²⁰ Hitler, *The Political*, 31.

²¹ Martin, *Japan*, 221.

²² Löwith, *Martin Heidegger*, 230.

In 1933 Adolf Hitler arrived in Marburg, where local professors were cordially invited to view one of his increasingly anticipated orations. In accordance with his racial policies, however, all Jews were denied access to the marquee in which he made his speech. Karl Löwith, a highly respected professor of philosophy at Marburg University, was one of the many Jewish scholars who would slowly become ostracized from their intellectual circles (see figure 3). Following his eventual escape to Japan, Löwith wrote an illuminating memoir, *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933*. Through this insightful work I



Figure 3: Portrait of Löwith in 1952, photographer unknown

will address the development (or perhaps lack of development) of anti-Semitism within the Japanese intelligentsia: Löwith's experiences indicate that Nazi sentiments were typically overridden by the general impartiality of Japanese academia, and its members' tendency to favor class, not race, in determining status.

Despite the initial ambivalence and skepticism expressed by his peers during the early stages of Hitler's rise to power, Löwith witnessed "the German uprising manifest[ing] itself in Marburg as it slowly did elsewhere, at first by the SA men hounding Jews."²³ He gave his final lecture in 1933, just as the first round of Jewish professors were being dismissed by the university board. Within months, Löwith's social contacts in Marburg had depleted almost entirely. As most of his Jewish colleagues emigrated, finding positions in Zurich, Paris, and Rome, a sense of urgency dawned on him and he scrambled for employment elsewhere. For the

²³ Löwith, *My Life*, 77.

next two years, he would travel through Italy, Paris, and Prague, working as a visiting lecturer in universities not yet tainted by Nazi influence.

Upon returning to Marburg for three days in the spring of 1935, Löwith learned that his teaching license was revoked in Germany altogether, despite the lack of any legal justification for its revocation.²⁴ He even travelled to Berlin to contest the decision, where he was vaguely told by the Ministry that the chairman of the lecturers' association had taken such measures without any particular charges being brought against him.²⁵ It was during these next few days when Löwith met a Japanese academic who, to Löwith's surprise, greeted him with unusually cordial goodwill and claimed that his most recent work, a habilitation thesis, had been eagerly followed among Japanese philosophers.²⁶ On his suggestion Löwith wrote to Baron Kuki, a famed professor of philosophy in Kyoto. Almost a year later, in June of 1936, Löwith received a telegram from Japan offering him a chair at the University of Sendai. He later discovered this offer had been tirelessly negotiated by the Baron himself, who battled numerous attempts by the German Embassy and German Cultural Institute to block Löwith's appointment on racial grounds.²⁷

After a 33 day sea voyage from Naples, Löwith arrived in the Japanese city of Sendai. From the first day, Löwith noticed the exceptional politeness and courtesy with which he was received and shepherded to his housing.²⁸ There, he was allowed a spacious university home where he made a seemingly effortless transition and within months he felt at home—so much that he would often find himself saying “Marburg” instead of “Sendai.”²⁹ The allure of a

²⁴ Löwith, *My Life*, 109.

²⁵ Löwith, *My Life*, 109.

²⁶ Löwith, *My Life*, 110.

²⁷ Löwith, *My Life*, 113.

²⁸ Löwith, *My Life*, 117.

²⁹ Löwith, *My Life*, 117.

German-Jew in the local academic circle was palpable among his Japanese colleagues, lending a new impetus to his existence in a foreign country. Löwith recalls that he did not even initially notice his stark difference in appearance, as he was just one of the few Germans in Sendai at the time—while he expected to make the acquaintance of other Westerners (most of whom were Canadian, Italian, Swiss, or American), he often preferred the company of his Japanese colleagues.³⁰ Löwith’s academic clout effectively defined his sociopolitical status as a German Jew in Japan, impacting —rather favorably—his associations with local citizens of the same intellectual class.

Japanese Naivety

As heightening tensions in Europe caused small ripples of anti-Semitic thought to reach Japan, Löwith attempted to enlighten locals deceived by German propaganda whenever the opportunity arose. What he had previously theorized, however, was quickly proven to be true: how *could* the Japanese distinguish what was Jewish and what was German when there were so few of either in their proximity?³¹ Löwith observes that his Japanese associates were simply incapable of it, no matter how much they read about it in the newspapers: “most of them were totally naive,” he writes, “and some of them said ‘Jews’ when they meant England and American capital.”³² The anecdote regarding mathematician “K,” a professor at Sendai University, provides a classic example of this case:³³

“One day [K] came to see [Löwith] for the correction of an essay written in German— [K] knew that [Löwith] was Jewish. He had received an invitation from a German mathematician to co-author a publication which was to contain a German, an Italian and a Japanese contribution, and was due to appear in Germany. K felt most honored, and wrote a foreword in which he expressed the hope that the collaboration between the three

³⁰ Löwith, *My Life*, 117.

³¹ Löwith, *My Life*, 101.

³² Löwith, *My Life*, 101.

³³ Löwith refers to real characters using the first initial of their first name for the purpose of anonymity.

mathematicians would strengthen the tripartite pact between Japan, Germany and Italy in science too. In the same breath he expressed his highest admiration for Albert Einstein, without whose scholarly work modern algebra would not have progressed. At the end of the foreword he thanked [Löwith] for his help with corrections. When [Löwith] tried to get the point through to him that it would be better to omit his name, and that the printing of his sentence about Einstein could cause serious problems for his German colleague, this harmless man was suddenly nonplussed, so remote to him seemed the notion that in Germany even ‘pure’ mathematics could be stifled by National Socialism.”³⁴

K’s separation of the academic sphere from the socio-political climate of World War II was not unusual among the Japanese intelligentsia. In his memoir, Löwith mentions the loyalty with which his Japanese colleagues protected him: when German professor and Party member Otto Koellreutter visited Sendai, Löwith’s colleagues carefully avoided any arrangements that would expose his Jewish background.³⁵ Some had attended Koellreutter’s lecture, during which he illustrated the unity of the *Volk* and Nazi leadership with a comical diagram in which he drew a vertical line from the apex of the word *Führer* to the *Volk* written below.³⁶ The Japanese professors in attendance had found his lecture so trivial that they did not withhold their criticism—a seemingly shocking display to Löwith, who believed the Japanese to be a typically passive and unassertive people.³⁷

Despite Japan’s pact with Nazi Germany, the driving force of its ally’s ideology—anti-Semitism to a genocidal degree—was never formally recognized or supported by the Japanese government. In July 1937 the Nazi government requested a list of German citizens employed at Japanese universities from the Foreign Ministry. The Nazis procured a total of 74 names, enabling the German embassy in Japan to identify and potentially eradicate German Jews working as instructors—these intellectuals, including Löwith, were thought to have tremendous

³⁴ Löwith, *My Life*, 102.

³⁵ Löwith, *My Life*, 121.

³⁶ Löwith, *My Life*, 121.

³⁷ Löwith, *My Life*, 121.

(and dangerous) potential in influencing Japanese public opinion. By September 1939, the Japanese-German Cultural Exchange Cooperation Association, a Nazi affiliated academic coalition established in 1938, expressed their contempt of German Jews in Japanese academia, claiming they were unqualified to represent Germany. Such a statement was issued to Japan's Minister of Education and was swiftly rejected. In response, the department reserved its power to appoint and dismiss all foreign instructors at its discretion, asserting that Germany's "race problem" was limited to Germany alone:

“[The German-Jewish instructors'] qualifications as teachers is not a matter of race but of their scholarly accomplishments. Foreign instructors [held] personal contracts with the presidents of the schools where they [were] employed. The ministry [had] no authority to override presidents' discretionary decisions to renew or terminate contracts.”³⁸

Although this statement would soon make school presidents the targets of Nazi pressures, Japan had for the time being protected German-Jewish instructors from expulsion. The academic contributions offered by such instructors were not to be restricted by racial prejudices although in theory nationality was a criterion used to define foreign civilians—either as allied, neutral, stateless, or enemy nationals.³⁹ Despite an underlying admiration for western cultures, Japanese rhetoric failed to distinguish among various Europeans beyond the broad categorization of *gaikokujin*, a word comprising three characters that directly translate to outside (*gai*), country (*koku*), and person (*jin*). In contrast, there were pre-existing words for the Chinese (*chugokujin*) and the Koreans (*kankokujin*), both of whom were considered Japan's inferiors. The very word used to describe Jews, *yudayajin*, was only popularized by necessity in the early 1900s when imported and translated works of anti-Semitic Soviets following the Russo-Japanese War (1904-

³⁸ Makoto Honobe, *Ruisu Fuugo Furanku Sensei: Seitan Hyakunen Kinenshi* (Kofu-shi, Japan: Ruisu Fuugo Furanku sensei tsuito shaonkai, 1993), C.7.38.

³⁹ W. Puck. Brecher, *Honored and Dishonored Guests: Westerners in Wartime Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017): 10.

1905) and subsequent Russian Civil War (1917-1922) reached Japan -- the most important text being the translation of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Stationed in Siberia

In order to understand the crux of Japanese anti-Semitism, one must discuss *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Following the Russian Revolution and collapse of the Romanov Dynasty in October 1917, the Japanese government joined American, French, British, Canadian, and Czech forces in a joint intervention. Japanese troops amassed a force of 72,000 soldiers, and although intervening nations had withdrawn by June 1920, the Japanese military remained in Siberia. Because *The Protocols* text was distributed throughout the region as required reading for anti-Bolshevik detachments, many Japanese soldiers acquired copies themselves hoping that from it, they could understand the nature of Russia's revolution.⁴⁰

This text, nicknamed "the bible of anti-Semitism" by notable historian and Japanologist David Goodman, consists of 24 lectures in which members of a fictitious secret Jewish government—"the Elders of Zion"—present an elaborate plot for world domination by controlling the press and global economies. These "Elders" supposedly believe that societal order could only be achieved through the coercion and subjugation of all non-Jewish peoples by a single, hegemonic Jewish leader. While *The Protocols* was admittedly fabricated by the Russian secret police in France during the infamous Dreyfus Affair (1894-1899), the Japanese mistakenly recognized *The Protocols* text as fact due to its authoritative position in Russian society.

The text's influence on Japan was nothing short of profound: it introduced a frightening image of a people who were previously unknown to the country. As discussed in the first pages of this paper, Japan's long history of isolation and racial homogeneity generated an underlying

⁴⁰ Goodman, *Jews in*, 78.

mythos of potential destruction by a foreign power. Suddenly *The Protocols* text suggested this very fate: Japan's ultimate fear was both realized and justified as it materialized before them in the form of the Jews. In response, Japanese authorities hurriedly began negotiating policies to address this new threat. However, this task proved problematic: few Japanese in those days had any knowledge of Jews or Judaism in general. It was only after the 1931 occupation of Manchuria that a sizable Jewish population entered the Japanese mainstream for the first time.⁴¹

Within Major General Higuchi Kiichiro's Japanese headquarters in Siberia, there were a number of officers assigned to specialize in Jewish affairs. The role of these "experts" was to advise Japanese authorities on what should be done with the thousands of Jews who fled the Soviet Union after the Bolshevik Revolution and settled in the Japanese-controlled Manchurian city of Harbin. Colonel Norihiro Yasue and Naval Captain Koreshige Inuzuka, two middle-echelon officers, quickly rose to fame as Japan's leading experts on Jews after personally undertaking the translation of *The Protocols* in 1924. After engaging in many conversations with anti-Bolshevik Russians throughout the early 1920s, the two presented an assessment of Jews that subscribed to *The Protocols*' anti-Semitic rhetoric. During an exceptionally turbulent period of Japanese history—civilian restlessness, severe economic problems, a devastating earthquake—it was no wonder that the officers were quick to identify Jews as perfect culprits for their own country's problems.

Under the pseudonym of *Hokoshi*, Colonel Norihiro authored more anti-Semitic texts such as *The Revelation of a Revolutionary Movement*, *Behind the World Revolution*, and *The Jewish Control of the World*, disseminating propaganda worthy of Goebbels himself:

"The Bolshevik Revolution is part of the Jewish plot... they seek to control the world's economy, politics and diplomacy. Unless the Japanese realize this danger Japan will be

⁴¹ David Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis & Jews: the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945* (New York: KTAV Pub. House, 1988): 170.

left behind in the struggle for world supremacy; The League [of Nations], Freemasons... are under Jewish control. The Jews are revolutionaries and they are encroaching on the Manchuria economy, and the Japanese must guard their interests in both Japan and Manchuria against the Jews.”⁴²

Captain Koreshige similarly engaged in anti-Semitic discourse under the pseudonym *Kiyo Utsunomiya*, publishing numerous articles, newsletters, and journals. In effect the officers popularized the use of publications as a literary outlet for Japanese anti-Semitism, a unique feature of Japanese wartime culture.

Indeed, Japan’s Jewish population remained minimal throughout the following decade, but this did not prevent anti-Semitism from garnering the citizens’ interest. The Japanese viewed Jews with a mixture of admiration and fear—intellectual circles were especially drawn to their mystique and the general fanaticism they caused throughout the western world. Between 1926 and 1935, approximately 60 books and 80 articles regarding the Jews circulated throughout Japan alongside a myriad of translated works by Russian anti-Semites.⁴³ This initial surge increased exponentially shortly after the translated release of Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. Publications surrounding the “Jewish Peril” rapidly became popular in Japan from the late 1930s through wartime with a total of 170 books and 472 articles: in less than a decade, the book count tripled while the number of articles grew six-fold.⁴⁴ In 1938 alone, approximately 20 books and 117 articles about Jews were published.⁴⁵

Finally, the spectacle of Hitler’s racist regime in Germany transformed the Jewish Question into one of the most gripping topics of debate among the Japanese intelligentsia. It is this very phenomenon that distinguishes Japanese anti-Semitism from that of Germany: Hitler’s

⁴² Ho Koshi [Yasue Norihiro], *Sekai kakumei no rimen* [Behind the World Revolution] (Tokyo: Niyu Meicho Kankokai, 1924): 36.

⁴³ Ben-Ami Shillony, *The Jews and the Japanese: The Successful Outsiders* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1993): 170.

⁴⁴ Shillony, *The Jews and*, 170.

⁴⁵ Shillony, *The Jews and*, 170.

anti-Semitism was rooted in pre-existing conspiratorial claims and social stigmas surrounding Jews, synonymous to those of *The Protocols*. It was internalized by the masses so deeply that they unwittingly enabled and justified the attempted extermination of an entire people by a fundamentally anti-Semitic government. In Japan, however, the concept of a cunning, organized, and powerful people generated intense curiosity specifically within academia, catalyzing a desire to study them, learn from them, and potentially exploit them. What Löwith observes as a German-Jewish academic in Japan is that its anti-Semitism never escalated beyond an intellectual fad, discourse at best. Indeed, an anti-Semitic faction existed, but it found expression in publications rather than in acts of government-sanctioned aggression. With the exception of a few threats and politically motivated anti-Semitic posters, there were no attacks against Jews or Jewish institutions, nor were there any explicitly anti-Semitic organizations in Japan.⁴⁶

Summers in Karuizawa

⁴⁶ Jennifer Golub, "Japanese Attitude towards Jews" in American Jewish Committee Publications (Los Angeles: American Jewish Committee, 1992): 5.

Although Löwith's time in Japan was mostly spent in Sendai, he enjoyed summers at the resort town of Karuizawa, alongside other upper-class European emigre families. This rural mountain town was first touted as a potential summer retreat in 1881 by British scholar-diplomat Ernest Satow



Figure 4: Vacationing Japanese women play tennis at one of many Karuizawa tennis courts. Photographer John Nelson, taken in 1930.

(1843-1929), who described the area as “a beautiful plateau... an ideal destination for hiking, plant viewing, and escaping Japan’s oppressive summer temperatures.”⁴⁷ With the timely completion of a direct railroad between Tokyo and Karuizawa in 1893, the town attracted many foreign travelers who were “summering,” a typically Western aristocratic practice of escaping to the cool breezes and panoramas of mountainside resorts.⁴⁸

Karuizawa’s general ambiance was a replica of Western tastes: the main street was lined with foreign bookstores, antique shops, barbers, Christian churches, and English signs. The Karuizawa Summer Residents’ Association (KSRA), formed in 1913 by the town’s Western “regulars,” financed the construction of traditionally western recreational facilities such as tennis courts, nine-hole golf courses, and skiing and skating sites (see figure 4).⁴⁹ Moreover the summertime villas lacked Japanese authenticity as they often resembled standard two-story wooden cabins with open verandas and spacious patios (see figure 5).

⁴⁷ Ernest Mason Satow and Ian C. Ruxton, *The Diaries and Letters of Sir Ernest Mason Satow (1843-1929), a Scholar-Diplomat in East Asia* (London: Mellen Press, 1998): 29.

⁴⁸ Brecher, *Honored and Dishonored*, 76.

⁴⁹ Brecher, *Honored and Dishonored*, 77.

Over the next few decades however, “summering” was adopted by Japan’s upper class, particularly by businessmen and diplomats, who soon constructed large residences alongside pre-



Figure 5: Child sits on patio of Antonin and Noemi Raymond’s summer home in Karuizawa. Photographer unknown, taken in 1933.

existing villas. By 1930 the proportion of of foreign-owned residences dropped from a majority to just one-third, with Japanese vacationers noticeably outnumbering foreigners. Nonetheless, Westerners continued to shape the appearance and feel of the community, fashioning a setting that would serve as a surrogate for their homelands.⁵⁰ In a period when Western aesthetics were becoming increasingly synonymous with modernity, Karuizawa predominantly attracted Japanese aristocrats associated with American or European businesses or Christian churches -- that is, those who sought a taste of the “Western” life.

Throughout the 1930s, Karuizawa exhibited a unique case of gentrification as it quickly

transformed into a Western residential and commercial district surrounded by lower-income Japanese neighborhoods.

In 1937, summer traffic between Tokyo and Karuizawa had grown so much that additional train and airplane services were provided. Despite the economic depression, the town’s luxuries had steadily increased: two full golf courses, three luxury hotels, horse stables, race tracks, markets, public baths, and a myriad of other facilities were constructed, with the

⁵⁰ Brecher, *Honored and Dishonored*, 77.

number of private villas peaking at 1,454.⁵¹ By 1939, the Karuizawa settlement was a multiracial cosmopolitan community functioning under a class-contingent inclusivity: Löwith recalls how one was more likely to come across colleagues and acquaintances in Karuizawa than anywhere else in Japan.⁵² In effect, the town was a racially insular community based on pre-war socioeconomic privilege. German Jews like Löwith managed to integrate themselves into Karuizawa's semi-autonomous, semi-exclusive society among other Westerners. This form of class-based integration was unwittingly honored by surrounding Japanese communities despite international tensions, as there was little to no effort to distinguish between Nazi Germans and Jewish Germans.⁵³

The KSRA was fundamental in nurturing Karuizawa's Japanese-Western integration; the association enacted bylaws in its bilingual handbook to formalize "a spirit of kinship."⁵⁴ This handbook, written in 1930 by KSRA leaders, hoped to affirm an alliance of Japanese and non-Japanese residents with "the purpose of promoting the welfare and contributing to the pleasure of all persons spending the summer in Karuizawa" while advocating "international friendship among the residents."⁵⁵ Despite efforts to foster racial inclusivity, the KSRA did not necessarily shelter the town from Hitler's pre-war and wartime influence: it approved and oversaw the annual National Socialist Teachers Association (NSTA) conference commencing in August 1939.⁵⁶ It was during this time that Karl Löwith would make his first visit to Karuizawa, where he happened upon two ex-colleagues from Marburg participating in the event. While one

⁵¹ Brecher, *Honored and Dishonored*, 79.

⁵² Löwith, *My Life*, 123.

⁵³ Brecher, *Honored and Dishonored*, 46.

⁵⁴ Shoko Komatsu, *Karuizawa to hisho* (Kyoto: Yumani shobo, 2009): 3.

⁵⁵ Komatsu, *Karuizawa*, 3.

⁵⁶ Löwith, *My Life*, 123.

pretended not to remember Löwith, the other was embarrassed, making hurried excuses as to why he was unable to see Löwith.⁵⁷

Although both ex-colleagues were active Party members, Löwith particularly feared “Dr. D,” chairman of the NSTA and secretary of the German-Japanese Cultural Institute. He was known as “Japan’s Custodian of Culture,” an “obsequious and pushy, subservient and petty-bourgeois” Nazi whose ability to speak and read Japanese rendered him exceptionally able to influence the Karuizawa residents.⁵⁸ He had unsuccessfully attempted to block Löwith’s appointment as early as 1936 and was still endeavoring to prevent the renewal of his contract.⁵⁹ “Dr. D” was a zealous organizer, Löwith recalls, and his energy in the pursuit of propagandist aims was considerable as he overexerted himself in serving the new German culture.⁶⁰ Nonetheless Löwith’s time in Karuizawa would soon prove his fears wrong: while visiting Nazi ambassadors assailed their audience with Nazi ideology, Japanese spectators often visibly exhibited the superficiality with which they embraced their ally’s rhetoric.⁶¹

Take, for example, a public lecture Löwith attended, in which the Japanese nationalists Fujisawa and Kanokogi spoke of Pan-Asiatic politics.⁶² In an effort to connect with attending Party members, Löwith believes, the two speakers attempted insubstantial comparisons between Germany and Japan: “Confucius was compared with Hitler... Japan’s relationship with China [was compared] to that between Germany and Austria,” both of which were ridiculed soon after.⁶³ Furthermore, Fujisawa freely referred to Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* out of context, oblivious to

⁵⁷ Löwith, *My Life*, 124.

⁵⁸ Löwith, *My Life*, 124.

⁵⁹ Löwith, *My Life*, 124.

⁶⁰ Löwith, *My Life*, 124.

⁶¹ Brecher, *Honored and Dishonored*, 46.

⁶² Löwith, *My Life*, 124.

⁶³ Löwith, *My Life*, 124.

the fact that certain “unfavorable” chapters regarding Japan’s racial status were omitted in Japanese translations.⁶⁴ Löwith concludes:

“[The Japanese] could never tell how far their solidarity with Germany really extended, in contrast to which the Germans, as ever, posed as the superior school masters who had to explain their mission to the Japanese. The German side openly expressed their doubts about the outcome of the war with China, while the Japanese bowed to Germany’s strength and ended their lectures with ‘*Heil Hitler*’... Beyond that [the Japanese] had little to say about race, blood, heritage, ancestors...”⁶⁵

In contrast, expatriates were quick to adopt Nazi teachings and applied them almost immediately. Consider the case of married couple “R,” who Löwith met prior to 1939. “R” lived happily as German expats in Japan for some decades already: while the husband was the founder and headmaster of a German school in Yokohama, the wife oversaw the “Sunshine House” in Karuizawa, a grand villa open year round.⁶⁶ During the formative years of the Nazi Party, Löwith recalls her personal disgust towards its ideology, as she frequently criticized the intolerance she read about within those circles.⁶⁷ Within just a few years however, perhaps due to the Japanese-German alliance and subsequent influx of Nazi sympathizers in Japan, “R’s” political views would shift dramatically, aligning suddenly with that of their villa’s steady flow of National Socialist guests:

“[The husband] had adopted the habit of complaining about his burdens and annoyances [as being a German resident in Japan]... although he, like most old residents in Japan, actually led an extremely comfortable life, as expatriate teachers’ salaries by far exceeded those in Germany... His wife took charge of managing the spacious house, whose furnishings and fare suddenly corresponded to German customs in every way... She treated her Japanese servants and the local authorities in the worst possible way, because she did not have the least inclination to understand and adapt to foreign customs and Japanese psychology.”⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Löwith, *My Life*, 124.

⁶⁵ Löwith, *My Life*, 125.

⁶⁶ Löwith, *My Life*, 127.

⁶⁷ Löwith, *My Life*, 127.

⁶⁸ Löwith, *My Life*, 127.

During his visit in 1939, Löwith had asked to recuperate in “R’s” home. “While there would have been absolutely no question about it under normal circumstances,” Löwith writes, “the registration of a [German Jew] at a German bed-and-breakfast hotel had become a tricky problem due to the policy of racial segregation and its ensuing complications.”⁶⁹ “R” did eventually allow Löwith to stay, though under the condition he ate dinner later than usual, as she did not want to startle the German New Year guests with a Jewish resident.⁷⁰ Despite Löwith’s geographic isolation from Nazi rule, German expatriates within local Japanese communities exhibited an unfaltering Party conscience. Perhaps the distance from home emboldened Germans to behave as if still in Germany, an innate sense of duty Löwith describes as “keep[ing] in with” the National Socialist agenda.⁷¹

Anti-Semitism in Japan is one of the greatest anomalies in the history of that prejudice. A country containing no more than 1,000 Jews, one that is neither a Christian nor Muslim society, should not -- logically speaking -- have anti-Semitism.⁷²

Jennifer L. Golub, *Japanese Attitudes Toward Jews*

Heinz Altschul

After Japan was opened to Western commerce in 1862, a small population of Jewish traders settled on the mainland and established a community in Kobe, a historically significant port city. Although Jewish emigres never constituted so much as a percent of Japan’s population, by 1923 the Jews of Kobe had founded multiple cultural institutions, a synagogue, and a Zionist organization, becoming the oldest surviving Jewish community in Japan at the time. In 1940, a

⁶⁹ Löwith, *My Life*, 128.

⁷⁰ Löwith, *My Life*, 128.

⁷¹ Löwith, *My Life*, 129.

⁷² Golub, “Japanese Attitude,” 5.

total of 50 Jewish families were accounted for in Kobe by local officials.⁷³ Among these families was that of Heinz Altschul, a German Jew with a blue collar background and a long history in Japan (see figure 6). His memoir, *As I Record These Memories...Erinnerungen eines deutschen Kaufmanns in Kobe (1926-29, 1934-46)*, provides an



Figure 6: Portrait of Altschul.
Photographed by Klaus Titzler, 1987

Kaufmanns in Kobe (1926-29, 1934-46), provides an intimate record of life in Kobe as a middle-class German-Jew. Through his work, I will illustrate the ever-fluctuating and often conflicting nature of Japanese anti-Semitism as demonstrated by the local citizens' day to day interactions with Altschul throughout the war.

Altschul was born in the industrial city of Dresden, a factory hub for three major industries: cigarettes, cameras, and women's hats. His father was a manufacturing representative for Winckler and Co., a company that distributed raw materials used in hats worldwide, and Altschul would soon adopt the same line

of work in his adult life. In 1925, his father secured a job for Altschul at Winckler and Co.'s office in Japan. It was during these formative years that Altschul developed a fondness for Japan, prompting him to return there as a permanent resident in the years leading up to World War II.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, Altschul recognized the many signs which foreshadowed the dangerous trajectory of Nazi leadership, the first being his sudden removal

⁷³ Tamar Engel. "The Jews of Kobe" in *The Jews of Kobe* (1993, xenon.stanford.edu/%7Etamar/Kobe/Kobe.html): 1.

from the Dresden Rowing Club.⁷⁴ Although he was initially hesitant to leave Germany, the Jewry's worsening conditions convinced Altschul to accept an auspicious five-year contract in Japan as a department head. Within a few months, he, his wife Hanni, and infant son Bob travelled to Kobe where they would settle for the next two decades. Altschul admits he could not think of any better time than the years spent between 1934 and 1938 in their *Nunobiki* home—with its mountainside brook, pleasant neighbors, the camphor trees and beautiful views, Kobe was a wonderful place to call home, so long as it remained untainted by Hitler's hateful ideology.⁷⁵

In 1938, however, Altschul began to notice the presence of Nazism in Kobe, particularly within local organizations where he was an active member. One of the committee men in the German Club, for example, was an ardent Nazi by the name of Brüggemann. He had eliminated Altschul from an upcoming bowling tournament despite others' protests, eventually forcing him to resign altogether.⁷⁶ From then on, Altschul explains, friends with whom his family had good relationships for years suddenly did not know them anymore—neighbors would cross the street when they saw Altschul, fearing that if they talked to him, one of the resident Nazi affiliates would immediately retaliate.⁷⁷

Compliance

To understand the behavior of Japanese citizens, one must note the nature of Japan's collective psyche, particularly in the years leading up to wartime until 1945. The *kokutai* (loosely translating to “national body”) was a national policy responsible for the development of Japanese

⁷⁴ Heinz Altschul, *Heinz Altschul: “As I Record These Memories...” Erinnerungen eines deutschen Kaufmanns in Kobe (1926-29, 1934-46)* ed. Nikola Herweg, Thomas Pekar and Christian W. Spang (Germany: OAG Deutsche Gesellschaft für Natur und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, 2014): 32.

⁷⁵ Altschul, *As I Record*, 33.

⁷⁶ Altschul, *As I Record*, 39.

⁷⁷ Altschul, *As I Record*, 40.

ultranationalism and the spiritual mobilization of the nation's citizenry.⁷⁸ The theory's origins can be traced back to the works of Kato Hiroyuki (1836-1916) and Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), Meiji era nationalists who were concerned with Japan's socio-political position in a noticeably Western-dominated world order. To combat both real and imagined notions of national inferiority, Meiji leaders sought the unification of Japanese citizens under an all-encompassing imperial institution. This construct was rooted in an ancient myth in which the emperor was a direct descendant of the Shinto sun deity *Amaterasu-ōmikami*—from this, it is suggested that the citizens were a mythical national family under the divine leadership of the emperor, collectively recognized as an incarnation of the state itself. The singularity of the Japanese people was propagated extensively as the nation's distinguishing characteristic, one that would later justify the government's expansionist claims for a Japanese Empire.⁷⁹

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Prince Fumimaro Konoe, the *Kokutai no Hongi* (“Cardinal Principles of the National Body”) pamphlet was issued by the Japanese Ministry of Education. The text, which contained teachings regarding every aspect of the state, was disseminated as a work of ideological indoctrination: from it citizens were taught to put the nation before the self, defining the state as a “family” in which one's loyalty to the emperor should be no different from the filial and sacrificial kinship between a child and its father.⁸⁰ In effect, the *kokutai* would result in the psychological and spiritual synchronization of the Japanese citizens, each bred to behave in whatever way was necessitated by the state.

⁷⁸ The *kokutai* is a particularly complex and fundamental feature of Japanese ideology in the years leading up to World War II. To avoid any needless explanations, this paper mentions the broadest elements of the *kokutai* and the necessary context relevant to understanding Japanese anti-Semitism. The complete translation of *Kokutai no Hongi* issued by the government in 1937 is readily available. For further information, see Murayama Masao's “The Logic and Psychology of Ultrnationalism” (1946).

⁷⁹ Bruce E. Reynolds, *Japan in the Fascist Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016): 58.

⁸⁰ *Kokutai No Hongi. Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan* (Harvard University Press, 1949).

Many of Altschul's personal experiences portray this national phenomenon. In 1941, for example, Altschul recalls that "excitement was great everywhere after the news of Pearl Harbor and during the first year the Japanese were in very high spirits. Germany was now an ally, and much was made of it in the Japanese press. So the Germans had a good standing all of a sudden, much better than it had been before, and they took advantage of it."⁸¹ Some of the Germans who had already been living in Japan now acted as self-appointed Nazi ambassadors, exploiting the wave of Japanese civilian respect towards resident Germans. Although they had assimilated quite smoothly into local society, Aryan Germans suddenly wished to make themselves authoritative figures in the community, often demanding citizens to act accordingly towards Jewish residents when in their presence. Altschul's rowing club coach Glombik, a close friend from his earlier years, "became the number one Nazi in Kobe" and a feared resident to Japanese citizens who suddenly "behaved strangely when [Altschul] appeared somewhere" near Glombik.⁸²

These Nazi-affiliated German residents, despite lacking any sort of official title in Japan, oftentimes influenced the behavior of local Japanese officials by virtue of the Axis Pact which promoted a German-Japanese friendship. When Altschul attempted to renew his travel permit, a Japanese police officer exhibited unusually arrogant behavior:

"[Altschul] asked very politely one of the policemen if [he] could borrow his pen, [to which he responded] very obnoxiously. [He] threw [Altschul's permit] on the table, and said, 'if you do not have a pen, then you cannot get a permit.'"⁸³

It was only after a presumably pro-Nazi German exited the office that a different Japanese officer graciously agreed to talk to him about his permit renewal. "These were things you got used to," Altschul reflects, "and there was nothing else you could do about them."⁸⁴ Since the

⁸¹ Altschul, *As I Record*, 45.

⁸² Altschul, *As I Record*, 50.

⁸³ Altschul, *As I Record*, 74.

⁸⁴ Altschul, *As I Record*, 54.

state was, at the time, focused on strengthening its relationship with Germany, the citizens were to interact with their allies accordingly. This form of anti-Semitism, as personally experienced by Altschul, was visible under certain conditions unique to wartime; for example, in the presence of Nazi officers or ambassadors as described above. Only then did anti-Semitism become an outward expression, not in the form of violence but through temporary, ideological code switching and hesitant acts of exclusion.

In the same vein, the onset of Nazi pressures to oversee Japan's German-Jewish population greatly affected Altschul's most intimate associations, especially with his live-in caretaker, Sumie-san. At age 19 she began working for the family as their son's caretaker and stayed with them for 11 and a half years—long enough to be considered family, according to Altschul.⁸⁵ During those years she even learned German, understanding almost every word of the family's conversations.⁸⁶ Nonetheless Altschul writes that she, "like all Japanese, was of course very patriotic" and when the time came, her innate devotion to the state easily outweighed her personal connection to the family:

"All servants who worked for foreigners were drilled by police to report regularly about what took place in the household. So the police was fully informed of every step [they] made, of every visitor who came to [them], of every place [they visited]... [Altschul] considered Sumie-san fully trustworthy, but as a matter of her patriotism [they] knew she would have to report whatever she thought was important to the police. So [they] had to be quite careful... and this situation became more important and more serious as the war progressed..."⁸⁷

A Complicated Kindness

The German-Japanese friendship slowly faded into the background of Japan's wartime culture as the political situation between the United States and Japan became more strained.

⁸⁵ Altschul, *As I Record*, 54.

⁸⁶ Altschul, *As I Record*, 54.

⁸⁷ Altschul, *As I Record*, 54.

Following Pearl Harbor, the American forces retaliated with equal force -- this was an event that Altschul recalls vividly:

“When the ‘Doolittle air raid’ occurred, I happened to be with Bob in one of the shopping streets not too far from our house, when all of a sudden sirens sounded all over, and people rushed back and forth very excitedly, not really knowing what was going on. And all of a sudden, an airplane flew overhead... and a few minutes later we heard some explosions on the other side of Kobe... Of course, it made a big impression, and it showed that Japan could be attacked, too.”⁸⁸

Japan’s wartime enemy had shifted away from the grand Communist threat as outlined by the Anti-Comintern Pact’s international mission and centered its focus on the United States. Otto Tolischus (1890-1967), a Pulitzer prize winning journalist, presented a rather illuminating theory of Japanese racism towards resident Jewish refugees during wartime in his book *Tokyo Record* (1943). In it, he observes that public sentiment often paralleled current events, a tendency towards greater public hospitality when diplomatic relations warmed and more “latent hostility” when they deteriorated.⁸⁹ The innocuous nature of Japanese public opinion suggests that citizens often felt little to no personal stake in political matters; it was even unclear as to whether or not they paid much attention to them.

As Otto described it, most Japanese were utterly disinterested in the Anti-Comintern Pact or the Axis Alliance, nor did they feel any responsibility to contribute to Hitler’s promised “new order” in which the Japanese were placed (rather reluctantly, and for diplomatic purposes) under the category of “honorary Aryans.” Despite the deep dislike of Japanese people he witnessed among his American colleagues, he described his time in Japan as pleasant, having experienced no evidence of racial hatred on the streets.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Altschul, *As I Record*, 48.

⁸⁹ Otto D. Tolischus, *Tokyo Record* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1943): 43.

⁹⁰ Tolischus, *Tokyo Record*, 46.

Testimonies from assimilated Westerners like Heinz Altschul added a neglected dimension to the discourse of civilian racism in Japan. Their accounts of wartime conditions call for further reconsideration of the conflict as a race war driven by hatred, as embodied by Japan's allied power, Nazi Germany. Did Japanese civilians subscribe to exhortations about racial purity and spiritual supremacy as evidence of their own racial preeminence, and, were those ideas internalized enough to effectively manifest outward acts of racial hostility towards German-Jewish refugees in their town?

Evidence from Altschul's personal experiences suggest that whereas propaganda was effective in inciting nationalism and generating ideological conformity, in many cases the Nazis' imported racial policies were unsuccessful in producing a sincere hatred of Jews, most of whom went unrecognized in local communities. This indicates, rather, that a clear ideological divide separated most civilians—even intellectuals—from their military and political leaders, that is, those who came in most direct contact with Nazi party members. Even so, many political leaders were ambivalent towards Hitler's racially driven ideology, typically adopting the bare minimum of anti-Semitic policies to appease pressures from the German consulate. The results of Gestapo *Obersturmbannführer* Josef Meisinger's attempts to influence the Japanese authorities are a fitting example.

Acting as a liaison between the Gestapo and German Embassy in Japan, Meisinger came to Tokyo in 1941 to present an extermination or enslavement policy for the 18-20,000 Jews in Japanese-occupied territories. His proposals included creating a concentration camp on Chongming Island or sending Jews on freight ships off the coast of China to starve.⁹¹ Because Japanese authorities in Shanghai refused to yield to Meisinger's pressures, his proposals were

⁹¹ O'Neill, Mark. "A saved haven: Plans to rejuvenate Shanghai's rundown former Jewish ghetto will celebrate the district's role as a sanctuary during the second world war," *South China Morning Post*, August 1, 2006; Features: Behind the News; page 11.

reduced to the creation of what became the Shanghai ghetto, an isolated slum with about twice the population density of Manhattan. Some 2,000 Jews would die in the Shanghai ghetto over the coming years.⁹² The Japanese authorities' rhetoric neither represented nor reflected the interests of the citizenry at large. For much of the local Japanese population, interactions with resident foreigners were guided by practical concerns driven by a broader political agenda—a form of racism that demanded the compliance of racist thought specifically during wartime rather than the adoption of it as a lasting ideology beyond the context of World War II.⁹³ In the words of famed Israeli historian Ben-Ami Shillony:

“The Jews to whom the anti-Semitic theories applied were, to the Japanese, remote figures, living in Western cities, controlling the world economies and manipulating Russian communism. The theories had little relevance to Jews actually living in Japan or in Japanese-controlled territories, who were neither particularly rich nor revolutionary, and whom the Japanese in any case could not distinguish from other Western foreigners. As the Japanese did not categorize foreigners by religion, Jews were treated in the same way as other Westerners.”⁹⁴

Ideological Dissonance

Although the *kokutai* guided the behavior of Japanese citizens, this was also contingent upon the unity of the Empire's leadership. Indeed, while the *Kokutai no Hongi* text provided uniform teachings of topics ranging from domestic policies to civilization and culture, there was nothing to be said about Japan's national stance on anti-Semitism, nor was there ever an official government statement made during World War II. The leadership's position on the matter was profoundly split, and this ambivalence is apparent in the government's ever-fluctuating policies towards resident Jews.

⁹² Ernest G. Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge: A Memoir of the World War II Jewish Ghetto* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993): 47.

⁹³ Brecher, *Honored and Dishonored*, 7-8.

⁹⁴ Shillony, *The Jews and*, 165.

As briefly mentioned, military officials and “Jewish experts” Colonel Norihiro and Naval Captain Inuzuka expressed starkly anti-Semitic attitudes in anonymously written publications. Following Japan’s initial exposure to a global Jewish conspiracy as articulated by *The Protocols* text, the two became leading figures of Japanese anti-Semitism through the 1920s and into the early 1930s.

When the issue of anti-Semitism entered the forefront of Japanese politics following the Anti-Comintern Pact, a conflicting consensus emerged at the Far Eastern Jewish National Conference of 1937. At the conference, which took place in the small village of Harbin, 21 delegates representing Jewish communities of the Japanese mainland and occupied territories gathered to discuss the circumstances of their residency in the wake of the Anti-Comintern Pact. Following an opening declaration by Dr. Avraham I. Kaufman, a leading figure of Jewish communities in Japanese territories, and the recitation of a Hebrew prayer, Major General Higuchi declared a rather surprising stance regarding the “Jewish Question” in Japan:

“While we find quite serious Jewish problems in some European countries, [the Imperial Japanese Empire] with the national manifesto of ‘Gozoku Kyowa’ [five-family harmony] offers sufficient protection for the hard-working and righteous Jewish people and tolerates their peaceful existence... I sincerely look forward to the Jews making a great historical contribution to the objective of building the New Far East.”⁹⁵

In total defiance of their German ally’s racial policies, Japanese officials present at the Far Eastern Jewish National Conference—Army Major General Higuchi, Army Major Onouchi Hiroshi, and Army Major Kawamura, to name a few—accepted the following conditions within a single day:

“Although the Jews are deprived of their human rights and national rights in some countries, they enjoy every kind of national right and complete freedom in economic activities to the same degree as other nationals living in both Japan and Manchukuo.

⁹⁵ Naoki Maruyama, “Facing a Dilemma: Japan’s Jewish Policy in the late 1930s” in *War and Militarism in Modern Japan: Issues of History and Identity*, ed. Guy Podoler (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2009): 22-38.

There is no oppression against minorities that degrades the moral virtue of the nation and hurts the common culture of human beings in both Japan and Manchukuo. The Jewish residents in both Japan and Manchukuo devote their abilities and powers as loyal subjects to the development of the country where they live in awareness of their duties to the country.”⁹⁶

The German government’s immediate protest came as no surprise to Japanese leaders. Its Tokyo Embassy filed a formal complaint with the Japanese Foreign Ministry to be forwarded to the Army Ministry. Chief of Staff Hideki Tojo, however, ignored it entirely.⁹⁷

Just one year later, celebrated army general and director of the Foreign Ministry’s Jewish research department Shioden Nobutaka (1879-1962) attended an anti-Semitic conference in Erfurt in 1938 on behalf of the Japanese government. During this trip he personally met with Julius Streicher, the editor of the notoriously anti-Semitic journal *Der Stürmer*, in which Shioden was featured in a centerpiece titled “General Shioden, the Japanese anti-Semite.”⁹⁸

On December 5, 1939, the highest officials within the Japanese government—the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister Hachiro Arita, Army Minister Itagaki Seishiro, and Navy Minister Yonai Mitsumasa—held a secret meeting, later to be called the Five Minister’s Conference. The objective was clear: to resolve the Japanese government’s position on the “Jewish Question,” yet little progress was made. While some refused any involvement with the Jewish people altogether, others found great value in the imagined power of the Jewry, hoping to exploit it for the benefit of Japan’s “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” and its quest for empire. The latter opinion would serve as the basis of Yasue and Inuzuka’s “Fugu Plan” which suggested the mass-settlement of Jews in an autonomous region near Shanghai. In effect, the officers believed the Jews would bring with them technological advancements, managerial skills, and massive

⁹⁶ Maruyama, “Facing a Dilemma,” 28.

⁹⁷ Maruyama, “Facing a Dilemma,” 28.

⁹⁸ Shillony, *The Jews and*, 172.

capital, thus developing the occupied territory on behalf of the Japanese Empire.⁹⁹ Interestingly, the two notoriously anti-Semitic officers never considered adopting plans to eliminate the Jewry despite the prevalence of Nazi ideology and their personal admiration of Hitler.

In a publicized meeting with a group of Jewish businessmen in 1940, Foreign Minister and famed diplomat Yosuke Matsuoka stated he “was the man responsible for the alliance with Adolf Hitler, but nowhere has [he] promised that [Japan] would carry out [Hitler’s] anti-Semitic policies in Japan... I have no compunction about announcing it to the world.”¹⁰⁰ When the Pacific war began, Matsuoka publicly professed that “entering into the Tripartite Pact was the mistake of [his] life... Even [his] death won’t take away this feeling.”¹⁰¹

Finally, in July 1941 Shioden would emerge again with the publication of his book, *Yudaya shiso oyobi undo* (“The Jews: Their Thought and Their Movements”), with an introduction by the former prime minister Baron Hiranuma Kiichiro. The text, which further articulated Jewish plans for world domination, garnered a widespread readership. Shioden utilized his popularity to release more anti-Semitic articles and give speeches, eventually transforming his personal anti-Semitic beliefs into a political platform. In the Diet elections the following year, Shioden received more votes in his electoral district than any candidate in the whole country.¹⁰²

As exemplified by the various conflicting statements made between 1937 and 1941, Japanese leadership would continue to lack any cohesion regarding anti-Semitism until the war’s bitter end. The citizens were met with ambivalence and no standard to conform to -- Japan was

⁹⁹ Meron Medzini, *Under the Shadow of the Rising Sun: Japan and the Jews During the Holocaust Era* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016): 52.

¹⁰⁰ Johanna M. Meskill, *Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan: The Hollow Diplomatic Alliance* (New Brunswick: AldineTransaction, 2011): 48.

¹⁰¹ 「三国同盟の締結は、僕一生の不覚だったことを、今更ながら痛感する。これを思うと、死んでも死にきれない」 "第69回 ぼく一生の不覚 ～三国同盟締結・松岡洋右の誤算～"NHK. September 26, 2001.

¹⁰² Shillony, *The Jews and*, 173.

ruled by a coalition of military officers and bureaucrats, none of whom attained a preeminent position.¹⁰³ It is no wonder that like their leadership, the masses exhibited an equally conflicted form of anti-Semitism where the extent of hostility mirrored the opinion of individual government figures. Although sociopolitical pressures for conformity were strong, the constant need for consensus prevented anti-Semitism from taking root in Japan.

Furthermore, the power of the *kokutai* and its ability to galvanize citizens rests, perhaps, in the cultural authenticity of the text—that is, the work itself is founded in Japanese myth, written solely for the Japanese people, with the purpose of glorifying the nation’s “uniqueness.” Despite the noticeable uniformity of its people, Japan was able to foster this desired outcome with tireless ideological indoctrination over the course of multiple generations. For this reason, the characteristics that defined Japanese citizens—self-sacrifice, loyalty, conformity, and others—were possible to achieve through the *kokutai*, and proved useful in mobilizing a country towards war. In contrast, anti-Semitism was an imported ideology that lacked any basis in Japanese history, having only been introduced in the early 1900s. A hostility towards Jews, who were long unknown to the Japanese people, served little to no purpose unless exploited for political gain—say, to please a fundamentally anti-Semitic ally like Germany.

The [Japanese] learn what is foreign in itself, but they do not do so for themselves... and for this reason they do not have any impulse to transform what is foreign into something of their own.¹⁰⁴

Karl Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*

Until the Bitter End

For the entirety of World War II, the status of the German Jew in Japanese society remained unresolved and profoundly split both in theory and practice. Part of this polarity can be

¹⁰³ Ben-Ami Shillony, *Politics and Culture in Wartime Japan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981): 173.

¹⁰⁴ Löwith, *Martin Heidegger*, 232.

attributed to two ancient Shinto representations of the “foreigner” which provided broad generalizations to classify any “other:” the first was the malevolent and dangerous foreigner destined for expulsion, and the second was a gift-bearing visitor from afar. Although Japanese perceptions of varying foreigners were often uniform, the classification of Jewish peoples proved problematic. They, unlike “others” of the past, exhibited distinct traits in both the *oni* and *marebito* lore: they were “culture destroying” peoples who were particularly influential in what Japan believed to be a world dominated by the West. As a result Japanese leaders were torn between admiration and fear, ally and enemy, forming inconsistent policies that generated fickle civilian sentiment towards resident German Jews.

The autobiographies of Karl Löwith, an intellectual and Heinz Altschul, a blue-collar worker provide differing accounts of Japanese anti-Semitism loosely determined by class. In the case of Löwith, a pre-existing culture of collegiate interactions between Japanese and western scholars proved favorable even in the tide of war. More often than not, Löwith’s niche expertise shielded him from anti-Semitic behavior by colleagues, who remained bound to the principles of meritocracy. Despite the pervasiveness of Hitler’s racial hierarchy following the translation of *Mein Kampf*, Löwith’s “Jewishness” was seemingly diluted in Japan; he was able enjoy the leisure afforded by the Japanese upper class even during a war waged against his own people.

Ripples of Nazi rhetoric continued to reach Japanese shores in the years following the Anti-Comintern Pact. Germany’s racial ideology aroused curiosity, skepticism, and scholastic interest among intellectuals in Japan, generating academic debate and research in the form of publications. The circulation of Hitler’s “Jewish Peril” endowed Löwith with the same sensationalized Jewish qualities of economic prowess, cultural influence, and the fear associated with their perceived strength. Japan’s “Jewish Question” became a question of what could be

learned from the Jews and applied to strengthen Japan; as a German Jew, Löwith was a spectacle in a foreign intellectual circle, bearing the roles of both teacher and student:

“This connection between [him and his Japanese colleagues], who seem to be incompatible, is highly optimistic: one wants to preserve the best in what is Japanese and supplement it with Europe’s best, thereby adding to the perfection of Japan and the perfection of Europe, as if cultures could be combined in such a way that one brings home the good and leaves behind the bad...”¹⁰⁵

In the case of Altschul, the average Japanese citizen did not subscribe to the anti-Semitism readily expressed by the German public, but a heavily diluted form of it emerged. The extent of civilian anti-Semitism ebbed and flowed to match the state of Japanese-German relations as expressed by their leaders. Local citizens were inconsistent in their behavior towards Jews as they lacked any depth of influence despite German attempts to indoctrinate its overseas ally. The nature of Japan’s wartime culture was that of compliance, and a fundamental aspect of such behavior was devotion to Japan and Japan alone. What the government sought to gain from European civilization was not its religious or moral foundation (the internal), but its external advancements: the technology, military organization, and science that made the West so powerful.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps it was for this reason that Nazi teachings did not have the power to shape the Japanese psyche in the same way the *kokutai* did. Since what was western in origin was not and could never be innately Japanese, an imported ideology like anti-Semitism had little to no purpose for citizens who were conditioned to embody and preserve all that was spiritually and morally Japanese. The extent to which they understood Hitler’s National Socialism was shallow, and what they were taught of anti-Semitic thought was not particularly convincing. Thus, what was foreign remained foreign, and the residual traces of Nazi ideology that did resonate in the Japanese public was predominantly limited to wartime alone.

¹⁰⁵ Löwith, *My Life*, 127.

¹⁰⁶ Löwith, *Martin Heidegger*, 230.

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