

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Manchukuo Young Girl Envoys and their visit to Japan: an underestimated prelude of Japan–Manchukuo interactions, June 22–July 12, 1932

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Abstract

This study analyzes the little known Manchukuo Young Girl Envoys – Manchukuo’s first government-appointed diplomats – and their official visit to Japan between June 22 and July 12, 1932. Existing studies on the Envoys tend to interpret them from an angle of contemporary Japanese people’s national sentiment and deem their visit to Japan a show that the Japanese authorities in Manchukuo and Japan orchestrated together, to render Japan a strong world power. This study problematizes that view and considers the Envoys more of a product of intense power struggles inside Manchukuo’s highest Japanese ruling strata, suggesting that Manchukuo’s decision-making circle in 1932 was far from being a unified entity. Examining the Envoys’ interactions in Japan and comparing relevant Japanese- and Chinese-language news coverage on them, this study argues for the possibility of tracing the intertwined national ideals of Manchukuo’s Chinese and Japanese government leaders based on the inspiring example of the Envoys.

Keywords: Children; diplomacy; Kasagi Yoshiaki; Manchukuo; young girl envoys

On the morning of June 22, 1932, a Japanese merchant ship named *Ussuri* (うすりい) from the newly created Manchukuo arrived at the port of Moji (門司), Kyūshū, to the welcome of the city’s mayor, dozens of primary school students, journalists, and members of local female associations. After the ship docked at the port, the six Manchukuo girls, ranging from eleven to fourteen years old, with identical pantyhose and shoes appeared on the deck, to greet the Japanese reception and receive their presents. Holding bouquets that they received from journalists of the Japanese newspaper *Asahi shinbun* (朝日新聞 *Asahi news*) in one hand and carrying portable national flags of Japan and Manchukuo in the other hand, one of the girls stated, “The countries of adults have many complicated rules [and barriers], but the countries of children have no such rules and national boundaries. Everyone in Japan, please keep a prolonged friendly relationship with us.”¹ The newspaper *Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun* (東京日日新聞 *Tokyo daily news*) on June 23 proudly conceptualized the greeting at Moji as a “prelude of the interactions between Manchukuo’s and Japan’s young girls.”²

The above story was the moment when Manchukuo’s first government-dispatched envoys reached Japan in June 1932. Known as the Manchukuo Young Girl Envoys (滿洲國少女使節團 *Ch: Manzhouguo shaonü shijietuan*; *Jp: Manshūkoku shōjo shisetsudan*; hereafter Envoys), the six girls were responsible for “introducing the neighbor nation to the present situation of Manchukuo, to make the Japanese understand Manchukuo’s standpoint” and to “acquire the close neighbor of

¹ Ōsaka *Asahi shinbun furoku: Yamaguchi Asahi* (June 22, 1932): 5.

² *Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun* (June 23, 1932): 2.

Japan's assistance" for national construction on behalf of the Manchukuo government.³ During their twenty-days interaction in Japan between June 22 and July 12, 1932, the Envoys visited Tokyo, Osaka, Nara, Kyoto, Kobe, Shimonoseki, and Moji and distributed to local primary school students 30,000 copies of Manchukuo posters and postcards, 1,000 copies of the Manchukuo Prime Minister's greetings to Japanese children, 10,000 copies of pamphlets on Manchukuo's present situation, and 120,000 copies of musical scores of the songs of Manchukuo's national foundation and memorial sports competition that the Manchukuo government provided.⁴ After they returned to Manchukuo from Japan on July 12, local Japanese media highlighted the warm welcomes that the Envoys received in Japan, stating that the six girls "have fulfilled their duty as the Young Girl Envoys."⁵

Dispatched by the Governance Support Bureau (資政局 Ch: *Zizheng ju*; Jp: *Shisei kyoku*; hereafter GSB) of Manchukuo, a short-lived Japanese-directed institution in the State Council that existed between March and July 1932, the Envoys consisted of six junior members and an adult supervisor.⁶ Representing the state of Manchukuo, the Envoys' missions were to request Japan's recognition of the new state and to promote Japanese involvement in the country's development against the backdrop of the Lytton Commission's view of Manchukuo as a product of Japan's invasion of Manchuria. To reflect Manchukuo's proclaimed ethnic diversity, the GSB intentionally formed the Envoys with two Han Chinese, two Japanese, and two Korean primary school and junior high school girls and entrusted a kindergarten's Japanese female principle at the Japanese concession of Dairen (present-day Dalian) in Manchuria to serve as the Envoys' supervisor.⁷ Departing from the Manchukuo capital city of Xinjing (新京 Changchun) on June 18, 1932 for Japan and returning to Xinjing one month later on July 17, the Envoys experienced highly publicized receptions from domestic Japanese media, civil organizations, and primary school students in every place that they visited in Japan. Emphasizing the concept of "new" for a vigorous and innovative image of Manchukuo, a Japanese-language newspaper in Dairen noted that the Envoys were the "first international ambassadors of Manchukuo."⁸ Domestic Japanese media went further by conceptualizing the Envoys as the "first international young girl ambassadors in the world."⁹ Although the Envoys travelled between the visits of representatives from the newly created Manchukuo Concordia Association (協和會 Ch: *Xiehe hui*; Jp: *Kyōwa kai*; June 20–July 6, 1932) and the head of the country's Ministry of Communications, Ding Jianxiu (丁鑿修 1887–1943; June 30–July 18, 1932), they were the sole government representatives of Manchukuo in Japan, while the latter two represented Manchukuo's citizens.¹⁰

Such a ground-breaking event in the diplomatic history between Manchukuo and Japan was supposed to leave a remarkable page in the history of Manchukuo's creation and interactions with Japan, yet the reality is opposite. After the Envoys returned to Xinjing in July 1932, they faded into obscurity in both Manchukuo's and Japan's media and publications. The 1933 edition of Manchukuo's Japanese-language annual report, *Manshūkoku gensei* (滿州国現勢 Manchukuo's present situation), for example, overlooked the Envoys in its 230-page summary of the country's government organizations and achievements in 1932.¹¹ Post-1945 reviews on Manchukuo's history in Japan rarely mention the Envoys. The 1970–1971 two-volume *Manshūkoku shi* (滿州国史 The history of Manchukuo), one of the first comprehensive reviews of Manchukuo in postwar Japan, briefly notes the Envoys' 1932 visit to Japan with errors on dates and places, suggesting that the six girls "greatly impressed the Japanese home government."¹² Existing Chinese-language reviews on Manchukuo in the People's Republic of

³ *Manzhou bao* (June 20, 1932): 2.

⁴ Fujinuma Shōhei, June 24, 1932, 0037.

⁵ *Manshū nippō* (July 15, 1932): 2.

⁶ Director of the Tokyo branch of the South Manchuria Railway Company, June 17, 1932, 0021.

⁷ *Miyako shinbun* (June 24, 1932): 13.

⁸ *Manshū nippō* (June 20, 1932): 1.

⁹ *Osaka mainichi shinbun* (June 5, 1932): 11.

¹⁰ *Osaka Asahi shinbun* (June 21, 1932): 11; *Manzhou bao* (June 22, 1932): 1.

¹¹ *Manshūkoku tsūshinsha* 1933.

¹² *Manshūkoku shi hensan kankōkai* 1971, p. 61.

China have paid no attention to the Envoys. The 1980 *Wei Manzhouguo shi* (偽滿洲國史 The history of bogus Manchukuo) and the 2008 *Wei Manzhouguo shi xinbian* (偽滿洲國史新編 The history of bogus Manchukuo: a new edition), for instance, ignore the Envoys, despite both volumes being over 650 pages in length.¹³ Why did Manchukuo appoint six schoolgirls to serve as the country's first official diplomats; why did Manchukuo give up dispatching more children envoys after 1932; and why does such a special diplomatic corps fail to catch enough attention in China, Japan, and the West to this day? These questions are at the center of this study.

By exploring the schedules and the activities of the Envoys in Japan and comparing relevant Japanese- and Chinese-language news reports on them, this study interprets the Envoys' 1932 visit to Japan from a perspective of early Manchukuo politics. Its thesis is threefold. First, the GSB treated the Envoys' visit to Japan as an experiment to spread its ideal of realizing regional autonomy in Manchukuo under Japanese guidance and assistance among the population of Japan, exploiting the young girls' pure and blameless image. Hindsight nevertheless suggested the experiment to be a failure, as the Envoys behaved more like a group of curious students on a study trip in Japan based on contemporary news reports, and the Manchukuo state abolished the GSB before the Envoys' return. Second, although the GSB expected to use the Envoys to portray an image of Manchukuo's harmonious and diverse ethnicities in front of young populations of Japan and Manchukuo, such an image hardly attracted the attention of Manchukuo's Chinese-speaking population because it overly emphasized Japanese roles in Manchukuo's creation and overlooked the thoughts of the country's Chinese-speaking ethnicities. Many Chinese-speaking residents would regard the Envoys' two Japanese and two Korean members as imperialists or invaders. Third, considering the abolition of the GSB during the Envoys' interactions in Japan in July 1932 and the virtually simultaneous visits to Japan by the Concordia Association and the head of Manchukuo's Ministry of Communications, Manchukuo's decision-making circle even on the Japanese side in 1932 did not have a unified voice. Different political factions inside the Manchukuo government competed with each other and presented different images of the new state in Japan, and the GSB's downfall sealed off the path for cultivating children diplomacy for the following thirteen years of Manchukuo's existence. Although the Envoys exerted little influence on Manchukuo's relationship with Japan in hindsight, their story serves as an inspiring clue for historians to excavate more of Manchukuo's diverse national ideals on both the Chinese and the Japanese sides in the early 1930s and thus should not be left forgotten in the two countries' news reports.

Historiography, structure, and sources

In the past twenty years, more studies in Japan and the West have explored issues relating to gender, children, and childhood in Manchukuo and early Shōwa Japan, but studies that address the Manchukuo Young Girl Envoys are scarce, if any.¹⁴ Japanese sociologist and folklore scholar, Koresawa Hiroaki, is arguably the only one who has specifically analyzed the subject.¹⁵ One of his articles on the Envoys has an English translation in the 2017 edited collection, *Child's Play*.¹⁶ From an angle of early Shōwa Japanese national awareness and media, Koresawa concludes that the Envoys were pawns for the Japanese government to "legitimize Japan's invasion of Asia" because the pure image of girls could signify "peace and friendship" and cover the reality of Manchukuo as a "mere product of the Japanese armed invasion."¹⁷ Considering the Envoys' visit to Japan a show that Manchukuo's Japanese authorities and the Japanese home government planned together, to "make Manchuria's independence a fact," Koresawa deems the Envoys' appeal for inviting Japanese assistance

¹³Jiang 1980; Xie 2008.

¹⁴For a sample of gender and child studies on Manchukuo and Japan, see Chang 1991; Koresawa 2017, 2018; Smith 2007.

¹⁵Koresawa 2013, pp. 70–86; Koresawa 2015, pp. 3–26.

¹⁶Koresawa 2017, pp. 121–40.

¹⁷Koresawa 2018, p. 233. Similar narratives can be found at Koresawa 2013, p. 83; Koresawa 2015, p. 24.

a “self-targeted propaganda” toward the Japanese, to “fulfill contemporary Japanese people’s desire of making Japan become a strong world power.”¹⁸

Koresawa’s observations are plausible by associating Japan’s intensified expansions in China proper and East Asia between 1937 and 1945, but whether the Japanese home government, domestic and Kantō armies, and civil officials in Manchukuo had such expectations in 1932 is uncertain based on available sources on the Envoys in both Japanese and Chinese. Late Taishō and early Shōwa Japan in the 1920s and the 1930s had an identifying problem of political rivalry within and between different party and military factions, without mentioning the growing military interference in Japanese politics.¹⁹ Political decisions that generated from such a chaotic situation, in the words of historian Kitaoka Shinichi, “brought about immense disaster on Japan and its neighbors.”²⁰ Indeed, the Kantō Army invaded Manchuria in September 1931 due to dissatisfaction with the Japanese home government’s domestic and foreign policies, and the government’s refusal to let the Kantō Army expand the conflict after the Manchurian Incident broke out on September 18, 1931 prevented the army from annexing the region. Government constraint on the military nevertheless caused the assassination of Japanese Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi (犬養毅 1855–1932), who tended to solve Manchuria’s problems within the framework of “the established international order” by making the region a “Japanese-Chinese joint venture,” in May 1932 by a group of soldiers from the Japanese Navy.²¹ Facing pressures from the Japanese military, the League of Nations, and the Nanjing Nationalist government of China, “how to deal with the Manchurian Incident” and Manchukuo thus became a conundrum that Inukai’s successor, Saitō Makoto (齋藤実 1858–1936), had to confront with extreme caution.²² Such a tense situation facing the Japanese home government hardly left it spaces to satisfy contemporary Japanese people’s so-called vanity with the Japanese creators of Manchukuo. Although few existing studies explicitly note and explore, Manchukuo had a hard core of Chinese leadership at least before 1937, and the Kantō Army initially relied heavily on the assistance of the country’s Chinese-speaking forces to direct Manchukuo’s development in the early 1930s and then spent years to dissolve them. Historian Yamamuro Shin’ichi would partially agree with this observation because he deems Manchukuo “the first time in history that the Japanese tried to coexist with those who had different language, customs, and values on a large scale.”²³ When analyzing the Envoys, therefore, one cannot focus exclusively on the Japanese side and overlook the attitude of Manchukuo’s Chinese-speaking population. Overcoming the constraints of conspiracy, the historical significance of the Envoys still requires serious empirical examination.

To restore a relatively complete picture of the Envoys from their creation to dismissal, this study contains three sections, although the first and the last sections have multiple headings. The first section examines relevant events prior to June 23, 1932, when the Envoys arrived at Tokyo, to review details behind their selection process and missions in Japan. The second section analyzes the Envoys’ interactions with Tokyo’s government institutions and civil organizations between June 24 and 29, comparing the receptions that they received from the Japanese home government and Tokyo’s residents. The last section reviews the GSB’s crisis and traces the Envoys’ visit to Osaka, Nara, Kyoto, and Kobe before returning to Xinjing via Shimonoseki, Moji, Dairen, and Fengtian (奉天 present-day Shenyang) between June 30 and July 17, examining how local Japanese media viewed the Envoys and how domestic Chinese- and Japanese-language media in Manchukuo reported their return from Japan. It references relevant documents in the Japanese government-operated website, Center for Asian Historical Records (アジア歴史資料センター *Ajia rekishi shiryō sentā*), and newspapers in Manchukuo and Japan. Major Japanese-language newspapers include *Asahi News*, *Tokyo Daily*

¹⁸Koresawa 2013, pp. 83–84. Similarly narratives can be found at Koresawa 2015, p. 24.

¹⁹Kitaoka 2021, pp. 1–2, 107.

²⁰Ibid., p. 2.

²¹Ibid., p. 135.

²²Ibid., p. 140.

²³Yamamuro 2004, p. 283. This book was translated into English with the title *Manchuria under Japanese Domination* by historian Joshua Fogel in 2006.

News, *Ōsaka mainichi shinbun* (大阪毎日新聞 Osaka daily news), and *Manshū nippō* (滿州日報 Manchurian daily newspaper). The three Chinese-language newspapers that the study references are *Taidong ribao* (泰東日報 Eastern daily), *Manzhou bao* (滿洲報 Manchurian newspaper), and *Shengjing shibao* (盛京時報 Shengjing times); all of them enjoyed Japanese sponsorship since their publications in the 1900s and the 1920s and shared a pro-Japan standpoint after Manchukuo's creation.²⁴ Incorporating these sources will allow historians to recover an almost forgotten – yet highly important – diplomatic and political history of Manchukuo.

Using the pure heart of children to promote friendship: the Envoys' selection process

As its name suggests, the members of the Manchukuo Young Girl Envoys were all primary school and junior high school girls. Serving as Manchukuo's first official diplomats and carrying the mission of introducing the Japanese, particularly primary school children, to the ideals of Manchukuo, the Envoys caught the attention of both countries' media. *Osaka Daily News* on May 28, 1932 revealed that the Envoys were part of a project that Manchukuo's GSB conducted on promoting international recognition of Manchukuo, as "the pure heart of children could transcend national boundaries."²⁵ It authorized the School Affairs Division (学務課 *Gakumu ka*) of the South Manchuria Railway Company (SMR) to select competent candidates from Manchukuo's Han Chinese, Japanese, and Korean school girls.²⁶ On June 3, 1932, the Division selected two Han Chinese, two Japanese, and two Korean girls from the ten candidates that it gathered from Manchukuo's primary and secondary schools and recommended them to the GSB; they became the Envoys' eventual members.²⁷ The two Chinese girls are respectively Yang Yun (楊雲; born in April 1920), a first year student at the Changchun (Xinjing) Public School's higher division, and Lei Jingshu (雷靜淑; born in May 1920), a first year student at the Fengtian Public School's higher division. The two Japanese girls are Izumi Miyuki (和泉美幸; born in February 1921), a sixth year student at the Changchun West Square Primary School, and Tsuda Sumi (津田寿美; born in June 1920), a sixth year student at the Fengtian Kamo Primary School. The two Koreans are Kim Kunhee (金君姬; born in February 1920), a fifth year student at the Andong (Dandong) Normal School, and Yoo Boksoon (俞福順; born in November 1918), a fifth year student at the Fengtian Normal School.²⁸ To protect and assist the Envoys in Japan, the GSB appointed Japanese woman Ishida Toyoko (石田豊子; unknown d.), the principal of the Dairen North Park Kindergarten, the Envoys' supervisor.²⁹

The growing popularity of children in Japanese popular culture since the 1920s was a major reason behind the GSB's utilization of young girls for diplomacy. As newspapers, magazines, and movies gradually became Japanese people's affordable consumables in the 1920s, domestic media often highlighted children's roles in promoting friendship and peace especially after 1927, when the governments of Japan and the United States held a doll exchange ceremony between the two countries' schoolchildren for enhancing universal peace and Japan–America friendship.³⁰ For Koresawa, the GSB tended to follow this newly emerged trend of children diplomacy by building upon the 1927 ceremony.³¹ Adding the element of ethnicity for consideration because of Manchukuo's proclaimed ethnic diversity, the GSB planned to introduce the Japanese to this new country with exceptional school girls from the country's leading ethnicities.

School grades, morality, specialties, health, and Japanese language ability seemed to the major criteria of selection, while the social status of candidates' families was of minor concern. Yang Yun, the

²⁴ Although the Manchukuo state newspaper *Datong bao* (Great unity herald) is of a more authoritative Chinese reference, its 1932 issues have arguably lost.

²⁵ *Osaka mainichi shinbun* (May 28, 1932): 11.

²⁶ *Manshū nippō* (June 3, 1932): 7.

²⁷ *Manshū nippō* (June 4, 1932): 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Manshū nippō* (June 5, 1932): 7.

³⁰ Koresawa 2018, pp. 5–6.

³¹ Koresawa 2015, p. 3.

daughter of a Shandong grocer, “speaks fluent Japanese and can communicate with Japanese people without obstacles.”³² Lei Jingshu, the daughter of a former Fengtian police officer, was “good at painting and embroidery; the fluency of her Japanese is hardly comparable among her classmates.”³³ Izumi Miyuki, originally from Himeji (姫路), Hyōgo prefecture, was “good at learning and singing” and was currently “practicing her Manchurian language [Mandarin Chinese] ability.”³⁴ Tsuda Sumi, the daughter of an employee at the Bank of Korea (朝鮮銀行 *Chōsen ginkō*) who was born in Fukuoka prefecture, was not only a “star at school proms given her specialities in singing and dancing” but also a “major force in school athletics” who had a “good school grade.”³⁵ Kim Kunhee, born in Keijō (京城 present-day Seoul) and able to speak fluent Japanese, was the daughter of the Andong Korean Association’s president. As a student with “excellent grades at school,” her “morality also serves as a model for the whole school’s students.”³⁶ Yoo Boksoon, born in Pyongyang and currently resided in Fengtian, “likes sports and has a strong body,” and was “good at writing in Japanese.”³⁷ These girls with different familial backgrounds yet similar qualifications represented the Manchukuo government in Japan and interacted with Japan’s officials and civilians.

Regional autonomy matters to Manchukuo: the Envoys’ identifying mission in Japan

To request Japanese recognition of Manchukuo required articulation of the country’s national ideals in front of the Japanese people, something that served as the Envoys’ primary mission in Japan. One can find relevant clues in news reports. For example, Tsuda Sumi suggested during a local welcome ceremony in Osaka on June 30, 1932 that Manchukuo “will advance through its new national ideals.”³⁸ Koresawa Hiroaki also agrees that the Envoys tended to “spread the spirits of Manchukuo’s national foundation among the young boys and young girls of Japan,” although he does not analyze what the so-called “spirits of Manchukuo’s national foundation” were.³⁹

To identify the ideals that the GSB wished the Envoys to convey in Japan, one should reference the pamphlet *Dai Manshūkoku no shōjo yori* (大満州国の少女より From greater Manchukuo’s young girls), a 20-page document that the Envoys distributed along their journey in Japan. Issued by the GSB as a non-commercial product, the opening Chinese plain-language poem revealed its observation of Manchukuo’s national ideals:

To the elders and brothers of the Northeast/now is the time to rise up/Public enemy warlords have disappeared/[we should therefore] save people from water and fire and realize universal tranquility/ [Our] regime has managed to restore peace/[making us] treat territorial defense and civil pacification [保境安民 *baojing anmin*] as the principle [of Manchukuo]/Thirty million people of Manchuria and Mongolia/unify [yourselves and contribute to] the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.⁴⁰

“Territorial defense and civil pacification” are the key words in this poem, a term that Manchuria’s media in late 1931 and early 1932 frequently referenced, to justify the region’s separation from China proper. Referring to the territory and population of Manchuria, it contained a sense of autonomy and isolationism.⁴¹ Kasagi Yoshiaki (笠木良明 1892–1955), the head of the GSB, supported the

³²*Manzhou bao* (June 20, 1932): 2.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴*Manshū nippō* (June 4, 1932): 7.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶*Osaka Asahi shinbun furoku: Chōsen Asahi nan Sen ban* (June 8, 1932): 5.

³⁷*Manzhou bao* (June 20, 1932): 2; *Manshū nippō* (June 4, 1932): 7. The former suggested that Yu’s father “currently has no job,” while the latter suggested that her father was “conducting land sale business” in Fengtian.

³⁸*Osaka mainichi shinbun* (July 1, 1932): 11.

³⁹Koresawa 2013, p. 79.

⁴⁰*Manshūkoku Shisei kyoku kōbō sho*, 0051.

⁴¹For two relevant studies on the term, see Li 1996, p. 57; Mitter 2000, pp. 115–16.

decentralization of power in government and urged Manchukuo's Japanese civil officials to treat the "establishment of mutual trust and the spreading of morality" as their dogma and "respect local customs" with "a heart of passion" when assisting and guiding the country's Chinese-speaking residents to develop autonomy.⁴² By acquiring the assistance of the Japanese home government and population, the Japanese would make Manchuria, according to the pamphlet, *From Greater Manchukuo's Young Girls*, a territory that had "buried 200,000 Japanese warriors [who were sacrificed during] the Sino-Japanese War [of 1894–95], the Russo-Japanese War [of 1904–05], and the Manchurian Incident [of 1931]," a "paradise of mankind and the birthplace of universal peace."⁴³

Unable to represent Manchukuo's Chinese-speaking residents: the Envoys' Japanese-oriented image

Understanding the ideal that the GSB made the Envoys spread in Japan generates a question: to what extent did that ideal resonate with the ambitions of Manchukuo's Chinese-speaking government leaders, particularly Chief Executive Aixin-Jueluo Puyi (愛新覺羅溥儀 1906–1967; the last Qing emperor) and Prime Minister Zheng Xiaoxu (鄭孝胥 1860–1938)? Little might be the answer to that question. One may find evidence in the documents that the Envoys brought to Japan, *Nihon no shōjo ni okuru* (日本の少女に贈る To the young girls of Japan), a Japanese-language letter that the GSB requested the Envoys to distribute in Japan. It invited "the little national citizens" of Japan to use their "warm hands to hold the hands of our country's little national citizens," to "make each ethnicity of [Manchukuo] enjoy a benevolent and caring life" under Japan's assistance.⁴⁴ News reports in Manchukuo and Japan initially claimed that Puyi drafted the letter, yet they soon all contended Zheng to be the author; a revised version of the letter secretly switched several first-person phrases by Puyi to a third person.⁴⁵

Neither Puyi nor Zheng understood Japanese, and neither person acknowledged children's political values. Based on Puyi's conversations with Japanese political and military figures between 1932 and 1938 that his interpreter Hayashide Kenjirō (林出賢次郎 1882–1970) recorded, Puyi primarily strove to revive his monarchical status in 1932 and 1933.⁴⁶ Although Zheng indeed supported regional autonomy in his writings, one could hardly find evidence of his interest in using children for diplomacy.⁴⁷ In his diary on June 17, 1932, the day when the Envoys visited Zheng before departing from Xinjing for Japan, for example, Zheng mentioned the visit with one sentence: "six girls that the GSB will send to Japan for introducing [the Japanese to Manchukuo] come to visit me."⁴⁸ One month later, on July 17, Zheng wrote, "the six girls that the GSB dispatched have returned from Japan and come to visit me."⁴⁹ These sentences, besides a note on the Envoys' ethnicities in his work diary (院錄 *yuánlù*) on June 9, 1932, constituted Zheng's observation of the Envoys.⁵⁰ Apparently, the GSB not only failed to consult with Puyi, Zheng, and other Chinese-speaking officials on such an important diplomatic mission but also lacked a consistent idea on how to present the new Manchukuo in the Japanese home islands.

Knowing that the GSB lacked consultation with Manchukuo's Chinese-speaking officials on dispatching the Envoys, one might expect the GSB to at least make the girls reflect Manchukuo's proclaimed cultural diversity on their way to Japan, yet the result was disappointing. After reaching Fengtian via train in the afternoon of June 18, 1932, the Envoys' supervisor, Ishida Toyoko, took

⁴²Kasagi 1960, p. 48, 50.

⁴³Manshūkoku Shisei kyoku kōbō sho, 0069.

⁴⁴"Kokumu sōri messēji," 0029–30. Local Chinese news reports noted that the letter's original language is Japanese.

Taidong ribao (June 8, 1932): 1.

⁴⁵*Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun* (June 2, 1932): 11; *Shengjing shibao* (June 19, 1932): 4.

⁴⁶For example, see Hayashide, January 11, 1933.

⁴⁷For Zheng's support of regional autonomy, see Zheng 1934, pp. 103–104.

⁴⁸Zheng 1993, p. 2390.

⁴⁹Zheng 1993, p. 2396.

⁵⁰Zheng 1993, p. 2737.

the girls to the Japanese Kantō Army's headquarter and reported to Honjō Shigeru (本庄繁 1876–1945), the army's commander, their visit to Japan.⁵¹ They then went to worship at the Fengtian Shintō Shrine and at the local Japanese Monument of Loyal Souls (忠霊塔 *chūrei tō*), to pray for the success of their mission.⁵² After reaching Dairen in the morning of June 19, the Envoys immediately went to worship at the Dairen Shintō Shrine for the same purpose before attending several welcome ceremonies that local Japanese media held for them.⁵³ Departing from the port of Dairen via the Japanese merchant ship *Ussuri* on June 20 and docking at the port of Moji on June 22, the Envoys all dressed in their so-called ethnic clothing and wore the same white pantyhose and black belt shoes.⁵⁴ Yang Yun and Lei Jingshu dressed in the same dotted “orange-color Manchurian clothes and tea-color skirt,” and Kim Kunhee and Yoo Boksoon dressed in a traditional “Korean-style white clothes and black skirt.”⁵⁵ Unlike the Chinese and the Korean sides, Izumi Miyuki and Tsuda Sumi wore a “plain white Western-style dress” and carried a white hat in hand.⁵⁶ In the words of Koresawa, such arrangements arguably tried to “demonstrate Japan’s modernization” and capability of assisting the newly created Manchukuo.⁵⁷ This was without doubt the GSB’s intention (Fig. 1).

Without highlighting Manchukuo’s cultural diversity, domestic Japanese media emphasized Izumi and Tsuda after the Envoys’ arrival. While *Asahi News* reported Izumi’s words at Moji on inviting the Japanese to “keep a prolonged friendly relationship with” the residents of Manchukuo on June 22, *Tokyo Daily News* published a nursery rhyme that Tsuda, “the number one dancer and singer” in the group, composed before reaching Tokyo via train in the evening of June 23.⁵⁸ Revealing her excitement of revisiting Japan, Tsuda wrote, “Receiving the farewell flag/cutting off its tape [and making it] flutter in the wind. With cheers/[we] are heading to nostalgic Japan. The young girl envoys/going to the enjoyable and pleasant Japan. Farewell; farewell/we are coming. Long live; long live/see you again.”⁵⁹ Describing Japan with the adjectives nostalgic, enjoyable, and pleasant, Tsuda associated her excitement of returning home with the cheers of presenting Chinese-speaking and Japanese schoolchildren when the Envoys departed from Dairen for Japan. From a political perspective, contemporary Japanese readers may deem the poem a description of Manchukuo’s kinship relation with Japan: the Yamato ethnicity of Japan were parents, and the ethnic minorities of Japan, mainly Koreans and Taiwanese, and the Chinese-speaking ethnicities of Manchukuo were children. The “children” of Japan now returned home, to request the assistance of their “parents” in Tokyo for constructing the new country.

A clumsy expression of Japan–Manchukuo friendship: the Envoys in Tokyo

Following rigorous daily schedules that the Tokyo Municipal Government made, the Envoys conducted diplomacy in Tokyo between June 24 and 29 and resided in the Imperial Hotel (帝国ホテル *Teikoku hōteru*), excluding an arranged holiday visit to Nikkō (日光), Tochigi prefecture, on June 28. Attending several welcome ceremonies that different municipal and civil associations held for them from morning to afternoon every day, the girls hardly had time to rest. For instance, the June 24 schedule made them visit and worship at the imperial palace and the Meiji and Yasukuni shrines respectively at 9:20 AM, 10:30 AM, and 11 AM.⁶⁰ Without a break, they visited the mayor at the Tokyo municipal government at 11:30 AM and had a lunch with him.⁶¹ In the afternoon, between 1 PM and 3:30 PM, they attended a

⁵¹ *Manshū nippō* (June 19, 1932): 7.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Dairen shinbun* (June 19, 1932): 7.

⁵⁴ *Osaka Asahi shinbun furoku: Chōsen Asahi seihoku ban* (June 23, 1932): 5.

⁵⁵ *Dairen shinbun* (June 21, 1932): 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Koresawa 2013, p. 18.

⁵⁸ *Yamaguchi Asahi* (June 22, 1932): 5; *Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun* (June 24, 1932): 8.

⁵⁹ *Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun* (June 24, 1932): 8.

⁶⁰ “*Manshū shōjo shisetsu nittei*,” 0018–19.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*



Figure 1. The Manchukuo Young Girl Envoys in Xinjing, June 17, 1932. The six girls in the front row from left to right are respectively Lei Jingshu, Yang Yun, Izumi Miyuki, Tsuda Sumi, Kim Kunhee, and Yoo Boksoon. The woman to Lei's left is Ishida Toyoko. The tallest man in the middle of the back row is Prime Minister Zheng Xiaoxu, and the man to the right of Zheng with glasses is Kasagi Yoshiaki.

Source: Kasagi Yoshiaki ihō roku kankōkai, ed., *Kasagi Yoshiaki ihō roku* [Works of the deceased Kasagi Yoshiaki] (Tokyo: Kasagi Yoshiaki ihō roku kankō kai, 1960), no page number.

welcome ceremony at Hibiya Public Hall with representatives of Tokyo's primary school students, before attending another two ceremonies at 4:30 PM and 7 PM in different places.⁶²

Although having fewer ceremonies to attend from June 25 to 29, they followed the municipal government's strict regulations and could not act freely. The government always transported the girls by car, and during welcome ceremonies, the girls mechanically read the letter that Zheng Xiaoxu reportedly wrote for Japan's young girls and sang the anthem of Manchukuo's creation.⁶³ This is perhaps why Yoo Boksoon, one of the Korean members of the Envoys, suggested that they "know little about Tokyo's cityscape," despite having stayed in the city for five days.⁶⁴ Observing the Envoys' dense schedules in Tokyo, Koresawa suggests that the adult planners behind those events used the girls to advance their own objectives and disregarded the girls' feelings.⁶⁵ Yoo's suggestion supports his view.

Serving as Manchukuo's government representatives, the Envoys symbolized the country's infantile status for Tokyo's media. Emphasizing the vulnerable image of children, Ishida Toyoko, the girls' supervisor, during an interview on June 24 in Tokyo portrayed Manchukuo as an "infant who has just learnt to stand" and who needed "Japan's care."⁶⁶ The Envoys' curious behaviors helped bolster

⁶²Miyako *shinbun* (June 25, 1932): 13.

⁶³For example, see *Tokyō nichinichi shinbun* (June 25, 1932): 11.

⁶⁴*Manshū nippō* (July 21, 1932): 3.

⁶⁵Koresawa 2018, p. 81.

⁶⁶*Dairen shinbun* (June 25, 1932): 2.

such an image. After arriving at the peripheral area of the imperial palace – their first destination in Tokyo – on the morning of June 24, “the girls were filled with excitement and gratitude and jumped out like a spring from the car that they took when it stopped.”⁶⁷ They then saluted toward the direction of the palace with a deep bow and lowered their heads in prayer before shouting “long live” in Japanese three times under Ishida’s leadership.⁶⁸ The girls were initially excited, as they “jumped out like a spring from the car that they took,” arguably because they expected to tour the center of the Japanese Empire, not worshiping it. This is evident in their own words during an interview in Dairen on July 15, 1932. The Envoys complained that Japan’s photographers “refused to give us freedom” and frequently asked the Envoys to lower their heads and shout “long live” in Tokyo.⁶⁹ Domestic Japanese readers, however, would likely associate the Envoys’ excitement after reaching the Tokyo imperial palace with respect for Japan’s imperial clan based on their subsequent worships.

Japanese political figures in Tokyo likewise tended to disregard the Envoys’ status as Manchukuo’s diplomats. Saitō Makoto, the Japanese Prime Minister, refrained from discussing politics and diplomacy when the Envoys visited him on June 25 and instead asked the latter about their impressions of Japan.⁷⁰ Pleasantly recalling their trip to the famous commercial street of Ginza (銀座) the previous night, the Envoys responded to Saitō’s question “in a granddaughter-like tone,” saying, “Japan’s sceneries really amazed us.” Saitō hastily ended the conversation, saying, “Try to visit more places; do not to catch a cold.”⁷¹ The Envoys’ most important visit in Tokyo ironically ended in discussion of Japan’s scenery.

It is rather unfair to criticize the Japanese home government for downplaying the girls if one considers the earlier arrival of the Concordia Association’s representatives and the forthcoming visit of Manchukuo’s Minister of Communications, Ding Jianxiu. Departing from Fengtian on June 18, 1932 and reaching Tokyo on June 21 – two days before the Envoys’ arrival, the Concordia Association’s representatives contained fifteen adult Chinese and Japanese members.⁷² Besides “introducing Japanese political figures to the spirits of Manchukuo’s national foundation and [the country’s] politics and objectives, to enhance the existing friendly relationship between the two countries,” the representatives requested “Japan, a country with shared race and culture,” to recognize Manchukuo as a legitimate country.⁷³ Sharing virtually identical objectives with the Envoys, the Association’s representatives met Prime Minister Saitō and other Japanese government leaders on June 21 and stated their appeals; this likely reduced the significance of the Envoys for Tokyo.⁷⁴ Other than the fifteen members in Tokyo, the Concordia Association simultaneously sent two more teams across the Japanese home islands, except for Hokkaidō, to promote Japanese recognition of Manchukuo.⁷⁵ Considering the scope of the Association’s teams, without mentioning the fact that their leader Yu Jingyuan (于靜遠 1898–1969) was the son of a central promoter of Manchukuo’s creation, Yu Chonghan (于冲漢 1871–1932), the Envoys paled in front of the former. Ding Jianxiu, whose missions were to “request Japan’s recognition of Manchukuo and to invite Japanese investment in Manchukuo’s industries,” visited Tokyo on July 1, 1932 with sixteen members, including the head of Manchukuo’s Supreme Court, Lin Qi (林榮 1885-?), and interacted with the Japanese home government.⁷⁶

Receiving three visits from Manchukuo in two weeks, even a modern researcher might struggle identifying whom the three teams respectively represented with hindsight and sources from different

⁶⁷ *Osaka Asahi shinbun yūkan* (June 25, 1932): 2.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Manshū nippō* (July 20, 1932): 3.

⁷⁰ *Yomiuri shinbun yūkan* (June 26, 1932): 2.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun* (June 21, 1932): 7.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Miyako shinbun* (June 22, 1932): 13.

⁷⁵ *Manzhou bao* (July 6, 1932): 7.

⁷⁶ *Asahi shinbun* (July 1, 1932): 2.

perspectives, let alone the Japanese home government in June 1932, which did not recognize Manchukuo until September 1932. It is thus not surprising for the government to prioritize the adult visitors and marginalize the girls, especially because the girls vaguely comprehended their missions in Japan. One may realize this from Yoo Boksoon's words on June 19, 1932 in Dairen. Speaking to local Japanese journalists, Yoo revealed that the Envoys did not "begin to discuss whom [they] should meet and what [they] should say after reaching Japan" until meeting each other for the first time on June 17 in Xinjing.⁷⁷ This explains why one can hardly find relevant texts of their words other than travel impressions in Japan's news reports, while Manchukuo's Chinese news reports virtually ignored the girls' activities in Japan.⁷⁸

Instead of promoting Japanese understanding of the significance of regional autonomy and mutual trust and assistance between the residents of Manchukuo and the Japanese to Manchukuo's prosperity, the Envoys in Tokyo unintentionally portrayed Manchukuo as a fragile country that could hardly survive without Japanese supervision. *Asahi News* strengthened such an impression by praising the Envoys for "wonderfully finishing the mission of promoting friendship" between Japan and Manchukuo on June 30, the next day of their departure from Tokyo for Osaka.⁷⁹ On the other side of the ocean, the GSB might have more or less regretted its decision of using young girls to conduct diplomacy after observing the Envoys' behaviors in Tokyo, although this observation lacks direct evidence. However, it had no opportunities to refine future diplomatic strategies because the institution collapsed following the Envoys' departure from Manchukuo due to operations of its Japanese political rivals in the State Council, particularly Komai Tokuzō (駒井徳三 1885–1961). This sudden change in Manchukuo's inner circle foreshadowed the Envoys' obscurity in the later years of Manchukuo.

Regional autonomy faced obstacle: power operations behind the GSB's downfall

On June 27, 1932, the Manchukuo State Council decided during that day's cabinet meeting to abolish the GSB; it officially announced the decision in the country's government bulletin on July 5.⁸⁰ Official Manchukuo narratives depicted the GSB as a "necessary government institution when the country was created." However, because "this institution has accomplished its duty, it is no longer necessary for the government to preserve it," concluded the narrative.⁸¹ If the GSB became useless, so did the Envoys. This is perhaps why Manchukuo's media all refrained from highlighting the Envoys' status as Manchukuo's first government representatives when they returned from Japan in mid July 1932.

To explain the reasons behind the GSB's downfall, it is necessary to analyze its frictions with Manchukuo's other Japanese leading forces. As a supervisory institution in the State Council that aimed to "help different ministries and departments smoothly execute their policies," the GSB was meant to "promote the spirits of Manchukuo's national foundation," to "kindly cultivate people's character and support," and to "spread the thoughts of regional autonomy" in Manchukuo.⁸² Members of the GSB mostly originated from Kasagi Yoshiaki's Greater Magnificent Peak Society (大雄峯会 *Daiyūhō kai*), a Japanese youth organization that Kasagi created with a group of graduates from the Tokyo Imperial University who worked for the SMR in November 1930 in Dairen. Even if GSB officials were not exclusively Japanese, one cannot find evidence of Chinese-speaking ethnicities' involvements in the institution's decision-making circle.

Cooperating with the Kantō Army to restore regional order after the former invaded the region in September 1931, Kasagi strove to cultivate the Chinese-speaking population of Manchuria's ability of autonomy with the Greater Magnificent Peak Society's members.⁸³ Disappointing with the political

⁷⁷ *Manshū nippō* (June 20, 1932): 1.

⁷⁸ For example, see *Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun* (June 28, 1932): 8.

⁷⁹ *Asahi shinbun* (June 30, 1932): 11.

⁸⁰ "Shisei kyoku wa haishi," *Manshū nippō* (June 29, 1932): 1; *Wei Manzhouguo zhengfu gongbao* (1990), vol. 2, 10.

⁸¹ *Manshū nippō* (June 29, 1932): 1.

⁸² Fujikawa 1981, p. 49.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

situation of Japan, where bureaucratic autocracy and capitalist monopoly prevailed for Kasagi, he deemed indulgence the culprit and argued for the importance of cultivating individual officials' "self-discipline" (治己 *jiki*), literally the embrace of the decentralization of power, to the "eradication of others' sufferings."⁸⁴ To prevent Manchukuo from repeating the "mistakes" of contemporary Japan, Kasagi managed to create the GSB to the Kantō Army's consent in March 1932 and incorporate the members of the Society to serve as GSB officials, while those who failed to enter the GSB "all managed to serve in Manchukuo's other government institutions."⁸⁵ To preserve the vitality of the new country, Kasagi actively engaged in introducing to the Japanese population his ideal of regional autonomy after heading the GSB and overtly conceptualized those who opposed such an ideal in the Manchukuo state as "ambitious jackal politicians."⁸⁶

Such a provocative narrative alarmed Komai Tokuzō, a former employee of the SMR and the head of Manchukuo's General Affairs Board (總務廳 Ch: *Zongwu ting*; Jp: *Sōmu chō*) – an executive institution in the State Council that handled the country's confidential, human, statistical, and accounting affairs besides managing "affairs beyond the duties of other departments."⁸⁷ Unlike Kasagi, Komai envisioned centralizing ruling power for the State Council and making Japanese officials direct Manchukuo's development. He insisted that "China's separation of regional powers was the cause of its unrest and corruption."⁸⁸ Portraying Kasagi and his men in the GSB as a group of power hungry officials who "wanted to fulfill their private interests," Komai encouraged the Kantō Army to abolish the GSB, writing that "one could not expect the new country to develop in a healthy way" without "taking tough measures" on Kasagi's force.⁸⁹ Sharing Komai's ambition of supervising Manchukuo with Japanese bureaucrats and considering the GSB a threat to the Kantō Army's manipulation of Manchukuo from behind the scenes, the army's commander, Honjō Shigeru, endorsed Komai's suggestion and decided to abolish the GSB on June 20, 1932 – the day when the Envoys sailed to Japan from Dairen.⁹⁰ Arguably planning to marginalize the GSB's messengers with a candidate from the Manchukuo government, Komai facilitated the visit of the Manchukuo Minister of Communications, Ding Jianxiu, to Japan on the same day and encouraged Prime Minister Zheng Xiaoxu "not to reject that decision."⁹¹

The Concordia Association's interference in Komai's and Kasagi's contest further confused Manchukuo's chaotic political situation on the Japanese side in June 1932. Created initially as a civil organization and gradually the sole party of Manchukuo, the Concordia Association's Japanese organizers and members mostly came from an opposing force to Kasagi's Greater Magnificent Peak Society, the Manchuria Youth League (滿州青年連盟 *Manshū seinen renmei*). Because Kasagi refused to cooperate with the League in promoting Manchukuo's autonomy and prevented the latter from joining the GSB, the League formed the Concordia Association in June 1932, to spread its ideal of promoting ethnic harmony between the ethnicities of Manchukuo and Japan and to confront Kasagi.⁹² To snatch an opportunity for presenting its own views of Manchukuo in Japan, the Association preceded the GSB by reaching Japan earlier with a larger visiting group, a point that Koresawa covers in his analysis.⁹³ Such an intense power struggle surrounding Komai, Kasagi, and the Concordia Association in June 1932 generated three visits to Japan, something that went beyond

⁸⁴Kasagi 1932, p. 13, 16.

⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 54–55. The planners of the 1931 Manchurian Incident in the Kantō Army were a group of radical military officials who sought to reform the Japanese home government with military power.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 36, 56.

⁸⁷*Wei Manzhouguo zhengfu gongbao*, April 1, 1932, vol. 1, pp. 27–28. The Board gradually became the operator of Manchukuo in the later 1930s.

⁸⁸Komai 1944, pp. 205–206.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 215.

⁹⁰Fujikawa 1981, pp. 52–53.

⁹¹Zheng, "June 20, 1932," in Zheng 1993, p. 2391.

⁹²For more information on the Manchurian Youth League, see Fujikawa 1981, pp. 18–21, 50–51; Yamaguchi 1967, pp. 15–18.

⁹³Koresawa 2018, pp. 51–53.

the Kantō Army's control. Because the Manchukuo government had yet to announce the GSB's dismissal until July 5, 1932, Komai could not name Ding Jianxiu a "government representative" when he left from Manchukuo for Japan on June 28, as Ding's, the Envoys', and the Association's objectives in Japan were virtually identical. Without realizing the ongoing power struggles on the Japanese side in Manchukuo's government, let alone understanding their own subtle situation, the Envoys continued their trip in Japan and headed to Osaka in the evening of June 29, 1932.

The faint flame before extinguishment: the Envoys in Osaka, Kyoto, and Kobe

At 8:56 AM, on June 30, 1932, the Envoys arrived at Osaka via train from Tokyo to the welcome of local journalists, primary school girls, and representatives of the city's female associations.⁹⁴ After changing into Japanese kimono in the hotel where they resided, the Envoys took three cars that the Osaka municipal government prepared for them and visited the Osaka prefectural government, Osaka Castle, and the headquarters of *Osaka Daily News*, *Osaka Asahi News*, and the Fourth Regiment in the morning. After a lunch with the city's mayor, in the afternoon, they attended a welcome ceremony with 1,200 local primary school girls and several municipal officials.⁹⁵ During the ceremony, Tsuda Sumi, one of the Envoys' Japanese members, spoke on behalf of the Envoys and thanked "Japan for its bright and righteous heart," while Izumi Miyuki, the other Japanese member, and Yang Yun, one of the Envoys' Han Chinese members, successively read Zheng Xiaoxu's letter in Japanese and Mandarin; other members' activities are unknown due to a lack of information.⁹⁶

Although domestic Japanese news reports rarely revealed the Envoys' feelings for conducting diplomacy in Japan, one could find clues in their scattered words. Unable to bear the pressure for their dense daily schedules, Kim Kunhee, one of the two Korean members, cried out with "two other members" before reaching Osaka on July 1, saying, "I have left home for too long; now I really miss my mother and brother" in Andong. Mentioning her schoolwork, Kim suggested in tears, "If I do not go home quickly, to prepare for my forthcoming test, my grade will go down. I want to go back; I want to go back."⁹⁷ Lei Jingshu during an interview in Dairen on July 15 suggested that she "happily jumped on the deck when the ship [that the Envoys took] reached the Dairen Port" on July 14 because she wanted to "go home as soon as possible."⁹⁸ Compared with news reports on the Envoys' articulation of Japan–Manchukuo friendship, Kim's and Lei's words better reflect the thoughts of the Envoys' non-Japanese members. While *Osaka Daily News* tried to highlight the Envoys' innocence with Kim's complaint, and the *Manchurian Daily Newspaper* recorded the Envoys' July 15 interview in Dairen without comments, they allow historians to better comprehend these girls' attitude toward their mission in Japan. From this perspective, the GSB's experiment of cultivating multi-ethnic children diplomacy ended in failure.

The Envoys' rigorous daily activities in Tokyo generated unpleasant memories for them, but they eventually managed to relax and enjoy Japan's sceneries after reaching Kyoto and Kobe between July 5 and 11. Spending four days to interact with Osaka's schoolchildren and different civil organizations and one day to visit Nara on July 3, the Envoys reached Kyoto in the morning of July 5 and resided in the city for five days.⁹⁹ Compared with their rushed daily life in Tokyo and Osaka, the Envoys had more leisure time in Kyoto. For example, they visited the Kyoto imperial palace, the Uzumasa (太秦) film studio, and the famous scenic site of Arashiyama (嵐山) on July 6 under the Kyoto municipal government's arrangement.¹⁰⁰ On July 9, they climbed the Buddhist mountain of Hiei (比叡) and boarded an excursion boat on Lake Biwa (琵琶湖), Japan's largest freshwater lake, after descending

⁹⁴ *Osaka Asahi shinbun yūkan* (July 1, 1932): 2.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Osaka Mainichi shinbun* (July 1, 1932): 11.

⁹⁷ *Osaka Mainichi shinbun yūkan* (July 1, 1932): 2.

⁹⁸ *Manshū nippō* (July 19, 1932): 3.

⁹⁹ *Osaka Asahi shinbun Kyōto ban* (July 6, 1932): 5.

¹⁰⁰ *Osaka Asahi shinbun Kyōto ban* (July 7, 1932): 5.

Mt. Hiei via cable car.¹⁰¹ In Kobe, on July 10, the Envoys toured the seaside parks of Suma (須磨) and Maiko (舞子) besides ascending Mt. Rokkō (六甲) via cable car.¹⁰² Yoo Boksoon excitedly told journalists that she had “never seen the ocean before,” while Izumi Miyuki nostalgically recalled her hometown of Himeji.¹⁰³ Under such a pleasant atmosphere, the Envoys boarded the steamboat *Baikal* (ばいゝかる) on July 11 in Kobe and left Japan for Dairen via Shimonoseki and Moji, without realizing the changing environment in Manchukuo’s highest ruling strata.¹⁰⁴

When the flame went out: the Envoys’ return to Manchukuo

On July 14, 1932, at noon, the Envoys arrived at the port of Dairen via *Baikal*, finishing their twenty-days visit in Japan. After disembarking from *Baikal*, they went to worship at the Dairen Shintō Shrine, to report the success of their mission.¹⁰⁵ Attending several welcome ceremonies that local media held for them on July 15, the Envoys left Dairen for Fengtian via train at 10 PM on that day and reached Fengtian the next morning to the welcome of “countless Japanese and Manchurian students who waved the national flags of Japan and Manchukuo.”¹⁰⁶ Before leaving the city for Xinjing in the evening of July 16, the Envoys worshiped at the Japanese Monument of Loyal Souls and the Fengtian Shintō Shrine besides visiting Kantō Army commander Honjō Shigeru and “different public institutions and newspaper offices.”¹⁰⁷ In the morning of July 17, at 7 AM, the Envoys finally reached Xinjing via train; those primary school girls who came to greet them on the platform continuously shouted “long live” arguably in both Mandarin and Japanese and “waived Japan’s and Manchukuo’s flags in their hands” after the Envoys’ arrival.¹⁰⁸ After a brief rest, at noon, the Envoys greeted the former head of the GSB, Kasagi Yoshiaki, and talked with him for about 100 minutes before visiting Chief Executive Puyi, Prime Minister Zheng Xiaoxu, and several municipal institutions in the afternoon.¹⁰⁹ At 4:30 PM, the Manchukuo government announced the Envoys’ dismissal and let them return to their homes across Manchukuo, signifying the end of the country’s first, and to some extent clumsy, official interaction with a foreign country.¹¹⁰

Given the GSB’s abolishment, domestic news reports in Manchukuo refrained from stressing the Envoys’ status as diplomats after their return from Japan, while the country’s Chinese-speaking population ignored the girls. Rather than discussing diplomacy, for example, Japanese journalists of the *Manchurian Daily Newspaper* during their interview with the Envoys in the afternoon of July 15 in Dairen asked the latter about their favorite places and persons and the most delightful, interesting, amazing, challenging, and confusing things in Japan.¹¹¹ The Envoys in their answers mostly noted Kyoto and Kobe for pleasant memories and Tokyo for complaint. Except for Lei Jingshu, whose favorite places were Nikkō and Nara, all the other members liked Kyoto the most: Kim Kunhee recalled her visit to Arashiyama and Mt. Hiei, while Yang Yun mentioned the trip to Lake Biwa.¹¹² While Japanese media in Manchukuo tried to avoid associating themselves with Komai Tokuzō’s and Kasagi Yoshiaki’s forces by portraying the Envoys’ visit to Japan as a study trip, the country’s Chinese-language media were not interested in intervening in a power struggle between the Japanese. The famed *Shengjing Times*, for instance, merely mentioned the Envoys’ return with several

¹⁰¹ *Ōsaka Asahi shinbun Kyōto ban* (July 10, 1932): 5.

¹⁰² *Ōsaka Asahi shinbun Kōbe ban* (July 11, 1932): 11.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Manshū nippō* (July 13, 1932): 2.

¹⁰⁵ *Manshū nippō* (July 15, 1932): 2.

¹⁰⁶ *Manshū nippō* (July 17, 1932): 7.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Manshū nippō* (July 18, 1932): 2.

¹⁰⁹ *Manshū nippō* (July 18, 1932): 4.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Manshū nippō* (July 19, 1932): 3.

¹¹² *Manshū nippō* (July 21, 1932): 3. Although both Mt. Hiei and Lake Biwa belong to Shiga prefecture, they represented Kyoto for the Envoys.

sentences.¹¹³ With dissatisfaction, Supervisor Ishida Toyoko unpleasantly suggested during an interview with the Chinese-language newspaper *Eastern Daily* in Dairen on July 15 that “the Manchukuo side never organized any welcome ceremonies” for the girls before their departure; she said, “we are absolutely not Japanese-dispatched messengers.” Clarifying the girls’ will of “contributing to Manchukuo’s development,” Ishida criticized Manchukuo’s Chinese-speaking population for their indifference and contended that the girls should “thank the Japanese rather than the Manchurians.”¹¹⁴ Arguably trying to raise the newspaper’s fame across Manchukuo’s Chinese readers by reporting Ishida’s complaint, as *Eastern Daily* was the only Chinese media that held a welcome ceremony for the Envoys after their return, which made Ishida and the girls feel “extremely exciting” and helped them “relieve [their] fatigue” in Ishida’s words, the newspaper nevertheless exposed the Envoys’ insignificant status for Manchukuo’s Chinese-speaking residents.¹¹⁵ To interpret a hidden message of this report, if the Envoys want to thank the Chinese-speaking side, they should thank *Eastern Daily* because this newspaper cared about their journey in Japan.

No matter whom the Envoys should thank, they unfortunately represented a losing force on the Japanese side of Manchukuo’s government leaders and thus could not leave a conspicuous mark in the country’s official history. Kasagi Yoshiaki might have rethought strategies for future children diplomacy based on the Envoys’ lessons if he remained in power, yet neither his rival, Komai Tokuzō, nor the Kantō Army, appreciated children’s diplomatic potential. Worse, the country’s Chinese-speaking government leaders were reluctant to cooperate with Kasagi for realizing his ideal of promoting regional autonomy under Japanese supervision; they instead watched Komai and the army subvert the former in June 1932 arguably because for them, Kasagi’s stay or removal were irrelevant to their own interests. Although Komai and the Concordia Association managed to drive Kasagi out of Manchukuo’s inner circle, neither side benefited from it in the long term. While the former quit the General Affairs Board in October 1932 mainly due to conflicts with Zheng Xiaoxu, the latter suffered repressions under the leadership of Koiso Kuniaki (小磯国昭 1880–1950; the Kantō Army’s chief of staff between August 1932 and March 1934) until 1936, when the Kantō Army decided to cultivate the Association as Manchukuo’s dominant party.¹¹⁶

The Envoys were perhaps the most tragic figures in this power contest. For one thing, they enjoyed little personal freedom throughout their journey in Manchukuo and Japan besides having to repeat narratives that they vaguely understood. For another, their interactions in Japan offered no returns for them and instead became a negative asset that the Manchukuo government tried to eliminate for the following thirteen years because one had to recall Kasagi and his ideals when discussing the Envoys. Selected by the state and abandoned by the state, these six silent and obedient girls failed to secure a proper space for themselves in the ephemeral history of Manchukuo and became a group of mostly forgotten participants in the country’s creation.

Conclusion

This study approaches the Manchukuo Young Girl Envoys from the question of why these unique diplomats have not received adequate scholarly attention in any language to this day, examining the political faction inside Manchukuo’s Japanese inner circle that directed the girls’ visit to Japan – the GSB, including its ideals and struggles with opposing Japanese forces in Manchukuo. Contrasting the GSB’s expectations of the girls with the latter’s behaviors in Japan, this study considers the former’s experiment on testing the possibilities of children diplomacy a failure. Comparing Japanese- and Chinese-language news coverage on the Envoys in Manchukuo and Japan, it notes the indifference of Manchukuo’s Chinese-speaking population toward the Envoys throughout their one-month journey in the two countries given the girls’ Japanese-oriented image and activities. Reviewing power

¹¹³*Shengjing shibao* (July 15, 1932): 5.

¹¹⁴*Taidong ribao* (July 17, 1932): 7.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹¹⁶Fujikawa 1981, pp. 128–29; Komai 1944, pp. 212–17.

operations on the Japanese side behind the GSB's abolishment, it further argues for the inappropriateness of oversimplifying Manchukuo's decision-making circle in 1932 by overestimating the Kantō Army's manipulating power. Spending considerable efforts to derail the GSB, the Kantō Army and the Manchukuo General Affairs Board intentionally eradicated the Envoys from Manchukuo's history because the ideals that the GSB made the Envoys spread in Japan, respectively regional autonomy and the decentralization of state power, were antithetical to the country's national policy of state dictatorship in the following thirteen years. Abruptly appearing in the two countries' news reports and quietly leaving public attention in two months, many historians would incline to overlook this hardly visible component in Manchukuo's political and diplomatic history. Other than focusing on the somewhat abstract concept of contemporary Japanese people's national sentiment when analyzing this subject, perhaps politics, particularly Sino-Japanese interactions, can help one better comprehend the historical significance of the Envoys and other events that included both the Chinese-speaking ethnicities and the Japanese in the early years of Manchukuo.

Since their return to Xinjing on July 17, 1932, one could hardly trace the Envoys' later life in Manchukuo's publications. While Yang Yun and Lei Jingshu attended the welcome ceremony for the Japanese Schoolchildren Envoys (日本学童使節 *Nihon gakudō shisetsu*) – an informal visiting group to Manchukuo that the *Tokyo Daily News* and the *Osaka Daily News* organized together, to repay the Young Girl Envoys – in Fengtian as guests in September 1932, other members' experiences disappeared from the country's records.¹¹⁷ During the Envoys' stay in Osaka in early July, Tsuda Sumi optimistically suggested that the ethnicities of Manchukuo, including herself, “will depart from their erstwhile misfortunes [under warlord domination] in their memories” after Manchukuo's creation.¹¹⁸ Yet greater misfortunes came in less than two decades, as the Soviet invasion of Manchuria in 1945 and the Chinese Civil War of 1945–1949 devastated Manchuria's territory and population; Japanese residents particularly fell victim to the wars, and the communist Siege of Changchun of 1948 turned this former Manchukuo capital into a living hell. The Envoys' lively and innocent image in 1932 and Manchuria's desperate situation between 1945 and 1949 formed an ironic contrast, motivating one to lament the girls' unfortunate life of becoming a political tool for the adults, used and then forgotten.

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¹¹⁷Koresawa 2017 (*Kokuritsu rekishi minzoku hakubutsukan kenkyū hōkoku*), p. 139, 144.

¹¹⁸*Osaka mainichi shinbun* (July 1, 1932): 11.

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