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We are Warriors for the Movement

Misogi Training in the Imperial Rule Assistance League

Based on trainees' testimonies published in 1941 by the Imperial Rule Assistance League, this article examines the spectrum of identification seen in an early 1940s spiritual cultivation regimen of cold-water purification (*misogi*) aiming to enhance popular commitment to such national projects as Japan's war in China and the eradication of liberalism. The revival and ritualization of *misogi* within modern Shinto was initially led by Kawazura Bonji and later taken up with government sponsorship by a variety of influential Shinto figures, who promoted it within the league. While the league's *misogi* programs conveyed a distinctive notion of identity for Japanese men, and while trainees' testimonies show that they affirmed and identified themselves with it, it is also clear that the training regimen failed to meet their expectations in significant respects. In addition, a 1942 doctrinal dispute greatly undermined the intellectual coherence of *misogi* training and its concept of identity.

KEYWORDS: *misogi*—Kawazura Bonji—Imaizumi Sadasuke—Imperial Rule Assistance League—identity

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THE FIELD of Japanese studies has a long-standing preoccupation with questions of identity, and some of the best-known works of the late twentieth century gave rise to enduring images. Ezra Vogel's *Japan as Number One* produced a picture of Japan as peopled by salaryman families, while D. T. Suzuki's *Zen and Japanese Culture* led readers to think of the Japanese people as uniformly motivated to practice meditation and wrestle with koans (VOGEL 1979; SUZUKI 1970). As anyone teaching college classes on Japan can attest, both portrayals of the national identity have remained popular among students and difficult to dislodge.

Nevertheless, critiques of unitary concepts of identity have powerfully animated humanistic scholarship within and beyond Japanese studies over the last forty years. With the advent of cultural studies in the broad sense, which includes feminist studies, postcolonial studies, and critiques of orientalism, concepts of identity have come under attack as essentializing and effacing the existence of those outside the privileged paradigm. A premium on diversity has produced a perspective that regards selfhood as constructed, always partial, often conflicted, and constantly changing, and understands that affirmation of any particular identity produces stigmatization of dissenters and non-conformists. An early critique of monolithic images in the study of Japanese religions appeared in the early 1980s when a special issue of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* was dedicated to studies of women in Japanese religions (NAKAMURA 1983). The influence of a critical perspective on concepts of identity in Japanese studies more broadly can be seen in Dorinne Kondo's influential essay, "M. Butterfly: Orientalism, Gender, and a Critique of Essentialist Identity." Kondo shows persuasively that to imagine that we could construct a stable concept of identity without referring to the subject's placement within relations of power could only produce an illusion (KONDO 1990). Greatly influenced by Foucault, studies of identity today take as their starting points the idea that identity is constructed through discourse, performance, and narrative conventions and is neither bounded, singular, nor clear-cut, but fluid, multiple, and ambiguous. To cite only one example, anthropologist Lauren Leve calls on scholars "to study the processes that produce and extend particular ways of seeing and organizing the world rather than inadvertently naturalizing them" (LEVE 2011, 513).

While acknowledging these problems inherent in the idea of identity, there are few obvious alternatives when one seeks to understand how Japan's religious histories and traditions feed into self-conceptions. We are still in a deconstructive

moment, and the subject of cultural identity can seem like a relic of the past that could only end up with some new variant of essentialism. Addressing this impasse, Stuart Hall has written that a switch from “identity” to “identification” may offer a way forward. Whereas “identity” suggests something finished, closed, and static, “identification” signals a concern with an open-ended, changing process that is susceptible to many kinds of influence. Identification in Hall’s sense is a process in which people provisionally attach themselves to some notion of who they are or should be (HALL 1996).

This article uses spiritual trainees’ testimonies (*kansōbun* 感想文)¹ published in 1941 by the sponsoring organization, the Imperial Rule Assistance League (Taisei Yokusankai 大政翼賛会), in order to examine the spectrum of identification seen in an early 1940s spiritual cultivation regimen of cold-water purification called *misogi* 禊 that aimed to enhance trainees’ commitment to such national projects as Japan’s war in China and the eradication of liberalism. *Misogi* is a method of purifying body and mind through cold water ablutions. It can be found in Buddhism, Shugendō, as a folk practice without detailed doctrinal underpinning, as well as in Shinto. *Misogi* consists principally of pouring cold water over the body, allowing a waterfall to pour over oneself, or immersing oneself in a body of water while praying, and may be performed in the sea, under a waterfall, in rivers, at a well, or other places where water is available. *Misogi* itself has no unchanging conceptual component beyond the idea of purification. Instead, doctrinal or sectarian variations emerge in the content of prayers and the addition of exercises beyond the core practice of cold-water austerities (BLACKER 1975).

*Kawazura Bonji, Imaizumi Sadasuke,
and the Modern Revival of Misogi in Shinto*

Concepts of cultivation (*shūyō* 修養, *kyōyō* 教養, *shūshin* 修身, and other terms) permeated early twentieth-century Japan. From the late 1930s, government and patriotic societies sponsored cultivation campaigns to transform popular understandings of personal identity through *misogi*. Modern Shinto’s incorporation of *misogi* began with the ascetic Kawazura Bonji 川面凡児 (1862–1929) who surrounded the practice with ritual and set out a rationale built on his own distinctive doctrines about the kami Ame no minakanushi 天之御中主 and a group of kami named in the Great Purification Prayer as the “Kami of the Place of Purification” (*haraedo no kami* 禊戸之神) (KANATANI 1941).²

1. A *kansōbun* is literally “a composition describing one’s impressions,” but I have adopted “testimonial” as a better indicator of the content in this case.

2. The “Kami of the Place of Purification” are the three female kami: Seoritsu hime 瀬織津比咩, Hayaakitsu hime 速開都比咩, and Hayasasura hime 速佐須良比咩, and the male kami Ibukido nushi 気吹戸主.

Ame no minakanushi was one of three kami appearing in the opening chapters of the mythic collection *Kojiki*. Lacking form, and disappearing from the myths after a first mention, these deities are thought to have been added to the compendium after the original compilation. Ame no minakanushi and the other two played a role in the medieval theology of the Watarai 度会 house, which administered the Outer Shrine at Ise, but these deities were not popularly worshiped before the modern period. Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801) reinterpreted the three kami as a single creator god whom he dubbed Musuhi no kami (or Musubi no kami ムスビ, ムスビの神). In like manner, Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776–1843) interpreted these kami as the three creator gods (*zōka sanjin* 造花三神) in the early nineteenth century. It was through this *kokugaku* 国学 connection that modern Shinto figures like Kawazura came to take an interest in Ame no minakanushi (HARDACRE 2016, 48, 178, 261, 330, 338–343).

Kawazura started to promote a distinctive form of *misogi* in 1909. It incorporated a series of prayers and physical exercises, such as *ame no torifune* 天之鳥船 (or simply *torifune*, literally, the “Heavenly Bird-Boat,” making rowing motions in a standing position), *furutama* 振魂 (“causing the soul to quiver”) by praying and chanting the names of the kami while pressing palms together and moving them up and down rapidly in front of the torso, *otakebi* 雄叫び (“manly war cries,” shouting, “Ei-ii” and “Ii-eii”), invocations of various kami, and deep breathing exercises called *ibuki* 気吹. Following these exercises, trainees entered the water or began to pour water over themselves and recite the Great Purification Prayer loudly, also praying to Ame no minakanushi and the Kami of the Place of Purification. Following the period in water, they repeated the preliminary exercises, sometimes using printed texts that included imperial poetry and edicts such as the Imperial Rescript on Education for recitation. *Misogi* was to be accompanied by lectures.³

Kawazura began to travel around the country to lecture on *misogi* and conduct training sessions, continuing this peripatetic existence until his death, much like the Shinto popularizers of the Edo period. Like them, Kawazura was neither employed as a shrine priest nor based at a shrine. He preached on his own theories of multiple souls and obscure theological interpretations of various kami along with assertions of Japan’s superiority in the world, collectively dubbed the Great Japan World Religion of Imperial Dignity (Dai Nihon Sekaikyō Mitsukai 大日本世界教稜威会) (MIYAZAKI 2011).

Kawazura gained patrons in the military, in government, and in shrines across the country, especially in Fukuoka and Kanagawa prefectures, where he held annual training sessions. On 9 July 1921, he was invited by Home Minister

3. In a version of a text for trainees dating sometime after 1941, the declaration of war against the United States and England was included for recitation.

Tokonami Takejirō 床次竹二郎 (1867–1935) to present a lecture attended by the head of the Shrine Bureau (Jinjakyoku 神社局), aristocrats, highly-placed bureaucrats, and Imaizumi Sadasuke 今泉定助 (1863–1944), head of the Jingū Hōsaikai 神宮奉齋会, the nationwide support network for nongovernmental funding of the Ise Shrines. The Home Ministry sponsored a trip for Kawazura in the following month to Manchuria, where he lectured in the major cities. Tokonami recommended Kawazura to the Shrine Bureau, providing governmental approval for Kawazura's *misogi* methods. In 1922 and 1923, Kawazura was invited to lecture before the annual meeting of the National Association of Shrine Priests. In 1925, Imaizumi and Jingū Hōsaikai began promoting *misogi* (*Nihon seishin to misogi*, 282–303; OKAICHI 2017, 47).

After Kawazura's death, Imaizumi took up the mantle and began to advocate *misogi* beyond Jingū Hōsaikai. So powerful a figure that he was known as Shinto's *ōgoshō* 大御所 ("emperor," leading figure), Imaizumi's influence was exceptionally broad. A graduate of the imperial university in classical literature, he participated in the compilation of *Kojiruien* 古事類苑 and in the establishment of Kokugakuin University, later lecturing there.⁴ In 1921, he became the head of Jingū Hōsaikai, a position that brought him nationwide influence and entry into government and military circles, enabling him to place his disciples in influential positions. He was active in the National Association of Shinto Priests and lectured around the country for it and a variety of shrine-related and patriotic organizations, including frequent appearances at *misogi* training programs. Imaizumi was an advisor to the Imperial Rule Assistance League, and several of his disciples were appointed to league posts related to spiritual training. Convinced that shrine priests should be leaders of the national spirit (*kokumin seishin no shidōsha* 国民精神の指導者), Imaizumi promoted Kawazura's way of performing *misogi* through the league and in other fora (KONNO 2013; TAKEDA 2016).⁵

Judging from newspaper coverage, *misogi* training programs were already widespread in the late 1930s. In January 1937, the *Asahi shinbun* reported on a five-day *misogi* program offered on the Tateyama coast of Chiba Prefecture by Mitsukai 稜威会, an organization formed by the disciples of Kawazura Bonji, for a mixed group of men, women, and children, whose training incorporated

4. *Kojiruien* is an encyclopedia of Japanese terms compiled from 1879 to 1907.

5. Imaizumi promoted *misogi* through the organization he founded, the Imperial Fortunes Assistance Movement. He saw *misogi* as an essential practice necessary for Japan in wartime, one that could empty out selfishness and desire, replacing them with greater commitment to serve a divine emperor and to persevere in the face of hardship based on faith in the kami. Among the other organizations sponsoring *misogi* training was Shūyōdan 修養団, founded in 1906 by Hasunuma Monzō 蓮沼門三 (1882–1980). This association had branches across the country, frequently organized within factories for the purpose of suppressing union organizing (FAISON 2007, 52–80).

prayers for the flourishing of the country (*Asahi shinbun*, 4 January 1937, 11). In December 1940, it was reported that the Imperial Fortunes Assistance Movement (Kōun Fuyokukai 皇運扶翼会), founded by Imaizumi Sadasuke, sponsored *misogi* training at Kugenuma 鵜沼 on the Shōnan coast in Kanagawa Prefecture for over forty Imperial Rule Assistance League leaders in the midst of a violent winter storm (*Asahi shinbun*, 9 December 1940, 3). There were numerous advertisements for books on *misogi*. In an attempt to promote *misogi*, popular authors Kikuchi Kan 菊池 寛 (1888–1948), Yokomitsu Riichi 横光利一 (1898–1947), and Yoshikawa Eiji 吉川英治 (1892–1962), author of *Miyamoto musashi* 宮本武蔵 (serialized 1935–1939), performed *misogi* at the Nihon Seishin Dōjō 日本精神道場 in Hakone, established by reformed yakuza Sakai Eizō 酒井栄蔵 (1872–1939) (*Yomiuri shinbun*, 26 October 1941, 1). All these newspaper articles referenced *misogi* in the form popularized by Kawazura Bonji.

In one of its first acts, the Shrine Institute (Jingiin 神祇院, established in 1940 as the successor to the Shrine Bureau) called upon all the imperial and national shrines to build “cultivation training halls” (*shūyō dōjō* 修養道場) for spiritual training, aiming for a total of two hundred facilities. As of January 1941, some seventy-six shrines had established these facilities, offering programs centered on *misogi* combined with lectures. *Misogi* training centers were also established by the Ministry of Welfare and a variety of patriotic associations (*Asahi shinbun*, 23 January 1941, 7).

By 1940, a variety of sites outside shrines for *misogi* training adopting Kawazura’s method had been established. In Kanagawa Prefecture alone, there were a *dōjō*-cum-shrine called Kugenuma Fushimi Inari Dōjō 鵜沼伏見稲荷道場 for *misogi* in the sea, a *dōjō* managed by the Ministry of Welfare at Tsudayama 津田山 near Kawasaki City for *misogi* in the Tama River, and the Nihon Seishin Dōjō mentioned above for *misogi* in a waterfall near Hakone Yumoto 箱根湯本. In addition, influential writers from the Shinto priesthood penned works theorizing the sequence of exercises that constituted Kawazura’s method (SAIDA 1941; IMAIZUMI 1942).

Spiritual training programs under government sponsorship began in earnest in October 1937 during the first administration (4 June 1937 to 5 January 1939) of Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro 近衛文麿 (1891–1945) as part of the Total National Spiritual Mobilization Movement (Kokumin Seishin Sōdōin Undō 国民精神総動員運動), a moral suasion campaign intended to strengthen support for a long war with China through spiritual training (*rensei* 練成, *kunren* 訓練). At the seventy-sixth session of the Imperial Diet in 1941, Konoe announced that the government was planning to spread *misogi* among the people (“Kannagara no daidō ken’yō ni kansuru shitsumon shuishi” 惟神の大道顕揚に関する質問主意書, Dai 76 kai Teikoku gikai, Shūgiin Honkaigi dai 23 gō, 25 March 1941).

Bogged down by the war in China, Konoe's second administration (22 July 1940 to 18 July 1941) proclaimed the New Order in Greater East Asia (Dai Tōa Shin Chitsujo 大東亜新秩序) and its domestic counterpart, the Imperial Rule Assistance League, a mass organization that putatively included all Japanese subjects and was dedicated to heightening support for the war and directing all possible resources to military needs. The Home Ministry used the league to extend its control into every area, organizing the people into neighborhood associations for mutual surveillance, with league officials in the lead to enforce compliance and root out dissent. The league's *misogi* training camps prevailed on trainees to renounce all attachment to liberal values in favor of devotion to the emperor and the nation. The league enumerated the goals of *misogi* training as follows:

1. Trainees should physically experience the Great Way of Kannagara.
2. Based on the essence of Yamato, the myriad countrymen should become as one and truly serve in their separate occupations.
3. Leaders should become pioneers, advancing with pride and elation as imperial subjects toward the heavenly task of achieving the New Order in East Asia (*Ontami warera*, 1–3).

The expression “Great Way of Kannagara” evoked the notion that in ancient times the people had been so harmoniously unified in spirit with the emperor and his governance that there had been no need to distinguish ritual from the affairs of state. The similarly indecipherable “essence of Yamato” also pointed to the trope of ancient Japan as a time when discord was nonexistent and all served the emperor reverently. The third goal called on trainees to become leaders in the sacred calling of realizing the New Order.

Testimonials from Misogi Trainees of the Imperial Rule Assistance League

A twelve-day training session sponsored by the Imperial Rule Assistance League was held from 24 May through 4 June 1941 for sixty-six trainees. Forty-seven of them were league members chosen to represent their home prefectures, with others drawn from branches in Karafuto and China, league officials, and a few educators. Eighteen were already office-holders in the league. Four were former army lieutenants, and three were shrine priests. The first five days were conducted at Kugenuma Fushimi Inari Dōjō, where trainees practiced *misogi* in Sagami Bay, facing Mt. Fuji.⁶ The remaining seven days of the session were held at Higashi Fushimi Inari Jinja 東伏見稲荷神社 in the western Tokyo suburbs, where trainees

6. Also referred to by trainees as the Kugenuma Dōjō, Kugenuma Inari Jinja, or Kugenuma Fushimi Inari Jinja, the *dōjō* had an abundant well believed to produce holy water (*shinsui* 神水). It was made a shrine in 1943.

continued daily *misogi* (possibly in the nearby Shakujii River) and heard numerous lectures.⁷

The program's on-site leader was Director Yasumi Saburō 八角三郎 (1880–1965), thirty-five years old at the time and head of the league's central training office from 1941 and a disciple of Imaizumi Sadasuke. Yasumi had five assistants, of whom the most notable were Kangyū Tsuneo 簡牛凡夫 (1894–1973, second in command, also an Imaizumi disciple), and Hata Bushirō 羽田武嗣郎 (1903–1979, a representative to the National Diet from Nagano Prefecture who promoted *misogi* in a variety of training programs, not only those of the Imperial Rule Assistance League). Yasumi, Kangyū, and Hata participated alongside the trainees. Beneath this top level of management were a training leader, his three assistants, and four general staff.

The sixty-six trainees were divided into five subgroups, each of which had a leader appointed by the organizers. Each trainee is listed by his name, prefecture, and role in the league. There are some participants listed for whom no testimonial is recorded, but without any explanation of the omissions. Except for the subgroup leaders, whose ages were not recorded, everyone's age is stated. The trainees ranged in age from twenty-four to sixty-three. Six were in their twenties. Those in their thirties predominated (twenty-eight trainees). Twenty were in their forties; two were in their fifties, and only one was over sixty.

Trainees arose at 4:30 a.m. for two hours of *misogi*, followed by a ninety-minute session of chanting and worship exercises, all before breakfast. Trainees all wore the white vestments of an ascetic in training and were allowed only two meals per day, each consisting of a few spoonfuls of rice gruel and a pickled plum. Reading newspapers, listening to the radio, smoking, and alcohol were prohibited. Each day at Kugenuma (except the last period) included two periods for lectures totaling five hours, four periods for worship exercises, and a second two-hour *misogi* session in the afternoon. During the second, seven-day period, trainees maintained the morning schedule of *misogi*, but with shorter worship exercises. In all, trainees experienced *misogi* fifteen times.

A collection of sixty-two testimonials was published as *We Imperial Subjects: Testimonials from the First Central Training Session (Ontami warera)*. Besides reporting on their personal experiences, trainees were invited to address the

7. Located in present-day Nishi Tokyo City between Mitaka and Kichijōji, this shrine had been established in 1929 as a branch of the Fushimi Inari Shrine in Kyoto, by a former priest of Fushimi Inari for the purpose of providing a *misogi* training center. The City of Tokyo Education Bureau Head, Minagawa Haruhirō 皆川晴弘 (1875–1958), instituted a *misogi* program with a large-scale lecture series at Higashi Fushimi Inari Jinja for the reeducation of teachers built on *misogi* that eventually included seventeen thousand educators, urging teachers to promote *misogi* more broadly, as a practice that everyone should participate in. Minagawa seems to be the one who made this shrine a center of *misogi* practice (OKAICHI 2017, 48).

program's strengths and weaknesses. Testimonials were generally two to three pages long in print.⁸

It will be useful to examine one testimonial in full in order to understand how the trainees related their belief that they were able to change their personal identity through *misogi*, and the ways that *misogi* training impelled them to identify themselves with the league's favored tropes of selfhood. The following testimonial was composed by Matsuki Seichi, manager of league operations in Tottori Prefecture, who was forty-eight years old in 1941.

Kami and Man United (*Shinjin gōitsu* 神人合一)

I am responsible for the prefectural branch of our organization, and I believe deeply that the national movement is meant to replace the people's concepts of value, so I was delighted to have the opportunity to participate in this training session as a way to find new directions for leading the people.

There were various things that made this training session stand out, but what especially separated it from foregoing programs in an epoch-making way was its strong emphasis on *misogi*. The fact that this would be my first experience of *misogi* in all my forty-odd years added zest to my excitement.

I devoted myself and encouraged myself in each step of *misogi* practice in order to attain the conviction that "the kami are always right here among us" and that "the kami exist right before my eyes." I wanted to attain a deep realization of the majesty of the kami existing here and now. I pushed myself to experience a deep feeling of the unity of kami and man. I was able to deepen my faith that "everything in the universe is a manifestation of kami. Every occurrence in the universe manifests the doings of kami." I apprehended the grace (*onchō* 恩寵) of the kami in a single grain of rice gruel or a single black sesame seed. I polished and polished myself. I dug deeper and deeper into myself to become a person who is always among the kami. I succeeded in deepening my faith that I can be united with the kami.

I came to a deeper faith that the Way of the Subject is nothing other than the way of returning everything back to the emperor (*tennō kiitsu* 天皇歸一), who is the manifestation (*kengen* 顯現) of Ame no minakanushi no kami and Amaterasu ōmikami.

As for the training leaders, they need to start over, and make themselves more Japanese in order to come up to scratch.

I can imagine how difficult it must have been for the organizers to secure the highest-level lecturers and our imperial country's leading scholars, for whom I felt a natural respect. It was extremely moving to have the benefit of the wisdom of such first-rate people as Mr. Yanagawa and Mr. Suzuki.⁹ Director Yasumi,

8. Each printed page could be as long as 433 characters. Six trainees refrained from recording their reactions in any detail, composing simple "thank you" letters. Each testimonial bore a title, but whether it was composed by the author or the editor is not clear.

9. It is not clear who these people were, but possibly Imperial Rule Assistance League leaders.

Mr. Kangyū, and Mr. Hata participated alongside us, waking, sleeping, and eating with us, and showing us the correct standard. It is worth mentioning that from beginning to end, they treated us with the warm heart of a parent. Their model leadership is etched upon my mind.

(*Ontami warera*, 72–74)

As Matsuki's testimony makes clear, he came to the session already convinced of the ideas he encountered there. Neither he nor other trainees sought a conversion experience, because they were already familiar with and committed to the league's positions. Instead, they generally had two kinds of aims for their participation: to gain practical knowledge that they could implement in fulfilling their league roles upon return to their home prefecture ("find new directions for leading the people" so as to "replace" their values; more on this below) and to have an impressive spiritual experience that would solidify their beliefs, give them inspiration, and spur them on to more intense activism in the league. Of the two kinds of goals, Matsuki most wanted to feel catalyzed by the "faith" that he can be "united with the kami," and he felt that he had achieved this goal. Along the way, he took a swipe at the lower-level leaders in charge of his training, who he found wanting in some unspecified way, but he ended with thanks to the organizers.

Several trainees wrote of having unusual spiritual experiences, often thanking Ame no minakanushi, who was evidently the kami most emphasized in the training. Representing Miyagi Prefecture, Ono Giichirō 小野儀一郎 (d.u.), wrote as follows:¹⁰

I give thanks to the kami for these twelve days beginning on 24 May, which have been the most meaningful of my life.... Practicing *misogi* caused me to think deeply. I devoted myself to thoughts of the kami, and as I did so, I honed and purified my body and mind. I immersed myself into the sea on the morning of the twenty-fifth, and when I gazed at Mt. Fuji as it came into view out of the morning mist, I had a deeply spiritual intuition (*reikan* 靈感) and entered a pure state of mind devoid of self. I felt so deeply the value of the *kokutai* 国体 and the honor to have been born a Japanese. These feelings pervaded my entire being, and I felt myself enveloped by the desire to make a vow. Now the nation has entered a time of great urgency.... We must enlarge the divine task (*tengyō kaikō* 天業恢弘), extending the imperial will of Japan to the eight corners of the world (*hakkō ichiu* 八紘一宇). We must save the people of Asia from their state of quasi-colonialism and cause the Great Imperial Brilliance to shine upon them.

(*Ontami warera*, 17–20)

10. The sources documenting these statements from trainees do not provide readings for their names, so the romanization provided here is based on the most common rendering of these names.

Ono was gratified to have entered “a pure state of mind devoid of self,” which he experienced as a spiritual intuition. He links this to a new sense of mission to expand the empire and save Asians from Western colonialism.

Kamiyama Noboru 上山 昇 (d.u.), a shrine priest from Yamaguchi Prefecture, wrote:

Our country now faces an emergency unprecedented since the time of its founding. I wish to express my gratitude from the bottom of my heart for the adoption of *misogi* as the fundamental method of national training, Japan’s pure and bright practice as a divine nation (*shinkoku* 神国). I give thanks for the joy and happiness of being born in the age of the Shōwa Restoration, in the Great Way of Kannagara, in a time when we may look forward to clarification of the *kokutai*, born in Japan that shines brilliantly, without depending on words, through Kannagara. I feel a great awakening and conviction that I am Japanese, and I feel acutely aware that I have a momentous mission to base all things upon the emperor’s mighty heart (*ōmigokoro* 大御心).

(*Ontami warera*, 81–83)

Both Ono and Kamiyama endorsed the league’s ideological shibboleths such as “enlarging the divine task” (fulfilling the ancient ideal of imperial governance established by the mythical Emperor Jimmu), “the divine nation” (*shinkoku*), expanding the empire throughout the world, clarification of “the national structure” (*kokutai* 国体), Kannagara, and a “Showa Restoration” to rid imperial governance of the Diet and politicians so that the imperial will might be transmitted to the people without mediation. Through *misogi* training they reached a searing realization that it is an honor to have been born Japanese, or that *misogi* had led them to feel “awakened as a Japanese.”

There is a strong assertion in many of the testimonials that *misogi* is necessary in order for Japanese men to become truly Japanese or to realize the honor, blessing, and glory of being a Japanese man. On this view, it is a mistake to believe that being a Japanese man is an accident of birth or a birthright. Instead, it is something that must be achieved through the privations and purgatorial suffering of *misogi*. Moreover, this blessing must be recompensed by devoted service to the nation through the Imperial Rule Assistance League. As Hata Bushirō wrote in another context,

Misogi infuses a Japanese man with peerless loyalty and sincerity, as if his body were on fire. Pure, without blemish, he meekly becomes able to understand correctly the essence of the national polity and the ideals of an enlightened nation, but without *misogi* these things will remain mere slogans to him. Prospective leaders of the Imperial Rule Assistance League must experience *misogi*.

(*Kōkokumin no rensai*, 1–5)

Trainees formulated their sense of success through *misogi* in various ways. Sakamoto Isao 坂本 功 (d.u.), a former army lieutenant from Aomori Prefecture, wrote that the session had drawn together the league's main ideas and made them fully intelligible:

I give thanks from the bottom of my heart to Ame no minakanushi no ōkami and Amaterasu ōkami for the blessing of leading me and lighting my path to my present state of mind.... The Imperial Rule Assistance League movement takes everything back to the emperor through the policy that it has established, of bodily experience of faith in Ame no minakanushi no kami. In this way, the worldview of a new Japan develops, so that the significance of “the whole world under one roof” and “the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere” (*dai tōa kyōeiken* 大東亜共栄圏) becomes crystal clear, and that is the truly immovable strength of the Imperial Rule Assistance League movement.

(*Ontami warera*, 8–9)

Testimonials frequently invoked the idea that “everything derives from the emperor” or “everything returns to the emperor,” implying that the emperor is a peerless being at the center of the visible world, and that all matters are to be judged and decided with reference to him. Kawase Susumu 河瀬 進 (d.u.) wrote that, “Leaders must solemnly, continually reflect on their conduct and powerfully lead the people ... to return the emperor to the center” (*Ontami warera*, 100). Since in reality the emperor's rightful place is at the center of the cosmos, the people must conduct themselves in a way that manifests that insight. Moreover, if everything derives from and must be returned to the emperor, that must include the body and the soul. Matsuki Tamaie 松木瑞家 (d.u.), a Shinto priest from Ehime Prefecture who served as a subgroup leader, wrote confidently, “I believe, and there can be no doubt, that the trainees have gained the strength to become pioneers for the New Order in East Asia, deeply believing that their bodies and souls are extensions of the emperor's jeweled body” (*tennō no ongyokutai* 天皇の御玉体) (*Ontami warera*, 127). The implication is that neither the body nor the soul is the property of the individual but ultimately belongs to the emperor.

The testimonials explained that *misogi* was an antidote to liberalism and individualism, a form of spiritual pollution to be thoroughly extirpated. As one trainee wrote, “we are all products of the heyday of liberalism” (*Ontami warera*, 48). Japanese men have been “soaked,” “steeped” (*hitasu* 浸す), and “baptized” (*senrei uketa* 洗礼受けた) in these loathsome attitudes, and no amount of explanation can root them out. Trainees were taught that the opposite of liberalism is selflessness and the absence of desire. Only the physical experience of *misogi* can awaken these qualities.

Nevertheless, trainees uniformly found *misogi* painful and exhausting, as one of the former soldiers wrote: “I had the honor of being drafted after the China

Incident and returned from service last year, so I had confidence and the actual experience on the battlefield of being able to endure any hardship or privation, but the first few days of *misogi* were quite an agony” (*Ontami warera*, 7). Apparently, the shock of entering the cold seawater while stripped to a loincloth and remaining there for an extended time was not so much the source of the agony as the worship exercises performed both in the water and on the shoreline for periods of two or even three hours. On land, the trainees practiced the standing rowing motion called *torifune* and long periods of *furutama*, as well as “manly war cries” of “Eei!, Iie!, Ho!,” all at the top of the lungs, recitations of the Meiji Charter Oath, the Imperial Rescript on Education, and other imperial rescripts. Many prayers and chants were recited, including the Great Purification Prayer and invocations such as the following:

We praise the names of Ame no minakanushi, Amaterasu ōkami, the Great Kami of the Place of Purification, all the divine emperors of each age, the protective great kami of this place, the protector gods of our homeplace, all our ancestral kami, and the myriad kami of heaven and earth. Amaterasu ōkami, great gods, great gods, the precious imperial reign shines brightly! [The final sentence was to be uttered three times] (*Rensei kyōten*, 17–18)

Trainees were motivated to endure these exhausting exercises in part because lecturers emphasized repeatedly that the war posed an existential threat to Japan, a “time of emergency” (*hijōji* 非常時). The Kugenuma *dōjō* had a sign reading, “We are warriors for the movement,” referring to the Imperial Rule Assistance League. Shinohara Sadakazu 篠原貞弼 (d.u.), a shrine priest trainee from Ehime Prefecture wrote:

We are warriors assisting the throne. With pride and joy as imperial subjects, we will grasp the Great Way of Kannagara, and we will train our hearts and bodies as pioneers assisting the throne. With each passing day, these principles of the training hall changed from abstract slogans to actual sensations that welled up in me. This change came about through [*misogi*]. (*Ontami warera*, 88)

The program’s diet, however, was seldom praised. Some trainees wrote that they were so painfully racked by gnawing hunger that it was impossible to think of anything else, and that the point of the training had been lost on them due to the overly severe regimen. Nevertheless, trainees mostly emerged praising *misogi* itself, pleased to have achieved experiences that seemed to them revelatory. Since those who spoke of their motivations for participating in the first place generally cited their hope of attaining some extraordinary spiritual insight, this must have been a source of satisfaction.

By contrast, the goal of learning practical techniques for leading others, which they could implement after returning home, was apparently not fulfilled. The need that trainees expressed arose from Japan's circumstances in 1941. The 1937 commencement of all-out war in China meant intensified conscriptions, with tens of thousands of new troops sent to the continent, a period of stringent material privation and maximum pressure for ideological conformity, which league leaders such as these trainees were expected to enforce. Japan's alliance with Germany and Italy in 1940 added new uncertainties. Trainee Satō Kazuo 佐藤萬男 (d.u.) voiced a common concern:

Prolonged war and the scarcity of goods have given rise to impoverished thought, stemming from the failure to realize oneself as Japanese. Continuing for four years, this war has provided much evidence to induce pessimism in the country, leading people to think that as Japan is pressed by its enemies, we may not be able to escape our present situation. Now we see a mood of depression among the people. I have been tormented by the fear that the people, and I myself, might not be able to endure such extreme anxiety.

(*Ontami warera*, 103)

Though Satō is careful to blame the people's alleged inability to "realize themselves as Japanese" rather than any government failure, protracted war and privation produced pessimism, depression, and anxiety on a mass scale. As a local-level leader in the league, Satō bore responsibility for raising morale and support for a seemingly endless conflict. As a group, trainees earnestly craved instruction on how to respond to the demoralization they saw around them. They expected that the session's lectures would teach them what to do.

We Imperial Subjects unfortunately does not provide the texts, summaries, or even titles of the twenty-seven lectures delivered. During the first period, trainees heard eight lectures, and during the second, nineteen. Imaizumi lectured three times. Five lecturers were army officers, of whom the highest-ranking was Honjō Shigeru 本庄 繁 (1876–1945), former commander of the Kwangtung Army, who "retired" from service due to his suspected role in the insurrection of 26 February 1936. At thirty minutes, his lecture was by far the shortest, while Imaizumi could hold forth for three hours at a stretch, and most lecturers spoke for at least two hours.

Trainees' critiques of the lectures are most uncomfortably reminiscent of negative course evaluations from disgruntled students. They were bitterly disappointed. Trainees lamented that the lectures were disconnected and impractical. There were too many lectures and not enough time in between to absorb what was said. One trainee wrote that the lecturers assumed a superior attitude and that some of the trainees also seemed to regard themselves as better than their fellow trainees. Damningly, some trainees wrote that the lecturers were of poor

quality and lacked the experience necessary to lead others, because they themselves had not experienced *misogi*. What was needed was not lessons on classical texts but practical explanations of *misogi* that could enable trainees to return to their homes and try to conduct *misogi* training for local people. Trainees should have been issued a textbook, especially concerning *misogi*. Several wrote that it would be better to omit lectures entirely and focus solely on *misogi*.

Some trainees also took aim at their peers. Katada Harukazu 片田温一 (d.u.) introduced himself as a “mere farmer” from Niigata Prefecture, someone lacking exalted titles with which to embellish a name card. Nevertheless, he prided himself on his many years experience as a leader of youth groups. By comparison with those young men, he wrote, his fellow trainees were sadly lacking. He felt downcast to learn that each participant had been chosen as his prefecture’s best representative, because to a man, they so conspicuously lacked vigor and determination. All of them, he opined, including himself, are the products of the age of liberalism and they have not yet rid themselves of those unfortunate attitudes. These trainees cannot compare with youth group members, who turn to any task with alacrity and easily meld themselves into a whole when united by a shared purpose. He pointed out that one can tell how well people adapt to group life by how neatly they keep their footgear in order, but sadly, the sandals of the Imperial Rule Assistance League trainees were always in lamentable disarray (*Ontami warera*, 47–50).

Reading these criticisms must have made the organizers cringe, but the trainees’ candor shows that they genuinely desired to learn about *misogi* and that they wanted to adopt it as a method for training the people in their home districts, if only they could receive useful instruction on how to go about it.

Misogi and Identity

Misogi programs heightened commitment, produced moving experiences, and led trainees to a changed sense of personal identity. Numerous trainees reported that they emerged with a strengthened sense of themselves as men and as imperial subjects who felt themselves drawn closer to the kami, powerfully motivated for league leadership in the regions. While some men experienced a sense of personal transformation, however, many were disappointed at the lack of practical information that could help them develop as effective local-level league leaders.

The testimonials presented above described trainees’ experiences as spiritual in nature. We can see how trainees sought to reconstitute themselves through the practice of *misogi* as persons embedded in a larger framework. That framework posited a cosmos controlled by the male deity Ame no minakanushi, with Amaterasu ōmikami included, but almost as an afterthought. In the visible realm was the unique and peerless Empire of Japan, headed by the emperor, described

as the incarnation of both Ame no minakanushi and Amaterasu ōmikami. It was expected that the empire would expand throughout the world, and that the Imperial Rule Assistance League would “assist the throne” as “warriors of the movement” or “extensions of the emperor’s jeweled body.”

The league presented its conceptual framework to trainees as a series of images and slogans such as “returning everything to the emperor,” “the Great Way of Kannagara,” “the New Order,” “expanding the divine task,” “the national structure,” “the emperor’s mighty heart,” “Japan as a divine nation,” “the whole world under a single roof,” “becoming united with the kami,” “the Showa Restoration,” “awakening as a Japanese man,” and others. There is even a discernible subtext in some testimonials revealing trainees’ struggles to understand all these expressions and their interrelations. Ideally the lectures might have clarified these issues, but trainees evidently listened in silence and were not encouraged to inquire of the lecturers how they might best disentangle this labyrinth of gassy verbiage.

We can formulate trainees’ process of identification as follows. As present or potential league leaders, trainees worked to bind themselves to the conceptual structure outlined above, seeking in *misogi* some extraordinary, energizing experience to refashion themselves through the league’s favored images and slogans. Trainees hoped that once they returned to their home bailiwicks, they would be able to replicate the kind of training they had received, now directed to local people, whose concepts of value they aimed to displace, substituting those inherent in the league’s conceptual framework. At this point, they were frustrated and thwarted, however, as the instruction required for that step was not forthcoming.

The framework of ideas and practices endorsed by league *misogi* training was overwhelmingly masculinist, starting with the male deity Ame no minakanushi. The testimonies and life in the *dōjō* seemed to exclude any reference to women or the feminine as a matter of principle. Imaizumi’s published writings on *misogi* reflect this masculinism. In *Ōharai kōgi*, he wrote that men are so bewitched by women, expending so much time and energy on them, that they cannot unify their own spirits; they are swallowed up by women. This view conveys the fear that men will disappear and be consumed if they allow women to gain influence over them. Deploying a familiar trope, Imaizumi cast women as the obstacles to men’s spiritual progress, with *misogi* as the antidote (IMAIZUMI 1942, lecture one, 7).

Misogi training programs were temporarily discontinued after war was declared on the United States and England. Between January and June 1942, a doctrinal argument arose among Shinto advocates, called the “Separate Heavenly Gods Dispute” (*betsu tenjin ronsō* 別天神論争), in which Hoshino Teruoki 星野輝興 (1882–1957) of the Imperial Household Ministry argued that Ame no minakanushi derived from a separate kami lineage opposed to Amaterasu ōmikami. Hoshino’s position was initially upheld through such draconian

measures as banning numerous publications, even those written by Imaizumi, who had followed Kawazura's lead in elevating Ame no minakanushi, even suggesting that the emperor, Ame no minakanushi, and Amaterasu ōmikami formed a "trinity" (*sanmi ittai* 三位一体; KAMISUGI 2016, 186). Imaizumi's supporters launched a counterattack, but though Hoshino eventually lost his position, the matter ended inconclusively and without recuperating Ame no minakanushi (SANO 1986; KAMISUGI 2016; OKAICHI 2017, 62–63).

League *misogi* training recommenced in 1943, but with Ame no minakanushi erased from texts issued to trainees. In other words, the deity whom trainees up through 1941 had been taught headed the pantheon along with Amaterasu ōmikami, and of whom the emperor was supposedly the living incarnation, was excised entirely (OKAICHI 2017). In this case, as in the Pantheon Dispute (*saijin ronsō* 祭神論争) of the early Meiji period, a nascent moral suasion campaign advanced with government sponsorship capsized when an issue of Shinto doctrine divided the partisans.¹¹ In 1942 as in the Meiji period, the issue arguably came down to the question of whether male deities would be allowed to contend for preeminence with Amaterasu ōmikami, whose superiority was taken as received wisdom in public discourse. In this case, the perceived need for a masculinist training program was insufficient to dislodge the sun goddess.

What must the earlier trainees, now bearing heavy responsibilities for "correct thought" among the populace, have thought when they learned that the doctrinal rug that they had struggled so diligently to assimilate in *misogi* training had been pulled out from under them? How would they have explained the change to those in their charge? Regrettably, we have no information on these points, but with the end of the war, Orikuchi Shinobu 折口信夫 (1887–1953) and other influential Shinto scholars came to regard the earlier Shinto *misogi* movement as a mistake and to see Kawazura as a minor figure of obscure origins and no overwhelming importance. It was not until the 1960s that the Association of Shinto Shrines renewed its interest in *misogi* and affirmed it again, in a training session at the Isuzu River at Ise (KAMISUGI 2016; OKAICHI 2017, 53, 62–64). While scholars of Japanese religions would ordinarily perhaps be inclined to adopt a favorable attitude toward self-cultivation programs aiming to shape identity, based on the phenomenon's long and varied history, the present example offers the refreshing insight that these regimens are not always an unqualified success.

11. The Pantheon Dispute concerned the location and ruling deity of the underworld; it briefly split the Shinto world into two camps, revealing the malign tendency of doctrinal disputes to create division.

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