

1 Foundations of Religion in Society in Manchuria

This chapter will briefly introduce the ways that religion was manifested in Manchuria up to the late nineteenth century. It does not aim to establish the existence of a “traditional” religion in Manchuria, but rather to outline some of the ways that the social, political, and geographic development of the region both shaped and was shaped by religion as it was lived and perceived. This influence can be seen at two levels. The first is the place of religion in political life. No less than elsewhere in East Asia, much of what we would in retrospect call religion in Manchuria was fundamentally the purview and responsibility of the state. Religion was a vehicle of patronage and performance, as well as the language of diplomacy. It gave elites in the region a creative medium through which to define their interests, and to express them in relation to the cultural worlds on their borders.

The second level of significance was as a source of community and value within society, particularly during the high tide of migration from north China. Although parts of the northeast have been closely tied to and settled by Han Chinese for millennia, the speed and scale of the mass migration of the late nineteenth century were without precedent. Religious life among these newly established communities in many ways resembled that of northern China, whence most new arrivals hailed. However, rituals and structures of local religion took on new significance as a source of security in a new and occasionally hostile land. For the growing Han population in Manchuria, no less than for the Manchus, Mongols, or Koreans, religion was a vital marker of community and identity.

Political Religion before the Qing Dynasty

As previously mentioned, the name Manchuria is itself contentious. This book will use it in reference to the early twentieth century, because it reflects the usage at the time, including the connotations of separation

from China. Looking back further, the political and cultural identity of the region defies easy characterization. For most of its history, Manchuria sat at the confluence of two worlds: the Sinic-influenced world of settled agriculture to the south, and the Tungic herding peoples of the steppe. Politically, the region was sometimes independent, and sometimes pulled into the orbit of neighboring kingdoms. Culturally, it was both cosmopolitan and distinct.

Geographically, Manchuria consists of a wide central valley, surrounded on three sides by forested mountains. On the western border, the forest eventually gives way to elevated grassland and desert. The southern lowlands, particularly the wide plain where the Liao River empties into the sea, were home to advanced agrarian communities as early as 4000–3000 BC, roughly the same time that proto-Sinic cultures were developing along the Yellow River Valley. The Neolithic Hongshan 紅山, and the bronze-working Xiajiadian 夏家店 cultures, both in western Liaoning, eventually blossomed into advanced civilizations that resembled and communicated with (and perhaps in some ways preceded) those of the Chinese heartland, yet remained distinct from them culturally and politically.¹

The region was repeatedly incorporated into Chinese polities. Near the end of the fourth century BC, much of what is now southern Liaoning was integrated into the state of Yan 燕, one of the many independent kingdoms of the Warring States Period (475–221 BC), and eventually made part of the first unified China under the Qin 秦 (221–206 BC). Over the next fifteen centuries, Chinese rulers would occasionally manage to establish a hold over southern and central Manchuria, but for much of the time the region was commanded by a series of independent or semi-independent kingdoms such as the Bohai/Balhae 渤海 (698–926), Liao 遼 (907–1101), and Jin 金 (1115–1234). A reasonable claim could be made that each of these states was a part of, or a satellite of China, although Bohai and perhaps the most famous of these ancient kingdoms, Koguryō 高句麗 (37 BC–698), are claimed energetically by scholars in Korea, as well.² Chosŏn 朝鮮 (1392–1897) Korea often served as an alternate center for the region's trade and diplomacy, particularly during times of Chinese political weakness.³

¹ Sarah Milledge Nelson, ed. *The Archeology of Northeast China: Beyond the Great Wall* (London and New York, Routledge, 1995).

² Andre Schmid, "Rediscovering Manchuria: Sin Ch'aeho and the Politics of Territorial History in Korea," *Journal of Asian Studies* 56, 1 (1997): 30.

³ Donald N. Clark, "Sino-Korean Tributary Relations under the Ming," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. VIII, *The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part II*, ed. Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 272–300.

The frequent exchange of political hands belies the region's ethnic complexity. Manchuria was home to a variety of peoples, various groupings of Mongols, Nurchen (later to be known as Manchu), and Qidan, among many others, who were culturally, ethnically, and linguistically more Siberian or Central Asian. The non-Chinese population took many forms. Some such as the Qidan 契丹 founders of Liao were nomadic horsemen, expert at mounted warfare and hunting. Others practiced settled agriculture. Most spoke languages that were linguistically unrelated to Chinese, and retained cultural elements such as shamanism that harkened back to Siberian roots. Even as they adopted political forms and institutions from China, medieval kingdoms such as Bohai and Liao retained cultural and political elements of their central Asian heritage.⁴ Yet we should be careful not to exaggerate in retrospect a simple divide between Sinic and non-Sinic populations. Populations mixed, and boundaries were easily crossed – courts dismissed as “barbarian” were culturally indebted to Chinese political systems, and many of the kingdoms that are remembered as Chinese dynasties, were in fact ruled by houses of mixed ancestry.⁵

Political religion in early Manchuria reflected this cosmopolitan character. Archeological evidence of Neolithic Manchurian cultures reveals an advanced ritual life that was in some ways unique, but also contained elements such as ancestor worship that resembled developments further south.⁶ The integration under Yan and later Qin of southern Manchuria into a Sinic political milieu introduced the world of classical Chinese moral philosophy and court ritual. A few centuries later, schools of Buddhism and Daoism arrived as part of the package of ecclesiastic diplomacy that linked Chinese rulers with potential allies on the Korean peninsula and in Japan. In 372, an ambassador from the court of the short-lived kingdom of Former Qin 前秦 (351–394) presented the Koguryō king Sosurim 小獸林 (d. 384) with a gift of Buddhist sutras and statues. The first monastery in the kingdom was completed three years later, and within twenty years, Buddhism was adopted as the state religion.⁷ In 644, King Pojang 寶藏 (r. 642–668), also of Koguryō, dispatched envoys

⁴ Wang Chengli, *Bohai jianshi* (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1984). Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, “Liao Archaeology: Tombs and Ideology along the Northern Frontier of China,” *Asian Perspectives* 37, 2 (1998): 224–244.

⁵ The frequent crossing of ethnic and political boundaries is the theme of Naomi Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty: Frontier Crossings in Liao China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

⁶ Sarah Milledge Nelson, “Introduction,” in Nelson, *Archeology of Northeast China*, 13; Guo Da-shun, “Hongshan and Related Cultures,” *ibid.*, esp. 37–47.

⁷ Oikawa Giemon, *Manshū tsūshi* (Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1935), 57. Buddhism reached Japan under similar circumstances during the sixth century, when the Korean kingdom of Paekche sent sutras and a statue of the Buddha to the Japanese emperor in hopes

to the Tang court asking them to send Daoist priests and copies of the *Daodejing* 道德經.⁸ The rulers of Koguryō and Liao lavished patronage on both Buddhism and Daoism at home, paying for lavish rituals, as well as for monastic wanderings, the printing of gilt sutras, the founding and upkeep of large, landed monasteries, and the creation of some of the most stunning Buddhist art and architecture of the medieval world. As with practice, the grandeur and uniqueness of sacred architecture of the period reveals not only the depth of religious commitment, but also the deep mixing of Chinese and non-Chinese cultures.⁹

At the same time, religious life in these courts remained in many ways distinct from that south of the wall. According to the *History of the Three Kingdoms* (*Samguk Sagi* 三國史記), the ritual regimen of the Buddhist Koguryō court also included sacrifices to nature spirits, to unique deities such as the Great Martial Spirit 大武神) as well as to the ancestral spirits of the ruling house (particularly the founder Ko Chumong 高朱蒙, known by the title Tongmyōng wang 東明王).¹⁰ The political structure of Bohai relied heavily on shamans, and the Qidan Liao and Nurchen Jin, although devout Buddhists, were equally reliant on court shamans, and devoted to their own pantheons of nature and animal spirits.¹¹ Official histories and excavated tombs paint a picture of a distinct ritual life among the Liao elite, including mourning and funerary practices that were sufficiently different from Chinese ritual life as to provoke comment (as well it seems as disgust) from Tang 唐 (618–907) observers.¹²

The regional political influence of the Tungic world peaked during the Mongol ascendancy of the twelfth through fourteenth centuries, and was followed by a period of Chinese reassertion under the Ming dynasty 明 (1368–1644). The Ming ruled directly over much of southern Liaoning, ushering in a period of renewed prosperity that was reflected in a burst of temple construction of new temples and monasteries. Many of these new temples were devoted to characteristically Confucian deities, such as Guandi 關帝, Shennong 神農 as well as to Confucius himself.¹³ Some of the Buddhist institutions grew quite large: an account

of sealing a political alliance. Daigan Matsunaga and Alicia Matsunaga, *Foundations of Japanese Buddhism*, vol. I (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books Intl., 1987), 9–17.

⁸ Oikawa, *Manshū*, 58. As the Tang ruling house were also patrons of Daoism, this act also carried obvious political significance.

⁹ Steinhardt, “Liao Archaeology,” 224–244.

¹⁰ Oikawa, *Manshū*, 57. It is worth speculating whether the title Tongmyōng is itself a reference to the Buddhist tradition of *Vidyārāja* (radiant king) deities.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 77–83, 120–122.

¹² Steinhardt, “Liao Archaeology,” 224–244.

¹³ Oikawa, *Manshū*, 286–296.

from 1407 records new year celebrations at a monastery near Liaoyang 遼陽 at which 30,000 monks were in attendance. While not quite as well known as the more famous holy mountains further south, the Qianshan 千山 range in Liaoning is dotted with Buddhist and Daoist monasteries, many of which date from this period. Tibetan Lamaist Buddhism, which had been introduced by the ruling Mongols, remained prominent in Manchuria even after its decline elsewhere during the Ming.

Political Religion under Qing Rule

Although the Chinese influence in Manchuria had risen largely with the political fortunes of dynasties south of the Great Wall, it was the conquest of China by the Manchu Qing, and in particular the peace and prosperity created during their rule, that initiated the greatest period of sustained Chinese influence over the region. Culturally speaking, the Manchu conquest of China was in many respects a two-way process. Even before it crossed into Chinese territory, the Manchu military had included large numbers of Han troops, and once they had ascended the throne, the new emperors were anxious to conform to Chinese political expectations, employing most of the political institutions and idioms of their Ming predecessors. Yet at the same time, the new rulers were equally determined to preserve their own heritage, making a concerted effort to retain Manchu language, martial spirit, and customs among a political and military elite that was quickly won to Chinese ways.

The ethnic complexity of Qing rule was reflected in the plural expression of political religion. To Han Chinese on both sides of the Great Wall, Qing rulers presented themselves first and foremost as Confucian monarchs. The devotion of early Qing emperors to Confucian learning is well known, and the expressions and institutions of Confucian governance were as visible in Manchuria as they were anywhere else. At the same time, the Qing also operated outside of the Chinese idiom, presenting an entirely different face to other subjects of their multiethnic empire. Like the region as a whole, political religion in Qing Manchuria was divided between these two worlds, one that looked towards China, and another that looked towards the traditions and peoples of the steppe. Nurhaci 努爾哈赤 (1558–1626), the great unifier of the Nurchen tribes, had adopted Lamaist Buddhism to cement his alliance with the Mongols, and subsequent Qing emperors spent extravagant sums to build and maintain large lamaseries throughout their Manchu homeland. In addition to what was by all accounts a sincere devotion, the Qing embrace of Gelukpa Buddhism (including their alliance with the Dalai Lama) also

presented distinct political advantages. Following the example of their Yuan 元 predecessors, Qing rulers presented themselves to Manchu and Mongol subjects in the idiom of divine rulership, as literal reincarnations of the bodhisattva Manjusri. They built large Tibetan-style temples (including a copy of Lhasa's Potala Palace) in their summer retreat of Chengde 承德 as expressions of piety that also served as unofficial embassies for Mongol and Tibetan emissaries.¹⁴ Finally, Qing emperors used tours and ritual performance to build a distinct mythos around the Manchu people and their homeland, celebrating the descent of Manchu people from a common ancestor, and their primordial tie to points on the landscape such as the imperial tombs at Mukden (Shenyang 瀋陽), and the Changbai 長白 mountains.¹⁵

Migration

However deeply the Qing elite felt about the territorial and cultural integrity of Manchuria, their conquests south of the Great Wall had also opened the door to a wave of Han migration. Initially this was by design: in 1653 the first Qing emperor encouraged loyal Han Chinese to open up new farmland at the agrarian frontier.¹⁶ This policy was first qualified in 1678, when new migrants were restricted from occupying lands that had been granted to the Qing banner armies, leaving only 5,270,000 mu, roughly one sixth of the total land, available for new cultivation, and forcing remaining migrants into tenancy under Manchu or Mongol princes. The greatest changes occurred after 1740, at which point all unregistered Han migrants in Liaodong were ordered to return home. An edict of six years later banned migrant traffic through the Shanhaiguan 山海關 pass (the main land route) completely.¹⁷

Despite these restrictions, the Han population continued to rise, owing both to the prosperity of the legal population and to the ease of illegal immigration by land or sea routes. New migrants consisted primarily of poor peasants from the increasingly overpopulated provinces of north

¹⁴ On the circumstances of Nurhaci's shift from Sakya to Gelukpa Buddhism, see Johan Elverskog, *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism and the State in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 101–104. On the personal devotion of Qing emperors, see Barend ter Haar, "Yongzheng and His Abbots," in *The People and the Dao: New Studies of Chinese Religions in Honour of Prof. Daniel L. Overmyer*, ed. Philip Clart and Paul Crowe (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2009), 435–477.

¹⁵ Elliott, "Limits of Tartary," 612–619; Shao, *Remote Homeland*, 27.

¹⁶ Oikawa, *Manshū*, 303.

¹⁷ These laws were followed soon thereafter with a series of restrictions on movement within the interior, such as the 1777 ban on migration to Jilin. Komine Kazuo, *Manshū: kigen shokumin haken* (Tokyo: Ochanomizusho, 1999), 71–74.

China, but also included a variety of people, such as merchants, smugglers, and bandits, each of whom was drawn to the unique opportunities to be found on the northeastern frontier. Even after the ban was enacted, the number of Han households in Fengtian 奉天 nearly doubled in the space of forty years, from 60,057 in 1741 to 115,194 in 1780.¹⁸

Over the nineteenth century, population pressure in north China pushed ever more illegal migrants to Manchuria, just as the dynasty was losing the ability to enforce its restrictions. From 1860s Penglai 蓬萊, a coastal city on the northern coast of Shandong that became a major seaport for departing migrants, Ida Pruitt described the forces that propelled young men to the Northeast: “from almost every family, a son went to Manchuria to seek his fortune, for trade was in their bones, and the rocks of their homeland were bare.”¹⁹ While no reliable census of population exists for the nineteenth century, one investigation conducted soon after the 1859 opening of Yingkou 營口 estimated that 11 million of the 12 million people in Manchuria were Han. In 1894, the Qing government finally recognized the futility of further trying to stem the immigrant tide (as well as the necessity of shoring up its own sovereign claims in the face of foreign intrusion), and lifted the ban.²⁰

The wave of Han migration tied Manchuria commercially and culturally to north China more closely than ever before. Han merchant houses facilitated an ever-increasing trade of manufactures and cloth from throughout China in exchange for Manchurian specialty products such as furs and ginseng, and later for grain and the product that would become synonymous with Manchuria – soybeans.²¹ Culturally, a variety of networks linked these new migrants to home communities in north China. Many of those who had left villages of Zhili and Shandong to migrate to Manchuria viewed themselves only as sojourners, with the intention of returning home once they had made their fortunes. Others sought to make a new home in the Northeast, bringing with them physical reminders of their native villages: such as a brick they would bury to represent the ancestral graves they had left behind. Like the Chinese who settled in Taiwan or Southeast Asia, migrants to Manchuria sought solace in a communal religious life, founding new shrines, which they inaugurated with temple incense ashes from their home villages.

¹⁸ Ibid., 71.

¹⁹ Cited in Thomas R. Gottschang and Diana Lary, *Swallows and Settlers: The Great Migration from North China to Manchuria* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2000), 41.

²⁰ *Manzhou di zhi*, 1894, cited in Komine, *Manshū*, 155–156. On the Han advance into Manchuria, see Komine, *Manshū*, 145–181. Adam McKeown, “Chinese Emigration in Global Context, 1850–1940,” *Journal of Global History* 5 (2010): 95–124.

²¹ On Manchurian products during the late Qing, see Komine, *Manshū*, 181–206.

Gazetteer accounts portray the religious life and customs among the Han in Manchuria as roughly the same as those of the North China Plain. In town and countryside, people kept largely the same calendar of ritual activities as was seen elsewhere: the “Clear and Bright” (*qingming* 清明) festival in the third month, the Mid-Autumn Festival in the eighth, and the long series of rituals in the weeks building up to the Spring Festival. In the villages, peasants visited temples on set days, as well as during periods of crisis, such as drought, when they assembled to pray for rain (*qiuyu* 求雨). For rich and poor, townsman and peasant alike, the most important familial observances involved the care of dead ancestors, with elaborate funerals followed by a regular calendar of rituals and sacrifices. Other household rituals, such as capping and marriage, were also roughly the same as those seen throughout China.²² Many accounts of local custom mention the presence of healers, who were known by a variety of names, and who were largely similar to those one might have encountered in the towns and villages of northern China.²³

Chinese religious life in Manchuria was shaped by the frontier character of much of the region. Prospering especially well along the front lines of Han migration were the networks of religious teachings and societies that offered both spiritual efficacy and (quite often) physical protection. These include a wide variety of voluntary, occupational, mutual aid, and criminal organizations, that were internally structured around a core of ritual life that was sometimes but by no means always secret. They also included the large variety of syncretic lay religious teachings that had been proliferating since the Song 宋 (960–1276). These teachings are often associated with violence, as in the many religious uprisings of the nineteenth century, when charismatic religious leaders used apocalyptic visions and predictions to raise a military force. Both types of organization flourished among other groups of men working far from home – coolies in Southeast Asia, silver miners in Yunnan, barge pullers on the Grand Canal – because they offered both community and security. In the same way, Manchurian migrants imported and developed strong internal

²² While the calendar and practices of local religion vary greatly across China, certain patterns are fairly universal. See Susan Naquin, “Funerals in North China: Uniformity and Variation,” in *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, ed. James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 37–68 and Thomas David DuBois, “Local Religion and Festivals,” in *Modern Chinese Religion: 1850–Present, Value Systems in Transformation*, ed. Vincent Goossaert, Jan Kiely, and John Lagerwey (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 371–400.

²³ The compilation of gazetteers by Ding Shiliang includes over eighty from throughout the Northeast, most of which repeat largely similar accounts of local belief and customs. The more lengthy accounts come from the wealthier Liaoning province, and of these, that of the 1934 *Fengtian tongzhi* is the most complete.

societies to protect themselves both from external predation and from chaos within their own ranks.²⁴

The spread of ritual and religious organizations to Manchuria underscores the strong tie to northern China. Migrants to the region brought with them many of the religious teachings that had prospered in their home villages. Others were carried to Manchuria by missionaries. One common tactic employed by new teachings was to recruit eight disciples, one for each of the Eight Trigrams (*ba gua* 八卦), and send each in a cardinal compass direction. The Heaven and Earth Teaching (*Tiandimen jiao* 天地門教), which originated in the plains of northern Shandong province, spread through such a method. Ma Kaishan 馬開山, the disciple of the *kan* 坎 trigram, was sent to the north, spreading the teaching along the way through Hebei, Tianjin, and, according to sectarian scriptures, eventually through Shanhaiguan and into Manchuria.²⁵ According to the *Complete Gazetteer of Fengtian*, the Primordial Chaos Sect (*Hunyuan men* 混元門), another teaching that originated in the same region of north China, attracted numerous followers in every county of Liaoning province.²⁶ Ironically, government suppression of these sects in north China may have also promoted their spread, since sectarian leaders were often banished to the borderlands between Manchuria and Mongolia.²⁷

One of the most widespread and influential sectarian teachings in Manchuria was the Teaching of the Abiding Principle (*Zaili jiao* 在理教). This teaching had originated in peninsular Shandong during the early years of the Qing dynasty, and was best known for its Confucian-inspired moral precepts, and characteristic proscription of alcohol and tobacco. During the mid 1700s, the teaching became established in Tianjin, where it would eventually come to flourish on a par with the city's many Buddhist temples, and from where it would spread throughout China.²⁸ From its base in northern China, migration networks carried the teaching towards Manchuria. In doing so, they were retracing much earlier routes

²⁴ The promise of physical protection (and opportunities for predatory violence) was a key feature of the Luo Teaching, which spread through the ranks of barge pullers and sailors of the Grand Canal. See Ma Xisha, "Evolution of the Luo Teaching and Formation of the Green Gang," in *Popular Religion and Shamanism*, ed. Ma Xisha and Meng Huiying (Leiden: Brill 2011), 167–206.

²⁵ DuBois, *Sacred Village*, 163. On the use of trigrams as an organizational structure, see Lu Yao, "Guanyu Baguajiao neibu de yige chuanshuo," *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 3 (1994): 202–221.

²⁶ *Fengtian tongzhi*, juan 99, cited in Yang Yulian *et al.*, *Qingdai Dongbei shi*. (Shenyang: Liaoning jiao yu chu ban she, 1991), 617; On the Primordial Chaos Sect in Hebei province, see DuBois, *Sacred Village*, 154–156.

²⁷ Richard Shek, "The Revolt of the Zaili, Jindan Sects in Rehe (Jehol), 1891," *Modern China* 6, 2 (1980): 161–196. 167.

²⁸ DuBois, *Sacred Village*, 106–126.

of communication: some of the first disciples had hailed from Zunhua 遵化, on the mountainous border between northern Zhili and southern Liaoning.²⁹ Just over three centuries later, a source from 1908 recorded a visit by the teacher Hongbin (鴻賓), from Penglai to Andong 安東, the same sea journey taken by tens of thousands of Shandong migrants.³⁰

The transformation of the Abiding Principle Teaching in Manchuria illustrates the effect that insecurities of life on the frontier could have on the nature and purpose of religion. Although suspicious government officials tended to lump all sectarian teachings together simply by virtue of their illegality, this tradition was as a whole internally quite diverse, and even the same teaching could vary significantly from place to place. While in places like Tianjin the Abiding Principle had striven to emulate the respectability of monastic Buddhism, on the unsettled and often-violent frontier it promised physical protection. In 1891, members of the teaching (along with those of the Golden Elixir Teaching, 金丹教 *jindan jiao*) staged an armed uprising in Rehe 熱河, a mountainous region that straddles what are now Hebei and Inner Mongolia provinces. This event provides a glimpse into the unique attraction that sectarian teachings held for vulnerable Han migrants. In his study of the uprising, Richard Shek outlined the various threats these new migrants faced: exploitation by Mongol landlords, usurious lending practices of Han merchants, ruinous litigation from well-connected Chinese Catholics (a phenomenon that this book will revisit), and the malfeasance of incompetent local officials. In these unsettled circumstances, routine confrontations could easily turn violent. As a result, while teachings such as the Abiding Principle may have entered Manchuria as “peaceful, innocuous, folk religious groups,” they quickly evolved into a much more militant form, incorporating elements such as anti-Qing millenarianism, the worship of martial deities, and Daoist-inspired martial mysticism. Once the teaching did take the plunge into open violence, it quickly adopted the standard hallmarks of sectarian rebellion: a pretender to the throne, recriminations for past wrongs (including the murder of large numbers of Mongols and Catholics), sword-wielding magical Daoists, invulnerability charms and rituals, and a religiously inspired ferocity among the rank and file soldiers that fought even Li Hongzhang’s best troops to a standstill. They became, in a word, exactly the type of religious militants that authorities always feared they would.³¹

²⁹ Zhao Dongshu, *Lijiao huibian* (Taipei: Zhonghua Lijiao Qingxin tang gongsuo, 1953), 227.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 231.

³¹ Shek, “Revolt of the Zaili,” 191. Cecily McCaffrey, “Sects, Ethnicity, and Violence: The Revolt in Rehe, 1891.” Paper presented at the Asian Studies Conference Japan, Sophia University, June 23–24, 2001.

Conclusion: Faith on the Frontier

The religious life of Manchuria reflects much of what characterizes the region as a whole. In both political and social manifestations, the religion of Manchuria was in some ways very typically Chinese. In other ways it was unique. Qing emperors were heirs to a much older tradition of political-religious eclecticism that previous kingdoms had used to build bridges with Chinese, Korean, Mongol, and other courts, and to enhance legitimacy among a diverse and mobile population. The social life of Manchurian religion was shaped both by this cosmopolitanism and by the unique pressures of life on the frontier. Perhaps more so than in the densely populated villages of the North China Plain, the ritual life of the Northeast emphasized the bonds of security and solidarity, often ones that were maintained over large and difficult spaces. The new wave of migrants and sojourners that came pouring into the region during the late nineteenth century extended the geography of these ties even further, linking lives, aspirations, and ritual remembrance to distant ancestral villages, and to communities of fellow believers who might otherwise have remained out of reach.