

Wilhelm Schmidt and his East Asian Legacy

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Abstract

The Vienna School of Ethnology has left a dubious legacy in the field of cultural anthropological studies. After the initial successes of its “culture circles” theory in the 1920s and 1930s, the view prevailed that it was permeated by Catholic theological and missionary doctrines that did not stand up to scientific scrutiny. In post-war anthropology, and especially in Viennese cultural anthropology, the school and the writings of its founder and spiritual rector, Father Wilhelm Schmidt (1868–1954), soon became a no-go area. As a result, the school's influence on neighbouring disciplines, such as Japanese prehistory and ethnogenesis, including prehistoric cultural relations between Japan and Korea, has been downplayed and neglected. This essay addresses these issues. After an outline of Schmidt's life and work, it examines his influence on East Asian students of ethnology and prehistory who, attracted by Schmidt's academic charisma, studied in Vienna and spread his theories in Japan and Korea.

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See below, note 33.

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Andre Gingrich, himself a long-time professor of social anthropology in Vienna, put it the following way: “Schmidt’s ideological rigidity and his organizational terror [...] created desperation among his followers and blind fury among his intelligent opponents.” Andre Gingrich, “Ruptures, Schools, and Nontraditions: Reassessing the History of Sociocultural Anthropology in Germany,” in *One Discipline, Four Ways: British, German, French, and American Anthropology*, ed. Fredrik Barth et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 110.

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Ishikawa Hideshi et al., eds., *Origins of Oka Masao’s Anthropological Scholarship* (Bonn: Bier’sche Verlagsanstalt, 2016), v. For recent outlines of Oka’s biography in English, see Josef Kreiner, “Oka Masao: The Man and His Footprints in Japanese Ethnology and Viennese Japanese Studies,” in Ishikawa et al., *Origins of Oka Masao’s Anthropological Scholarship*, 3–42; Brigitte Steger, “The Stranger and Others: The Life and Legacy of the Japanese Ethnologist Oka Masao,” *Vienna Journal of East Asian Studies* 11 (2019): 60–91.

4

On Slawik, see the contribution of Juljan Biontino to this volume.

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Oka Masao, *Kulturschichten in Alt-Japan*. 2 vols., ed. Josef Kreiner (Bonn: Bier’sche Verlagsanstalt, 2012; drafted in 1935); Josef Kreiner, ed., *Nihon minzokugaku no senzen to sengo. Oka Masao to Nihon minzokugaku no kusawake* (Tokyo: Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 2013); Ishikawa et al., *Origins of Oka Masao’s Anthropological Scholarship*.

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Katsumi Nakao, “Minzoku kenkyūjo no soshiki katsudō: Sensō-chū no Nihon minzokugaku,” *Minzokugaku kenkyū* 62, no. 1 (1997): 47–65; Kevin M. Doak, “Building National Identity through Ethnicity: Ethnology in Wartime Japan and After,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 27, no. 1 (2001): 1–29.

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First results of my research were published in Bernhard Scheid, “Bunkaken to bunkasō. Oka Masao to Wiruherumu Shumitto no minzokugaku ronsetsu,” in Kreiner, *Nihon minzokugaku no*

Wilhelm Schmidt and his East Asian Legacy

In the field of cultural anthropological studies, Wilhelm Schmidt (1868–1954) is known as the founder of the so-called Vienna School of Historical Ethnology (hereafter Vienna School). Before World War II, his academic reputation reached a peak that hardly any Austrian scholar in this field would ever achieve again. And yet, in 1956, only two years after Schmidt’s death, a number of Austrian cultural anthropologists including his immediate students “officially renounced” his theory of culture circles (*Kulturkreislehre*), which had become the hallmark of his school.¹ It soon became clear that Schmidt had substantiated his theories by falsifying research results, which made him persona non grata not only in Austria but also in most other Western countries.² Yet, the decline of his school began already in 1938, when Schmidt—a Catholic priest and explicit supporter of Austria’s pre-war regime, known as Austro-fascism—sought exile in Switzerland, escaping repression by Nazi Germany after its annexation of Austria. Thus, a combination of political and scholarly reasons led to the end of a theory that was in itself heavily shaped by political and religious interests, as we will see below.

In East Asia, however, some of Schmidt’s ideas experienced an interesting afterlife. A key figure in this respect is the Japanese scholar Oka Masao 岡正雄 (1898–1982), a student of Schmidt, who is sometimes dubbed the “founding father of Japanese ethnology.”³ Oka, who studied in Vienna from 1929 to 1935, was followed by other Asian intellectuals, including students from Japan-occupied Korea, who became acquainted with Schmidt’s theories in the fields of ethnology and prehistory. Moreover, Alexander Slawik (1900–1997), who later headed Japanese studies at the University of Vienna but devoted his dissertation to ancient Korea, studied ethnology together with Oka under the guidance of the Vienna School in the 1930s.⁴ Oka and Slawik developed explanations of Japanese and Korean prehistory owing to that influence. They handed over their ethno-historical approach to Asian students interested in the roots of their own cultures and to Western students of Japanese studies who maintained contacts with Japanese folklorists and ethnologists.

This afterlife of the Vienna School has recently become the subject of historical self-reflection both within Japanese social anthropology and in German-speaking Japanese studies, initiated by Josef Kreiner’s publication of Oka’s Vienna dissertation in 2012.⁵ In addition, there is a growing decolonization theoretical engagement with Oka’s wartime activities.⁶ The present essay owes its origin to this renewed interest.⁷ The impact of the Vienna School on Korea, on the other hand, has hardly been dealt with so far. While this topic is covered in much more detail in the other contributions to this volume, the present essay sheds light on the life and work of Wilhelm Schmidt, concluding with a short outline of the works of his Japanese and Korean students. When comparing Schmidt and his Asian disciples,

senzen to sengo (2013), 362–93. I then explored this topic in greater depth in “Das Erbe der Wiener Kulturkreislehre: Oka Masao als Schüler Wilhelm Schmidts,” *Minikomi* 83 (2014): 5–20; “Oka Masao und das schwierige Erbe der Wiener Kulturkreislehre,” in *Aso: Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft eines Wiener Forschungsprojekts zum ländlichen Japan*, ed. Ralph Lützel and Wolfram Manzenreiter, vol. 1 (Vienna: Abteilung für Japanologie des Instituts für Ostasienwissenschaften, Universität Wien, 2016), 61–87; and “Der Ethnologe als Geburtshelfer nationaler Identität: Oka Masao und seine Netzwerke 1935–1945,” in *Gingrich and Rohrbacher, Völkerkunde zur NS-Zeit aus Wien* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2021), 1:207–29.

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Wilhelm Schmidt, “Die sprachlichen Verhältnisse Ozeaniens (Melanesiens, Polynesiens, Mikronesiens und Indonesiens) in ihrer Bedeutung für die Ethnologie,” *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft* 29 (1899): 245–58; Helmut Lukas, “Taiwan: Ausgangspunkt der austronesischen Expansion. Entdeckung und Erforschung der austronesischen Sprachen,” in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft Taiwans. Die indigenen Völker*, ed. Sonja Peschek (Vienna, Frankfurt, and New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 153–204; Floris Solleveld, “Between Dogma and Data: Wilhelm Schmidt and the Afterlives of 19th-Century Ethnolinguistics,” *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 44, no. 2 (2022): 57–77.

9

The Oath Against Modernism was introduced by Pope Pius X in 1910. Preliminary stages can already be found in the *Syllabus Errorum* (“Index of Errors”) of Pius IX, 1864. In the Catholic Church, there was also the traditional Index of Prohibited Books (*Index librorum prohibitorum*), to which new works were constantly being added. Both the Index and the Oath were only abolished in 1965.

10

Letter from 1904 to the Görres Society, cited from Fritz Bornemann, *P. Wilhelm Schmidt S.V.D., 1868–1954* (Rome: Collegium Verbum Divini, 1982), 32.

11

Honouring the Catholic intellectual Joseph Görres (1776–1848), the society was founded in 1876 to support Catholic scholarship in Germany.

it becomes clear that they were not only separated by fundamentally different cultural and religious backgrounds, but also held opposing political ideologies. Nevertheless, they derived mutual benefit from their relationship.

Wilhelm Schmidt SVD, early life

Wilhelm Schmidt was born in a suburb of the German town Dortmund in 1868. His parents came from a Catholic working-class background. At a young age, Schmidt was given the opportunity for higher education by entering a missionary school of the newly founded Society of the Divine Word (Societas Verbi Divini, SVD in the following). Schmidt grew up in the age of the so-called *Kulturkampf*, the ideological power struggle between the young German state and Roman Catholicism, which entailed anti-Catholic measures such as the closing of monasteries on the one hand, and a radical ideological opposition to the modern constitutional state and enlightened science on the other. Being part of the Catholic opposition to the Bismarck regime, Schmidt spent his youth in Steyl, a Dutch town close to the German border, where the Germany-based SVD placed its headquarters for political reasons.

In 1892, Schmidt finished his education in Steyl with his ordination to the priesthood. After one year as a missionary teacher, he was allowed to study in Berlin, obviously driven by a personal interest in Hebrew, Aramaic, and other Oriental languages. In 1895, however, he had to obey the wishes of his order, becoming again an instructor of future missionaries in St. Gabriel, a branch monastery of the SVD in the vicinity of Vienna. While he seems to have conducted this task with great energy, he also tried to establish contacts with Vienna University to advance his linguistic studies. This led among other things to an essay on the “linguistic situation of Oceania” in 1899, which is still regarded as a “groundbreaking study” and has been given new relevance by recent archaeological finds.⁸

At the same time, Schmidt extended his interests into the field of ethnology and made it his aim to raise the reputation of the Catholic Church in this new academic discipline. He was aware that this could only be done by avoiding openly dogmatic statements, and yet he also supported the Oath Against Modernism and other Catholic means of ideological control.⁹ Schmidt’s epitomic enemy was the agnostic “materialism” embodied in various current trends such as socialism, liberalism, or Darwinism. This led to a project to combine missionary work and ethnological studies in an academic journal, for which Schmidt lobbied during his first decade in Austria. In his quest for financial means, he had to convince not only the superiors of his own order, but also other authorities involved in the Catholic mission such as the Jesuits. To this end, Schmidt conjured up the picture of a dramatic battle in the field of ethnology, in which the church should use missionaries as “auxiliary troops” to achieve a “dominating position.”¹⁰

In 1906, Schmidt realized his goal with the foundation of a journal called *Anthropos*, which was indeed a breakthrough in his academic career. *Anthropos* gave him access to all the missionary networks of the Catholic Church and provided him with generous financial support from various sources, such as the arch-Catholic Görres Society.¹¹ Moreover, *Anthropos* was met with lively interest

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Bornemann, *Wilhelm Schmidt*, 136; Udo Mischek, "Antisemitismus und Antijudaismus in den Werken und Arbeiten Pater Wilhelm Schmidts S.V.D. (1868–1954)," in *The Study of Religion Under the Impact of Fascism*, ed. Horst Junginger (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 474.

13

Otto Urban indicates a number of correspondences between Schmidt and Menghin, but also emphasizes differences as regards, for instance, the *Urheimat* of the Aryan "race." In this point, Menghin supported the "Northern hypothesis," which was probably motivated by his early enthusiasm for National Socialist ideologies. Otto H. Urban, "Ein Prähistoriker und Unterrichtsminister in der NS-Zeit: Oswald Menghin und die ‚Kulturkreislehre‘ von Pater Wilhelm Schmidt," in Gingrich and Rohrbacher, *Völkerkunde zur NS-Zeit aus Wien* (2021), 247.

14

A chair for physical anthropology and ethnography had existed at the University of Vienna since 1913. When the head of this department—Otto Reche (1879–1966), a supporter of racial hygiene and opponent of Schmidt—moved from Vienna to Leipzig in 1927, the department was divided into "physical anthropology" under the direction of Josef Weninger (1886–1959) and "ethnography" under the direction of Koppers. See Katja Geisenhainer, "‚Rassenkunde‘ und ‚Rassenhygiene‘ an der Philosophischen Fakultät in Wien 1923–1938," in Gingrich and Rohrbacher, *Völkerkunde zur NS-Zeit aus Wien* (2021), 85–128.

in academic circles, establishing Schmidt as a scholarly authority within both the church and academia. Lastly, the journal provided Schmidt with a certain amount of autonomy in his research. While he was still dependent on his superiors in organizational matters, he realized his original goal of turning missionaries into ethnographers. This is even more remarkable, as Schmidt himself never actually conducted research in the field. He thus established himself as the commander-in-chief of an ever-growing group of missionary ethnographers who were sent to places that corresponded more to Schmidt's theoretical interests than to places that required Christian edification. Consequently, their observations were often censored and only published if they met Schmidt's expectations.

Fig. 1: Wilhelm Schmidt, Fribourg, 1947

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Political engagements and academic politics

After the realization of the *Anthropos* project, Schmidt began to elaborate his theory of primeval monotheism, which will be explained in more detail below. Interestingly, his ambitions turned simultaneously to politics at this time. During the First World War in particular, he became a close advisor and confessor to the last Austrian Emperor Karl (1887–1922, r. 1916–1918) and was heavily involved in social and educational policy issues for the country's conservative, pro-emperor, and anti-Semitic forces. As his biographer and confrere Fritz Bornemann (1905–1993) openly admits, he "called for a Christian-Aryan social reform as a dam against Social Democracy and Judaism."¹² After Austria's defeat, however, Schmidt returned to more academic tasks. In 1921, he habilitated at the University of Vienna and was subsequently awarded the title of "associate professor," which was usually only possible with a doctorate in the relevant subject. Since Schmidt lacked a dissertation, some professors opposed his promotion, but he also had ardent supporters such as the prehistorian Oswald Menghin (1888–1973), who had adopted Schmidt's theories.¹³ Menghin also endorsed the professorship of Schmidt's confrere and primary student Wilhelm Koppers SVD (1886–1961), who received the first chair of ethnology in Vienna in 1929.¹⁴ It is certainly no

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Achille Ratti (1857–1939), pontificate 1922–1939.

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Bornemann, *Wilhelm Schmidt*, 182–98.

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Bornemann, *Wilhelm Schmidt*, 198.

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Schmidt challenged Freud's theories for the first time in a public lecture in 1929. Freud, on the other hand, expressed in personal letters that he regarded Schmidt as the person solely responsible for the repression that his school experienced in Catholic Italy and Austria. This could be falsified by Peter Rohrbacher; nevertheless, Schmidt certainly remained a most influential opponent of Freud's theories. See Peter Rohrbacher, "Pater Wilhelm Schmidt und Sigmund Freud: Gesellschaftliche Kontexte einer religionsethnologischen Kontroverse in der Zwischenkriegszeit," *Cultura & psyché. Journal of Cultural Psychology* 1 (2020): 53–68; Mischek, "Antisemitismus und Antijudaismus."

coincidence that the rector of Vienna University that year was also a clergyman, the theologian Theodor Innitzer (1875–1955), who held various political positions in addition to his academic job and later became Archbishop and Cardinal of Vienna. Naturally, he was also closely acquainted with Schmidt.

But Schmidt's Catholic networks reached even further. In 1923, he personally approached Pope Pius XI¹⁵ to obtain funding for a research institute at St. Gabriel associated with the *Anthropos* journal. While this was approved by the Vatican, Schmidt was also asked to set up a museum for "missiology and ethnology" within the Lateran (now Vatican Museum of Missionary Ethnology).¹⁶ Although this was a great honour for Schmidt, it kept him busy with organizational tasks and internal church intrigues in Rome, especially between 1925 and 1928. Eventually, however, he handed over the day-to-day business to a deputy and returned to Vienna, while still drawing a considerable salary as the museum's director. In retrospect, he regarded the Vatican Museum of Missionary Ethnology as one of his greatest achievements and always kept a photo above his bed showing the Pope on his first visit to the museum in 1929, of course accompanied by Schmidt.¹⁷

Fig. 2: Pope Pius XI. and Schmidt at the Lateran, Rome, Dec. 20. 1929.

Photo by Alberto Felici (c) Missionshaus St. Gabriel



In the early 1930s, Schmidt continued to support conservative, anti-democratic circles who eventually succeeded in establishing the *Ständestaat*, a form of dictatorship close to Italian fascism that ruled Austria from 1933 until the *Anschluss* to Nazi Germany in 1938. In contrast to National Socialism, the Catholic Church, starting with Innitzer, played a leading role in this Austro-fascist regime. As one of its leading intellectuals, Schmidt was referred to as the "*éminence grise*" of the *Ständestaat* by more progressive scholars such as Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). Schmidt indeed wrote a couple of polemics against Freud's psychoanalytical theories, which he equated with Bolshevism.¹⁸ Yet, Schmidt also

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Wilhelm Schmidt, *Rasse und Volk. Eine Untersuchung zur Bestimmung ihrer Grenzen und zur Erfassung ihrer Beziehungen* (München: Kösel & Pustet, 1927), 16; Mischek, "Antisemitismus und Antijudaismus," 479.

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Bornemann, *Wilhelm Schmidt*, 264.

21

A lecture in Seoul is mentioned in a personal CV by Schmidt. Joseph Henninger, "P. Wilhelm Schmidt (1868–1954)," *Anthropos* 51, nos. 1–2 (1956): 31.

22

Bornemann, *Wilhelm Schmidt*, 239.

23

According to Schmidt, "700 members of the aristocracy, military and finance" listened to his main talk on June 22, 1935 (Wilhelm Schmidt, "Eindrücke von einer Ostasienreise," *Schönere Zukunft* 29 (April 19, 1936): 759). The event was organized by the Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai (Society for International Cultural Relations), a newly founded society to promote Japanese culture headed by Prince Takamatsu (a brother of the Tennō), Konoe Fumimaro (later prime minister), Marquis Tokugawa Yorisada, and others.

criticized the emerging Nazi movement, not only in political terms but also within his field of scholarship, especially regarding theories of racial segregation. Despite his anti-Semitic stance, he held up the "monogenesis" of mankind as one of the pillars of his theories and thus regarded differences in "race" as of secondary importance. As Udo Mischek has shown, there was indeed a tension in Schmidt's writings between a Christian anti-Judaist position (which makes use of racist stereotypes without deeper reflection) and a rejection of racist cultural theories, as is expressed in Schmidt's saying: "The soul has no race."¹⁹ Schmidt also rejected the Northern hypothesis (*Nord-These*), according to which the superior Aryan race originated from Northern Europe. Instead, he increasingly emphasized Catholic dogmatics even in his academic writings and continued to establish strongholds of what he called *katholische Wissenschaften*, which included all fields of the humanities.

After establishing the Vatican Museum, Schmidt, who was already in his sixties, engaged even more actively in large-scale academic projects. Firstly, Schmidt supported the foundation of a Catholic university in Salzburg, which was to become, according to his plans, a political and intellectual training ground for the Catholic elite of the country. Schmidt's conception was modelled on Oxford and Cambridge but was probably also influenced by National Socialist elite training in the field of education. Schmidt hoped to become himself the head of such an institution, and indeed, in 1934, most relevant Catholic authorities in Austria regarded Schmidt as the right man for such a job, being "a personality who has an international reputation in the academic field and at the same time possesses particular agility and skill" in organizational matters.²⁰ However, a second project had even higher priority in the eyes of Schmidt and his order. This was the Catholic Fu Jen University in Beijing, founded by the Benedictine Order in 1925 but transferred into the custody of the SVD in 1933. In order to lend a helping hand to this project, Schmidt embarked on his first journey outside Europe in March 1935. Before arriving in China, he visited among other places the United States, Japan, and Korea,²¹ giving lectures and forging academic contacts, but most of the year he spent in Beijing setting up the curriculum of Fu Jen University. In doing so he strongly emphasized evangelization from above. This led to a clash with missionaries from his own order, who had failed to win over the Chinese intelligentsia and were therefore in the process of developing a grassroots mission strategy. Schmidt, however, completely overturned this programme, invoking powers that were supposedly given to him personally by the Pope, but which were ultimately invented by himself. As biographer Bornemann insinuates, the untimely cardiac death of Fu Jen's rector Joseph Murphy SVD (1895–1935) in summer 1935 was probably caused by Schmidt's interventions.²² All in all, Schmidt's efforts in China did not lead to any success, but rather led parts of the Church and above all members of his own order to oppose his autocratic approach. Schmidt's ambitions regarding Salzburg also suffered from his failure in Beijing, which led to lengthy inner-Catholic discussions and a delay of the project. Nevertheless, Schmidt might have been able to crown his career with the post of a university rector if the Nazis had not thwarted this plan.

Some smaller side projects of these years were nevertheless successful. In Japan, for instance, Schmidt presented his theories to a highly illustrious audience that included not only leading intellectuals but also the top echelons of politics and business.²³ This was made possible by Schmidt's Japanese student Oka Masao. Oka, who had studied under Koppers at the University of Vienna since 1929,

24Oka, *Kulturschichten in Alt-Japan*.**25**

Oka returned to Japan in April 1935; Schmidt arrived in Tokyo on May 3 (Kreiner, "Oka Masao: The Man and His Footprints," 19; Bornemann, *Wilhelm Schmidt*, 231). Kreiner also mentions other reasons for Oka's return, namely the 60th birthday celebration of his Japanese mentor, Yanagita Kunio, in September 1935, and, perhaps most importantly, the foundation of the Japanese Society for Ethnology, including the journal *Minzokugaku kenkyū*, in 1934, which promised new academic posts in the field of ethnology.

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Scheid, "Das Erbe der Wiener Kulturkreislehre," 11–13.

27

Wilhelm Schmidt, *Neue Wege zur Erforschung der ethnologischen Stellung Japans* (Tokyo: Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai, 1935), 42–43.

28

Menghin was a member of a secret anti-Semitic group of university professors called "bear cave," which alternated with the Catholic Church in filling leading academic positions. Thus, Menghin could become university rector in 1935/36 and even served as interim Minister of Education after Hitler's annexation of Austria in March 1938. In this capacity, he was also responsible for the exile of his former colleagues Schmidt and Koppers. After the war, he himself went into exile in Argentina to escape prosecution as a war criminal. Klaus Taschwer, "Geheimsache Bärenhöhle. Wie ein antisemitisches Professorenkartell der Universität Wien nach 1918 jüdische und linke Forscherinnen und Forscher vertrieb," in *Alma Mater Antisemitica. Akademisches Milieu, Juden und Antisemitismus an den Universitäten Europas zwischen 1918 und 1939*, ed. Regina Fritz, Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe, and Iana Starek (Vienna: new academic press, 2016), 221–42; Urban, "Oswald Menghin."

29

Innitzer actually hoped for a political arrangement between the Austrian church and Hitler and initiated a declaration of Austrian bishops in favour of National Socialism. This was going too far in the eyes of Pope Pius XI, who ordered Innitzer to come to Rome and renounce his pro-Hitler declaration. Bornemann, *Wilhelm Schmidt*, 281–82.

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1939 to 1942 as a lecturer, 1942 to 1948 as a professor of ethnology. Henninger, "Wilhelm Schmidt," 45.

31

Peter Rohrbacher, "Pater Wilhelm Schmidt im Schweizer Exil: Ausgewählte Interaktionen mit Wehrmachtsdeserteuren und

suddenly returned to Japan in early 1935, leaving unfinished his *opus magnum*, the enlarged version of his German dissertation, a manuscript of almost 1,500 pages.²⁴ This decision was obviously influenced by Schmidt's world tour.²⁵ Oka not only acted as a travel guide for Schmidt in Japan and its new colonies Korea and Manchuria; he also organized Schmidt's lectures in Tokyo and provided Japanese translations. The most spectacular of these talks dealt with "Japan's ethnological position" in Schmidt's model of culture circles and was based on Oka's research.²⁶ Thus, Schmidt also boosted Oka's academic reputation in Japan. Even more importantly, in his public lectures Schmidt came up with the idea of founding an institute for Japanese studies in Vienna, indirectly asking for Japanese funds.²⁷ This idea was finally realized with the support of Mitsui Takaharu 三井高陽 (1900–1983), a scion of the Mitsui industrial conglomerate, who also sponsored academic projects in other European countries including Nazi Germany. Although the project did not come to fruition before 1939, it was clear from the outset that Oka was the only candidate to head such an institute. Schmidt therefore obviously had an interest in keeping Oka at his side.

In contrast to colleagues such as Oswald Menghin, who supported National Socialism from an early date,²⁸ or disciples such as Oka and Slawik, Schmidt ended up as a political opponent of the Nazis. Only a few weeks after the *Anschluss* in March 1938, Schmidt accompanied Cardinal Innitzer to the Vatican, where the latter was reprimanded for his pro-Nazi stance.²⁹ While Innitzer returned to Austria and always maintained an ambivalent relationship with the Hitler regime, Schmidt sought exile in Switzerland, where he was able to rebuild his Anthropos Institute. Later, he even obtained a chair at the University of Fribourg.³⁰ As has only recently been discovered, Schmidt was also active in political resistance against the Nazis to an astonishing degree, with even old enemies from the socialist camp becoming allies.³¹

After the war, Schmidt remained in Switzerland but visited Austria frequently, engaging in Austrian academic policies while still hoping for the foundation of a Catholic university in Salzburg. Such tasks kept him active until his death, yet in terms of international recognition, he had clearly passed the peak of his career. In Vienna, it was Koppers who rebuilt Viennese ethnology together with a colleague from pre-war times, Robert von Heine-Geldern (1885–1968), specialist in South Asian anthropology and archaeology. The latter pursued research questions similar to Schmidt's, but had always been a critic of Schmidt's theories, mostly for methodological reasons, but probably also because of his Jewish origins. After the war, which Heine-Geldern spent in exile in America, there was a reconciliation between him and the Vienna School, which did not prevent Heine-Geldern from playing a leading role in the retraction of Schmidt's theories in 1956.³² Hesitatingly, even Koppers disavowed the *Kulturkreis* concept. However, this only happened after Schmidt's death in 1954.

Primeval monotheism

As has often been pointed out, Schmidt's theories of human development, while clad in the academic discourse of his time, followed the outline of the Bible and are sometimes referred to as "ethnological proof of the existence of god."

Nachrichtendiensten 1943–1945,” in Gingrich and Rohrbacher, *Völkerkunde zur NS-Zeit aus Wien* (2021), 3:1611–42.

32

A first stage of this rebuttal was the Fifth Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Philadelphia, Sept. 1–9, 1956. At this occasion, Heine-Geldern informed the audience that the *Kulturkreis* theory was obsolete and no longer had “a single partisan in Austria.” Robert Heine-Geldern, “Recent Developments in Ethnological Theory in Europe,” in *Selected Papers of the Fifth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences*, ed. Anthony Wallace (Philadelphia: Philadelphia UP, 1960), 40. Four years earlier, the Fourth Congress was held in Vienna, with Schmidt acting as its president.

33

Wilhelm Schmidt, *Die Stellung der Pygmäenvölker in der Entwicklungsgeschichte des Menschen* (Stuttgart: Strecker & Schröder, 1910); Wilhelm Schmidt, *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee*, 12 vols. (Münster: Aschendorff, 1912–1955).

34

Schmidt, *Neue Wege zur Erforschung der ethnologischen Stellung Japans*, 20.

35

UdG, vol. 6, translated to English in Ernest Brandewie, *When Giants Walked the Earth. The Life and Times of Wilhelm Schmidt SVD* (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1990), 136–37.

36

Brandewie, *When Giants Walked the Earth*, 31–32.

37

Schmidt got knowledge of Lang through a lecture on “The Belief in a Supreme Being among the Primitives” by Leopold von Schröder, an Indologist at Vienna University, in 1902. A first lecture by Schmidt on Lang dates to 1906 and was published in *Anthropos* in 1908 under the French title *L'origine de l'idée de dieu*; it became the starting point of Schmidt's *UdG*. Brandewie, *When Giants Walked the Earth*, 65–67; Henninger, “Wilhelm Schmidt,” 34.

38

See especially Andrew Lang, *The Making of Religion* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1898).

This was in other words a “creationist” model of human development, even if Schmidt hardly ever questioned the natural sciences. In accordance with Christian universalism, he believed in the monogenesis, monotheism, and monogamy of the oldest human ancestors and even maintained that human culture was inspired by a divine revelation that communicated basic moral values and a monotheist image of God to mankind. Schmidt's main scholarly ambition was to prove these assumptions by demonstrating that remnants of the so-called *Urkultur*, which had survived as “primitive societies” in remote areas, indeed practiced monotheism and monogamy. His *opus magnum* on the “origin of the idea of God” (*Ursprung der Gottesidee*, hereafter *UdG*), published in twelve volumes between 1912 and 1955, is devoted to this endeavour, but articles on the subject had already appeared in *Anthropos* since 1908 and in his first monograph on pygmy culture two years later.³³ Schmidt recognized remnants of primeval culture in many parts of the world and made great efforts to identify the “oldest” among them, which he claimed to find in pygmy groups in Central Africa and in Tierra del Fuego, the southern tip of South America. These were also the regions where three of his leading disciples, Wilhelm Koppers, Martin Gusinde (1886–1969), and Paul Schebesta (1878–1967), conducted their main field work.

Considering Schmidt's reputation outside the church, it is remarkable how plainly his reconstructions of the history of mankind reflected an orthodox Christian worldview. Especially in his later writings, he did not hesitate to turn God into a historical agent. Even in his Tokyo lecture on the “ethnological position of Japan” (1935), which contains a very convenient outline of the model of culture circles, he remarked in passing that monotheism and monogamy were given to early mankind by “a higher power as a gift in the cradle.”³⁴ In Vol. 6 of the *UdG* (1935), this idea of primitive monotheism as a divine present or revelation is laid out in much more detail:

[I]t must have been a personality of overwhelming and mighty dimensions [...] who bound the intelligence of the first men to himself [...] with noble and advanced moral commands [...], attractive beauty and benevolence. This personality could not have been merely the imaginings of these early men [...] It was] the actually existing Supreme Being, the true creator of heaven and earth, and especially of man. This is the one who appeared to this favorite creature, man, and revealed his own essence and works to him.³⁵

Schmidt's concept of an ideal society at the beginning of human history was of course not a completely novel idea. In terms of Catholic scholasticism, it followed the concept of natural law developed by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), which Schmidt had studied already in Steyl at an early age.³⁶ As Ernest Brandewie argues, Aquinas' scholastic rationalism, which regarded humans of all times and cultures as gifted with reason, became the philosophical framework within which Schmidt operated. But Schmidt was also influenced by non-ecclesial authors of his time. A most notable source of inspiration were the writings of Andrew Lang (1844–1912), a “writer turned ethnologist” who was initially a student and later a critic of Edward Tylor (1832–1917).³⁷ Like Schmidt in his later writings, Lang criticized Tylor's “materialist” approach, in particular in the field of religion and myth, and tried to falsify Tylor's evolutionary scheme from animism via polytheism to monotheism. Lang therefore searched out cases of “primitive monotheism” in the ethnographic literature.³⁸ While Lang held a minority position within the

39

Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (Breslau: Trewendt & Granier, 1917); Franz Winter, "Rudolf Ottos ‚Das Heilige‘: Religionswissenschaftliche Perspektiven," in *Zwischen Gott und Welt: Das Heilige*, ed. Paolo Argarate and Willibald Hopfgartner (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2024), 13–35.

40

Winter, "Rudolf Ottos ‚Das Heilige‘," 31.

41

Bernhard Scheid, "Ein Stück echten nordischen Geistes: Religion und Nationalismus im Werk Wilhelm Gunderts," *Bochumer Jahrbuch für Ostasienwissenschaften*, forthcoming.

42

Oka Masao, "Oka Masao-shi danwa," in *Shibusawa Keizō*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Shibusawa Keizō Denki Hensan Kankōkai, 1981), 670–71.

evolutionary currents of late nineteenth-century cultural anthropology, figures in neighbouring fields such as Max Müller (1823–1900), the father of comparative mythology, who was active in Oxford and acquainted with Lang, also held that Indo-European pantheons originally derived from worship of a single high god. These examples may suffice to show that primitive monotheism was not just an idea of Catholic apologetics, but was seen by a number of scholars around 1900 as an alternative to the evolutionist model of religion.

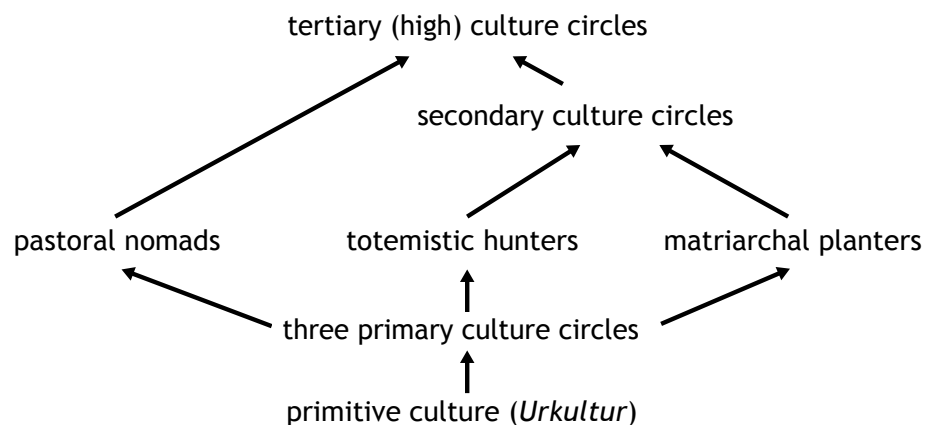
Since Schmidt's ethnological proof of God pushed the belief in a single higher being back to the origins of mankind, it opened the theoretical possibility of a dialogue between Christian and non-Christian religious traditions, which all originated in the common *Urkultur*. This inclusivist approach feels utterly outdated, however, when compared to similar developments within contemporary Protestant theology. Here, a figure of similar standing to Schmidt was Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), a theologian at the University of Marburg with a great interest in Asian philosophies and religions. Like Schmidt, Otto also searched for a common denominator in all human religions. This he found in the notion of the "sacred" or the "numinous," resulting in a religious "shivering" (*erschauern*) or a spontaneous awe, which he regarded as a common disposition of mankind.³⁹ In contrast to Schmidt, Otto regarded this common psychological ground of all religions as something beyond rational explanation and also as something morally indifferent. Thus, religious feelings can be directed towards both benevolent and aversive powers. Moral commandments or constructions of a higher being are products of later rationalizations. Consequently, Otto did not show much interest in Christian scholasticism but rather in early Christian mythicists and was also a pioneer in the reception of Japanese Zen Buddhism, fascinated by the irrationality of Zen *kōan* stories. While Otto was no cultural anthropologist himself, his theories have also been incorporated into this field, as exemplified by the work of Mircea Eliade (1907–1986).⁴⁰ His inclination towards mysticism was shared by many scholars who also embraced the upcoming ideologies of National Socialism, including the Japanologist and former Protestant missionary Wilhelm Gundert (1880–1971).⁴¹ For Protestant German nationalists such as Gundert, Otto's inclusivist concept of religion offered the opportunity to reconcile the ultimately "Semitic" roots of Christianity with "Aryan" fantasies of superiority. Schmidt's narrow dogmatic insistence on primitive monotheism, on the other hand, prevented him from such aberrations.

Coming back to Schmidt's influence in Asia, the question arises as to how Schmidt's Asian students came to terms with the Christian apologetic parts of his oeuvre and how Schmidt himself dealt with their non-Christian religious backgrounds. Starting with the latter question, we know of a testimony by Oka that Schmidt never touched that point in their personal communication, for which Oka was very grateful.⁴² Conversely, Oka neither approved nor denied Schmidt's hypothesis of primeval monotheism. According to his own historical reconstructions, the *Urkultur* left no trace in Japan. Monotheism, on the other hand, did have an influence on Japanese culture as part of religious beliefs introduced by pastoral nomads, to which we will return below. In this respect, Oka was certainly in line with Schmidt's model.

The model of culture circles

Schmidt's theory of culture circles comes into play when he tries to explain the transition from *Urkultur* to high culture, again by taking ethnic groups of his time as mirrors of ancient society. In this respect, Schmidt's model was not different from contemporary evolutionist theories. Schmidt denied, however, that human culture developed mechanistically according to similar patterns in different places. Cultural similarities were to be explained by cultural contacts or cultural "diffusion." Development from the common *Urkultur* did of course happen but was different at different places. Thus, he arrived at three "primary culture circles" which all developed their specific forms of economy, social structure, religious belief, and material culture. Separated geographically for thousands of years, these circles came into contact only at a comparatively late stage in the history of mankind, leading to more complex societies ("secondary culture circles") and ultimately to the early high cultures (sometimes referred to as "tertiary culture circles").

Fig. 3: Schmidt's model of culture circles



The weaknesses of Schmidt's line of argumentation are quite obvious from a present point of view. His culture circles depended on the assumption of no cultural contact and only minimal change within "primitive" societies. Such a concept was implicit in many ethnological theories of the nineteenth century, but was made explicit by the German geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904), who postulated the phenomena of "poverty of ideas" (*Ideenarmut*) and "cultural stasis" (*Kulturinvarianz*) among primitive peoples. These arguments were brought forward against the *Elementargedanken* of Adolf Bastian (1826–1905), a German evolutionist who maintained that all cultures developed the same elementary ideas without necessarily being in contact with one another. For Schmidt and other German ethnologists such as Fritz Graebner (1877–1934) and Bernhard Ankermann (1859–1943), Ratzel's axioms became the premise of a "culture-historical" or "diffusionist" model of prehistoric cultural development. At the same time—and in spite of his anti-evolutionist rhetoric—Schmidt's primary circles contained stereotypic assumptions from evolutionists such as Edward Tylor when he equated early agriculture with matrilineality ("the woman as inventor

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In this regard, it is quite telling that Graebner, who codified the culture historical method in 1911 and was routinely referenced by Schmidt, took Schmidt's first monograph on primeval monotheism as a negative example for speculative aberrations. See Reinhard Blumauer, "Wilhelm Schmidt und die Wiener Schule der Ethnologie," in Gingrich and Rohrbacher, *Völkerkunde zur NS-Zeit aus Wien* (2021), 1:41.

44

See in particular the ideas of Kita Sadakichi (1871–1931), which are discussed by Sekine in this issue.

45

Due to the fragmentary nature of this work, the actual strata are only represented in a two-page table. However, the strata are mentioned in almost identical terms and with reference to Oka in Schmidt's lecture on Japan, which was, as mentioned above, obviously written in cooperation with Oka. Oka, *Kulturschichten in Alt-Japan*, 1040–41; Schmidt, *Neue Wege zur Erforschung der ethnologischen Stellung Japans*, 37–38; Scheid, "Das Erbe der Wiener Kulturkreislehre," 14.

46

Nakamura Daisuke, "Oka Masao's Theories on the Japanese Ethnogenesis with Especial Reference to Migrations from the South," in Ishikawa et al., *Origins of Oka Masao's Anthropological Scholarship* (2016), 215–36. See also the contribution of Sekine to this volume.

47

Hans Dieter Ölschleger, "Oka Masao and Alexander Slawik: Mutual Influences between Japanese- and German-Speaking Ethnologies," in Ishikawa et al., *Origins of Oka Masao's Anthropological Scholarship* (2016), 110–11; Shōichirō Sunami, "Studies on Material Culture by Oka Masao: Methodology of Overcoming Differences in Academic Disciplines," in Ishikawa et al., *Origins of Oka Masao's Anthropological Scholarship*, 198–99. Ölschleger and Sunami both argue that Oka essentially continued Torii's research.

48

Josef Kreiner, "Einleitung," in *Kulturschichten in Alt-Japan* (Bonn: Bier'sche Verlagsanstalt, 2012), XXI.

49

Takemitsu Morikawa, *Japanizität aus dem Geist der europäischen Romantik. Der interkulturelle Vermittler Mori Ōgai und die Reorganisation des japanischen „Selbstbildes“ in der Weltgesellschaft um 1900* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013), 138. Morikawa adds that Yanagita did not question the *kokutai* 国体 ("national essence"), the ideology of an eternal dynastic rule by the emperor, but tried to establish the emperor and the common people as the two pillars of the *kokutai* (Morikawa, *Japanizität*, 140).

of agriculture") or associated totemism with hunting.⁴³ Schmidt's integration of evolutionist and diffusionist paradigms was probably a major reason why his theories were also attractive for scholars outside his Catholic environment. These included not only Oka Masao but among others Austro-American anthropologists such as Robert H. Lowie (1883–1957) and Clyde Kluckhohn (1905–1960). In the long run, however, Schmidt's speculative constructions provoked criticism from both evolutionists and diffusionists and ultimately from most modern anthropologists, who question the concept of cultural stasis.

The Asian afterlife of culture circles

Oka Masao

Oka Masao (1898–1982) came to Vienna in 1929, at the high point of the Vienna School, when a first chair for ethnological studies had been established at the University of Vienna. Formally a student of Koppers but also personally acquainted with Schmidt, Oka used the model of culture circles in his reconstruction of Japanese ethnic history. What he called "culture strata" (*Kulturschichten*, also translated as "culture layers") in accordance with Schmidt's terminology were remnants of different waves of immigration by different ethnic groups who mingled and made up the Japanese people at the time of its entrance into the light of history. Ideas of a multiethnic origin of the Japanese people were not entirely new in Japan, but Oka's reconstruction of prehistorical migrations was much more complex than any preceding theory.⁴⁴ In line with Schmidt's methodology, Oka tried to establish a temporal sequence of ethnic migrations to Japan. To identify ethnic groups, he used specified indices in the fields of material culture, social structure, mythology, religious beliefs, etc., which indicated the origination of a group from one of the primary circles. In the enlarged version of his Vienna dissertation, Oka arrived at six strata, starting with different "matrilineal agriculturalists" and "totemistic hunters" and ending with a last layer of "pastoral nomads" who managed to unify Japan under an aristocratic elite.⁴⁵ Oka also tried to determine from which neighbouring regions these culture strata originated, arriving at a mixture of peoples from the North (Siberia and Central Asia) and the South (South East Asia and Austronesia). Oka's model thus provided a synthesis of actual discussions among the newly emerging fields of ethnology and prehistory in Japan, which also dealt mainly with questions relating to Japan's ethnic origins.⁴⁶

Major Japanese figures who certainly had an influence on Oka include Torii Ryūzō 鳥居龍藏 (1870–1953), his first teacher of ancient history,⁴⁷ or his main Japanese mentor, Yanagita Kunio 柳田國男 (1875–1962), the founder of Japanese folklore studies, whom he quoted frequently in his dissertation.⁴⁸ Similar to Oka, Yanagita drew a distinction between elite culture and folk culture and even assumed that they had different ethnic roots. Folk culture was held by the common people (*jōmin* 常民), who became the focus of Yanagita's studies. In contrast to Oka, however, Yanagita treated the *jōmin* as a homogeneous group and as the bearers of Japanese cultural identity.⁴⁹ This identity was an a-historic, unchanging essence and was only threatened by the onslaught of modernity. As Morikawa Takemitsu argues, this was an essentially romantic imagination of cultural identity

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Morikawa regards Mori as a major source for the development of an ultimately romantic Japanese self-imagination rooted in German romanticism. He also points out Mori's personal contact with the young Yanagita, who for some time also wanted to become a writer. Morikawa, *Japanizität aus dem Geist der europäischen Romantik*, 133–36.

51

Shimizu Akitoshi, "Ijin, genzaigakuteki minzokugaku, soshite ruizoku shiteki keisei: Oka Masao to Nihon minzokugaku no tenkai," in Kreiner, *Nihon minzokugaku no senzen to sengo*, 100–02.

52

There are, in fact, contradicting remarks on that point: on the one hand, Oka maintains that "primitive Shintō" came into being in the fourth century BC (Oka, *Kulturschichten in Alt-Japan*, 485); on the other hand, he rejects the notion of "primitive Shintō" being a coherent religion (Oka, *Kulturschichten in Alt-Japan*, 288–89).

53

Oka, *Kulturschichten in Alt-Japan*, 485–87. In this context, Oka demonstrates his indebtedness to Schmidt when he remarks that "from the perspective of the culture circle theory," the oldest notions, *tama* and *mono*, were probably not different.

54

Oka, *Kulturschichten in Alt-Japan*, 486.

55

Oka himself wrote in his recollections that first doubts regarding the Vienna School had already occurred to him during his first fieldwork in Czechoslovakia and the Balkans in 1934 (Shimizu, "Oka Masao to Nihon minzokugaku no tenkai," 79). Yet, during this time he still worked on the publication of his dissertation in the tradition of the Vienna School.

56

Shimizu, "Oka Masao to Nihon minzokugaku no tenkai." On Oka's activities in Vienna between 1938 and 1940, see Scheid, "Der Ethnologe als Geburtshelfer."

57

These arguments were brought forward, for instance, in a famous speech in 1943. Here, Oka actually used the German word *akademisch* (academic) in a pejorative sense (Oka, "Gendai minzokugaku," 119).

58

Hirschberg, for instance, criticized that Schmidt did not take into account "the racially and ethnically determined mental characteristics" of primitive cultures. Oka's criticism may also reflect Hugo Bernatzik (1897–1953), an Austrian author of popular ethnographic reports and member of Hitler's NSDAP, who regarded

that may be traced back to Yanagita's early esteem for the German-trained writer Mori Ōgai 森鷗外 (1862–1922) or the American enthusiast of Japanese-ness Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904).⁵⁰ Oka's approach in the tradition of the Vienna school was a different one: he also started from the premise of a static, a-historic Japanese folk culture, but he treated it rather like a rock quarry, which contained layers of different ethnic identities that could be isolated in a quasi-geological way. Thus, his model anticipated incongruent elements and fissures within Japanese folk culture.⁵¹ The differences between Yanagita's and Oka's approaches become visible, for instance, in questions relating to Japanese religion: Yanagita was always in search of a primeval Japanese religion, *koyū shinkō* 固有信仰 (indigenous belief), which was conceptually similar to what other scholars called "ancient Shinto" (*koshintō* 古神道) and was shared by the entire population in pre-Buddhist times. Oka, on the other hand, doubted the existence of a homogeneous religious system in ancient Japan.⁵² Rather, he isolated various agencies within the unseen world (*kami*, *mono*, *tama*, and *marebito*) that in his eyes represented different ethnic religions and that he in turn assigned to different ethnic strata.⁵³ As is explained in David Weiss' contribution, the modern Shinto deities (*kami* 神) were remnants of a high god religion of pastoral nomads who represented Oka's last layer and included the ancestors of the imperial dynasty (the Tenson 天孫 tribe, in Oka's words).⁵⁴ This elite culture and its religious concepts were therefore different from the majority of ethnic strata in Japan. Oka's multi-layered concept of Japanese religion not only differed from Yanagita's, but also challenged the founding myths of the Tennō dynasty. In a climate of increasing Tennō-centred nationalism, Oka's model was therefore doomed to political suppression in Japan.

It is perhaps for such reasons that Oka did not continue his culture-historical approach when he returned to Japan in 1935.⁵⁵ Nor did he take it up when he went to Austria again in 1938, hoping to establish an Institute for Japanese Studies here. Due to the annexation of Austria to Nazi Germany, which forced Oka's former mentors, Schmidt and Koppers, into exile, this plan could only be realized in 1939. In the following years, Oka entered his "activist phase,"⁵⁶ turning towards a new, practical research approach and engaging in academic politics, which resulted in the foundation of an Ethnic Research Institute (Minzoku Kenkyūjo 民族研究所) under the direct supervision of the military. Now, he criticized the culture-historical theories propounded by the Vienna School as too "academic," and did not hesitate to offer ethnological support for the military administration of Japan's war-time colonies ("ethnology must become the cornerstone of ethnic policies")⁵⁷. It is quite probable that Austrian colleagues of his generation who remained in Vienna and supported National Socialism—including his friend and assistant Alexander Slawik or Walter Hirschberg (1904–1996), his former fellow student under Koppers—had influenced Oka's disavowal.⁵⁸ On the other hand, Oka's criticism did not refer to any specific details such as primordial monotheism or the concrete problems of Schmidt's methodology.⁵⁹

After the war, Oka returned to questions of Japan's ethnic prehistory, which were now of renewed social relevance. In a brief outline of his model of culture strata published in Japanese in 1958, he came up with five strata, which he located more consistently in time and space as compared to his dissertation. However, his basic assumptions remained the same: each stratum was the result of ethnic migration; within each stratum, clusters such as matrilineality in union with agriculture could be identified, or rather such clusters made it possible to identify specific strata; a last stratum, which Oka now associated with the advent of the

Schmidt's anthropology as a pseudo-historical theory with no relation to living people (Blumauer, "Wilhelm Schmidt," 52).

59

Moreover, Oka seems to have taken up historical questions even during his time at the Minzoku Kenkyūjo.

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Nakamura, "Oka Masao's Theories on the Japanese Ethnogenesis," 218–19.

61

Kreiner, "Einleitung," XVIII–XIX.

62

Scheid, "Oka Masao als Schüler Wilhelm Schmidts"; "Oka Masao und das schwierige Erbe der Wiener Kulturkreislehre."

63

Henninger, "Wilhelm Schmidt," 48. Needless to say, Numazawa took Schmidt's culture circles as his starting point. L. Walk, "Die Weltanfänge in der japanischen Mythologie by Franz Kiichi Numazawa and W. Schmidt" (Review), *Anthropos* 41–44, nos. 1–3 (1946–1949): 429–35.

64

Fritz Bornemann, *P. Martin Gusinde (1886–1969)* (Rome: Collegium Verbum Divini, 1971), 173, 176.

65

Martin Gusinde, "Gedenkfeier der japanischen Ethnologen und Anthropologen für P. Wilhelm Schmidt S. V. D.," *Anthropos* 50, no. 4–6 (1955): 935–37. I would like to thank Peter Rohrbacher for pointing out this report to me.

66

Bornemann, *Martin Gusinde*, 177. Four years later, Gusinde spent over a year as a guest professor at Nanzan.

67

Nanzan was founded in 1932 as a Catholic junior high school by Josef Reiners SVD (1874–1945), diocese prefect of Nagoya. The university was added in 1949.

tumuli (*kofun* 古墳) culture in the third century CE, reached Japan via Korea, originating from patrilineal nomads in Central Asia.⁶⁰ Oka presented this scheme without the abundant ethnographic material contained in his German dissertation, and invested no further efforts to deepen or defend it. Nevertheless, it became the starting point of many debates and modifications among his colleagues and students (see below).

In his personal recollections, Oka praised Schmidt together with Yanagita as his most important teacher but denied a direct impact of Schmidt's theories on his work. Instead, he referred to Heine-Geldern as the model of his culture-historical approach.⁶¹ As I have argued in more detail elsewhere, this cannot be substantiated by a close reading of Oka's Vienna dissertation and must be related to the "retraction" of the model of culture circles in Austria after Schmidt's death by Heine-Geldern and others.⁶² Shortly before that time, however, Schmidt was still celebrated as an academic hero in Japanese ethnological circles. The following episode, which to my knowledge has not been mentioned in recent contributions to the Oka-Schmidt debate, may serve to underscore Schmidt's impact.

In 1955, one year after Schmidt's death but before the official rebuttal of the Vienna school, Fr. Martin Gusinde, one of Schmidt's major disciples, was invited to Japan to join a couple of events in commemoration of Father Schmidt, including a seminar at Tokyo University. But the main purpose of Gusinde's journey was a celebration of Schmidt at the Congress of the Japanese Anthropological and Ethnological Society, which was held in October 1955 at Nanzan University in Nagoya. Nanzan was founded by the SVD in 1949 and included among its professors Numazawa Kiichi 沼沢喜市 (aka Franz Numazawa, 1907–1980), a Japanese confrere and student of Schmidt who had assisted the latter during his exile in Switzerland and wrote his PhD on Japanese mythology under Schmidt in 1942.⁶³ The organization of the congress, including the invitation of Gusinde and the commemoration of Schmidt, was coordinated by Alois Pache SVD (1903–1969), rector of Nanzan. In addition, Oka Masao (then professor at the Tokyo Metropolitan University) acted as Gusinde's travel guide to the Ainu in Hokkaidō.⁶⁴

In his personal recollections, Gusinde found it most remarkable that some 240 Japanese scholars, mostly non-Catholics, not only joined the Nanzan congress but also took part in a Catholic memorial mass for Schmidt on Oct. 17, 1955, which Gusinde himself conducted. The final laudation was held by Oka, who recalled his personal experiences ranging from 1929 to 1952 "with his highly esteemed teacher and model, Wilhelm Schmidt." In conclusion, Gusinde remarked that in all the events during his stay, "the fresh, reverent memory of Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt, as it lives on in the ethnological and anthropological circles of Japan, arose spontaneously and quite often."⁶⁵ Fr. Pache, the chief organizer of the event, also regarded Gusinde's visit as a huge success "for the Catholic presence within the science of anthropology and ethnology, and in particular for Schmidt's school."⁶⁶

From this event it becomes clear that two factors contributed to Schmidt's popularity in post-war Japan. Firstly, Nanzan University, which had been founded by confreres of Schmidt, could not resist using his academic reputation, even if he himself had hardly contributed to the university's establishment.⁶⁷ Secondly, we still recognize a great personal commitment on the part of Oka Masao, who not only commemorated his teacher Schmidt but also returned the favour to the Vienna School by arranging Martin Gusinde's travels in Japan.

68

Details on Ishida's biography are mainly taken from Shimizu, "Oka Masao to Nihon minzokugaku no tenkai."

69

Ishida Eiichirō, *Ningen o motomete* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1968), cited from Shimizu, "Oka Masao to Nihon minzokugaku no tenkai," 87.

70

Shimizu, "Oka Masao to Nihon minzokugaku no tenkai," 89–91.

71

Shimizu Akitoshi argues that Oka is hardly known among present Japanese students of social anthropology due to a lack of publications. Nevertheless, he was a key player in pre- and post-war anthropology due to his organizational and pedagogical skills. Shimizu, "Oka Masao to Nihon minzokugaku no tenkai," 67–68.

72

According to Chun Kyung-soo, Oka lectured together with Egami Namio on nomadic horse riders in 1944. Therefore, Chun traces back Egami's theories to his cooperation with Oka during the war, indicating that Oka never really abandoned his interests in Japanese ethnic history. Chun Kyung-soo, "Why Did GHQ Bring Oka's Dissertation from Vienna to Tokyo?" in Ishikawa et al., *Origins of Oka Masao's Anthropological Scholarship* (2016), 152–60; see also Kreiner, "Einleitung," XXVIII–XXIX.

73

Andreas Schirmer, "Korean Students in Europe Related to Oka Masao: Direct and Indirect Connections," in Ishikawa et al., *Origins of Oka Masao's Anthropological Scholarship* (2016), 169.

74

Schirmer, "Korean Students in Europe," 172.

75

The Japanese edition of 1943 only mentions Oka as the translator, but Oka remarks in the foreword that he would not have managed to publish the translation without the support of "To-kun' [who had] studied in Vienna under the close supervision of Menghin." (Steger, "Oka Masao," 70.)

Ishida Eiichirō

Ishida Eiichirō 石田 英一郎 (1903–1968) shared many biographical features with Oka, even if the two seem to have been quite different personalities.⁶⁸ Ishida came from a noble family and was at the same time inspired by the Russian Revolution, read Marxist literature, and engaged in leftist movements. Due to this political engagement, Ishida was arrested during the March 15 Incident (a mass arrest of communists and their sympathizers in 1928) and confined to prison for five years. After meeting Oka in 1936, he decided to follow in his footsteps and study under the Vienna School. For a short time, both stayed in Vienna. Oka returned to Japan in 1940 to set up the aforementioned Ethnic Research Institute in cooperation with the Japanese military, where he and many of his fellow students of ethnology found jobs as colonial administrators. Ishida joined a similar facility in Manchuria but in a less prominent position. After the war, both scholars cooperated in re-establishing Japanese ethnological studies. But while Oka had been able to help Ishida before the war, Ishida now helped Oka clear his name from the stigma of being a war criminal.⁶⁹ As the chief editor of the leading Japanese journal in the field, *Minzokugaku kenkyū*, Ishida headed a movement within Japanese ethnology that stressed culture-historical questions, as these were not associated with war crimes. It was probably also due to Ishida that Oka resumed the topics of his Vienna dissertation in the first decade after the war.⁷⁰ In the following years, Ishida turned out to be a more prolific writer and was eventually offered a professorship at the University of Tokyo. Oka, on the other hand, was more active in international networking and inspired a higher number of students.⁷¹ The most famous member of Oka and Ishida's study group, however, was Egami Namio (1906–2002), a historian who elaborated Oka's idea of a late stratum of nomad conquerors into the so-called "horse rider theory" (*kiba minzoku setsu* 騎馬民族説).⁷² Since Sekine's contribution to this volume deals with this subject in great detail, let me just remark at this point that such speculations would probably not have been possible without the "primary culture circle of pastoral nomads" as developed by Schmidt.

Korean prehistory

To Yu-ho (1905–?) was a leftist intellectual from a wealthy Korean family who spent some time studying in Germany. After Hitler's seizure of power in 1933, he sought refuge in Vienna.⁷³ Nevertheless, he remained in Vienna even after the Nazis took over in 1938 and returned to Korea in 1940 for economic reasons. Being a devout communist, he decided for North Korea after the war and became a leading scholar of ancient history.⁷⁴

To's academic interests in Vienna were directed toward the history of his country, Korea, on which topic he earned a dissertation in 1935. Naturally, he was well acquainted with Oka and Slawik, but his Austrian mentor was the prehistorian Oswald Menghin, who can be also regarded as a member of Schmidt's Vienna School (see above). The most notable consequence of this fact is that in 1942, in cooperation with Oka Masao, To translated Menghin's *opus magnum*, *Weltgeschichte der Steinzeit* (World History of the Stone Age, 1922), into Japanese.⁷⁵ The reasons for and the details of this cooperation are unknown to me, but To's case is a further example indicating that ideological differences were not

76

Schirmer, "Korean Students in Europe Related to Oka Masao," 182.

77

Barbara Plankensteiner, "Das Museum für Völkerkunde in Wien 1938–1945: Ein Bollwerk nationalsozialistischer Weltanschauung?" In Gingrich and Rohrbacher, *Völkerkunde zur NS-Zeit aus Wien* (2021), 570. On Schmidt's students in Fribourg, see Henninger, "Wilhelm Schmidt," 47–48.

78

Schirmer, "Korean Students in Europe Related to Oka Masao," 179.

necessarily a reason to reject Schmidt's and Menghin's theories, at least from an East Asian position.

Han Hung-su (1909–?), a Korean with similar interests and a similar ideological background to To, came to Vienna in 1936. After Austria's annexation in 1938 he went to Switzerland, where he earned a doctoral dissertation on the "megalith culture in Korean prehistory" from the University of Fribourg in 1940.⁷⁶ Even if Han was not an official doctoral student of Schmidt, it is quite obvious that he followed Schmidt into exile.⁷⁷ From 1941 to 1947, Han was employed at the Museum of Ethnology in Vienna and thus spent much of the war in Austria. He even earned a habilitation from Vienna University in 1947. During the war, he spent half of his time in Prague, where he worked as a teacher of Japanese and Korean. As with To, Han later also opted for communist North Korea and earned some academic fame there. Despite their many common aims and interests, To and Han ended up as rivals rather than friends. According to Andreas Schirmer, both scholars disappeared due to a purge in the later course of events.⁷⁸

Conclusion

In this article I have outlined the life and work of Wilhelm Schmidt in some detail to provide a background for evaluating his influence on his Asian students. This influence is certainly most obvious in the work of Oka Masao, who wrote a dissertation under the Vienna School in German. Here Oka combined material relating to Japanese prehistory, folklore studies, and archaeology with concepts taken from Schmidt's theoretical framework in order to explain the culture-historical background of the Japanese people. Oka seems to have ignored the obvious Christian agenda of Schmidt's theories, and yet a Christian influence on Oka's conceptions of Japanese monotheism may well be detected. Despite his originally leftist worldview, Oka was obviously not appalled by Schmidt's clerical conservatism and anti-Semitism. Considering that Oka also cooperated with the Japanese military, his opportunistic stance is not too much of a surprise. What is rather striking is the fact that the same ambiguity can also be found among other Asian students in Schmidt's academic circle. Ishida, To, and Han certainly adhered more consistently to their early socialist convictions than Oka, and yet they became attracted to Schmidt's teachings as well. One reason for this may be found in the fact that all Asian students of ethnology or prehistory started from a focus on the history of their own cultures. Their interests, therefore, were divided from the beginning between universal socialism and local historicism (which always included some nationalist potential). Schmidt's model also starts from universalist premises (all humans share the same origin and the same *Urkultur*), but already his "primary culture circles" imply clear value judgements (only one of these, the pastoral nomads, held up primeval monotheism) and emphasize differences between cultures rather than common features. In order to determine the specific characteristics of a culture, the Vienna School analysed the mixing ratio of primary-culture-circle elements in this culture in the form of "strata." These strata allowed the integration of local variations within a universalistic theory. Asian intellectuals like Oka, Ishida, To, and Han accepted the Western paradigm that a sound scientific theory had more authority than a traditional national mythology.

In this point, they differed from hardcore nationalists in their own countries. But they were still hoping to reveal a justification for cultural superiority or at least for cultural uniqueness/identity by their historical research. In this respect, evolutionist schemes like the “Asian mode of production” propounded by Marx and Engels had probably less to offer than the particularistic, diffusionist model of culture circles by the Vienna School.

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