

UNIVERSITY AS A SPACE TO EXPERIMENT WITH IDEOLOGIES: KENKOKU UNIVERSITY IN JAPANESE-OCCUPIED MANCHURIA, 1938-45

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Can and should Pan-Asianism coexist with nationalisms? This was a question that grappled the minds of Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Mongolian, and Russian students enrolled at Kenkoku University in Japanese occupied Manchuria. Proclaiming to realize the goal of minzoku kyōwa (“ethnic harmony”), Kenkoku University (1938-45) recruited male students of Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese, Mongolian, and Russian backgrounds and aimed to foster a generation of leaders for the state of Manchukuo. Although idealistic aspects of this unique institution came under pressure as the Japanese military intensified mobilization for war and intervention in higher education, the students continued to hold heart-to-heart dialogue in dorm-room meetings, at bars near campus, and through student-run periodicals. This presentation will first introduce Kenkoku University as a unique educational institution whose purpose was to experiment with Japan’s imperial ideology of Pan-Asianism and how it attracted and created a space for Japanese and non-Japanese scholars and students. Then, to show a compelling example of a transnational dialogue that took place at this University, the presentation will analyze excerpts from the University’s student-run periodicals to reconstruct students’ lively interchanges of ideas about Pan-Asianism. In the harsh criticisms of Japan’s policy and heated debates about the meaning of the ongoing war, Kenkoku University’s educational mission, and ideal form of “ethnic harmony,” one finds students’ sincere efforts to grapple with the question of whether their sense of nationalism and Pan-Asianism could coexist. Extending the effort made in recent scholarship on Pan-Asianism, this presentation challenges a simplistic interpretation of Japan’s wartime discourse of Pan-Asianism and demonstrates that the all-encompassing nature of the philosophy continued to engage the minds of young people from different corners of the Japanese Empire amidst the intensifying war and colonial domination. This presentation is based on my recent publication, *Kenkoku University and the Experience of Pan-Asianism*.

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