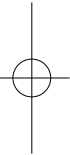




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Palm Healing and the Japanese Right: *Tanasue no Michi* and the Body of the Imperial Japanese Subject

This paper will examine nationalist conceptions of body and healing in the early Showa era, focusing primarily on a branch of Reiki known as *tanasukue no michi* (“the way of fingertips”) and *tenohira ryōji* (“palm healing”). *Tenohira ryōji* was developed by Eguchi Toshihiro (1873–1946) and popularized as *tanasukue no michi* by his more famous student Mitsui Kōshi (1883–1953), best known for founding the infamous nationalist organization Genri Nippon Society that attacked Marxist and leftist intellectuals in the 1930s and 1940s. Contemporaneous with other conceptions of the body and practices promoting health, *tanasukue no michi* sought to bridge the emerging discourse of national health with emperorist ideology. Mitsui framed *tanasukue no michi* as a form of worship that would strengthen familial and national bonds that complemented his theory of poetry as quintessential ethnic expression. *Tanasue no michi* reflected the cosmopolitan orientation of the early Showa right, as Mitsui sought to explain *tanasukue no michi* in the context of the international discourse of science, particularly ray theories, and vitalist philosophies from Europe and the United States. This paper argues that right-wing conceptions of healing were products of modern epistemologies of science, health, and nation.



Keywords: healing – nationalism – Reiki – right wing – science



There have been two trajectories in the postwar legacy of Mitsui Kōshi 三井甲之 (1883–1953), a nationalist writer active in the first half of the twentieth century. Mitsui was a prolific writer who presided over nationalist opinion magazines that led efforts to silence and purge intellectuals critical of the state and emperorist ideology. Over the past thirty years, Mitsui’s career has gathered the interest of historians working to account for the rise and domination of right-wing political discourse in the Showa years of Imperial Japan (Katayama 1992, Shōwa Joshi Daigaku, ed. 1997, Ishii 2002, Shiode 2003, Konno 2008, Kinoshita 2012, Nakajima 2017, Person 2020). Mitsui’s second legacy results from his lesser known works on what he called *tanasukue no michi* たなすゑのみち, or “the way of fingertips,” which he claimed was a way to heal the body by simply placing one’s hand on the

afflicted area.¹ Mitsui became interested in the practice in the late 1920s, and his works on the topic continues to be read by Reiki practitioners today. At the time of this writing, the only notable twenty-first-century reprinting of Mitsui's works is his 1930 monograph *Tenobira ryōji* 手のひら療治 (*Palm Healing*), reprinted in 2003 by a company devoted to Reiki.² To date, Mitsui's career as an evangelist of palm healing has been little more than a footnote in histories of the Japanese right wing.

In this article, I will explore Mitsui's writing on palm healing in light of his career as a polemicist and right-wing intellectual and draw out the political implications of *tanasue no michi*. Through the technique of *tanasue no michi*, Mitsui and his colleagues at the Genri Nippon Society sought to contribute to building a healthy populace in mind and body. In doing so, *tanasue no michi* was part of a three-part series of "ways" in which *tanasue no michi* (healing) and *oshimono no michi* をしもののみち (diet) served in a supporting role to *Shikishima no michi* しきしまのみち, the way of cultivating one's ethnic consciousness through poetry. As a unified system, the three ways would together help the Japanese people to "master the laws and principles of labor that would allow them to pursue their duties as Japanese imperial subjects," and the restoration of the true politics of ancient times in the present.³ Mitsui's interest in developing a theory and practice of nationalist (healthy) laborers (bodies) and imperial subjects (minds) coincided with a particularly heated round of negotiations with tenant farmers that worked on his land, a process which ended with Mitsui, in his own words, "exiled" from his own village.

Born in Yamanashi prefecture to a wealthy landowning family, Mitsui was a member of the intellectual elite, graduating from the First Higher School in Tokyo before attending Tokyo Imperial University, where he studied the *Man'yōshū*. Today, Mitsui is most remembered for his role in founding the infamous Genri Nippon Society, a civilian nationalist group at the forefront of campaigns to purge progressive and Marxist academics from the imperial university system

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1. Mitsui used both *katakana* and *hiragana*, seemingly interchangeably, in writing *tanasue no michi*. There are also examples in which he uses *kanji*, but these are far more infrequent.
 2. Mochizuki Toshitaka 望月俊孝 (b. 1957), head and founder of Vortex, the Reiki school that republished Mitsui's book (among others on *tanasue no michi*), claims Eguchi Toshihiro in his Reiki lineage via his teacher, Mitsui Mieko 三井三重子 (no relation to Kōshi), who apparently studied under Miyazaki Gorō 宮崎五郎, Eguchi's son-in-law and Mitsui Kōshi's associate. See Stiene and Stiene 2003: 43.
 3. The quote is taken from the Tanasue no Michi Society Statement (*Tanasue no michi no kai sengen* たなすゑのみちの会宣言), in Eguchi and Mitsui 1930: 12. The statement was undoubtedly written by Mitsui.

(Shiode 2003, Katayama 2006, Takeuchi 2006). Though this present essay focuses on Mitsui's engagement with palm healing, his role as one of the most active polemicists of Imperial Japan is worth emphasis. Together with his more infamous protégé Minoda Muneki 蓑田胸喜 (1894–1946), Mitsui targeted prominent progressive and leftist intellectuals, often suggesting that the political inflections of their writing were tantamount to treason. Imperial University professors were usually the target of these attacks, and their fear of the wrath of the Genri Nippon Society 原理日本社 meant that many self-censored their works to avoid attention.⁴ Outside of the world of Reiki and Japanese nationalist activists, Mitsui's reputation is overwhelmingly negative, no doubt a result of the suffocating impact he had on political discourse in Imperial Japan.

Like other elite intellectuals of his generation, Mitsui frequently published essays and books on a broad range of issues, including literature, philosophy, science, religion, and contemporary politics. His main area of interest and expertise was *waka* poetry, and Mitsui viewed himself as the successor to Masaoka Shiki's 正岡子規 (1867–1902) Negishi Tanka Society 根岸短歌会, and served as the *waka* column editor for *Japan and the Japanese* (*Nihon oyobi Nihonjin* 日本及日本人), where he also contributed political opinion columns (Shōwa Joshi Daigaku, ed. 1997). As scholars have argued, the rise of Reiki in Japan developed in the context of wide interest in international forms of spiritualism and new scientific discoveries (Stein 2012, 2017; Hirano 2016). Mitsui's *tanasue no michi* was no different, and his eclectic writings on the thought of medieval Buddhist figure Shinran (1173–1262), the experimental psychology of Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), Goethe's *Faust* (1808), and issues related to health and science such as *tanasue no michi* were consistent with his broad interest in intellectual developments in the world.

Mitsui's *tanasue no michi* was based upon a method of palm healing developed by educator Eguchi Toshihiro 江口俊博 (1873–1946). Eguchi studied Reiki under Usui Mikao 臼井甕男 (1865–1926), the founder of Usui Reiki Therapy (Usui Reiki Ryōhō), the basis for the various forms of healing today known as Reiki. As a disciple of Eguchi, Mitsui brought the practice to a broader audience, editing a special feature in 1929 comprised of testimonials and a how-to manual in the national opinion magazine *Japan and the Japanese*. Mitsui wrote prolifically on *tanasue no michi* over the next two years, authoring the aforementioned *Tenohira ryōji*, co-authoring a manual with Eguchi, and publishing numerous essays in his own monthly magazine *Genri Nippon*, one of the most notorious right-wing

4. A literal translation of Genri Nippon might be something like “Japan Principle.”

periodicals of early twentieth century Japan. In the co-authored manual, Eguchi credits Mitsui for providing an explanation to a power that he himself could not explain, and respectfully calls him “sensei,” an indication of their collaborative partnership (Eguchi and Mitsui 1930: 20). While Eguchi approached *tanasue no michi* as a practical, economical method of healing that anyone could learn with a little bit of practice, Mitsui incorporated it as a bodily, ritual component to his nationalist theory of poetry and imperial subjecthood called *Shikishima no michi* (Tsukada 2019). It was Mitsui who introduced the archaic-sounding name *tanasue no michi* to the practice that Eguchi simply referred to as palm healing, or *tenohira ryōji*.

There are few scholarly treatments of *tanasue no michi*. In an early critical treatment, Yoneda Toshiaki (1961) anticipated more recent work in remarking that *tanasue no michi* resembled a new religion (125). Shiode Tamaki (2003) provided a brief overview of the practice in his dissertation on the Genri Nippon Society and observed the importance of self-cultivation among right-wing organizations. Katayama Morihide (2006) discussed the practice in a lengthy endnote in a book chapter on the career of Mitsui. There he argued that Mitsui’s focus on the body was an inevitable result of his overall tendency to abandon thought in favor of sublating individual struggles through an eternal present anchored on the figure of the emperor. Katayama (2009) later echoed this interpretation in a broader study of Japanese right-wing thought. In a short research report, Tsukada Hotaka (2015) suggested that interpreting Mitsui’s *tanasue no michi* in the context of right-wing intellectual history is limiting, advocating for an approach that interrogates the relation between political ideology and popular healing practices. Tsukada (2019) expanded on these insights, concluding that Mitsui’s *tanasue no michi* was notable for its leap beyond a method of spiritual healing (*reiryōjutsu* 靈療術), developing into a form of nationalist religion.⁵ Tsukada’s suggestion is an important one, and

5. This latter study by Tsukada was published days before I submitted the initial draft of the present article, and thus I was not able to consult it at an early stage. I want to thank the editors of this special issue for working with me through the awkward timing of my submission. Tsukada’s latest treatment of *tanasue no michi* is an important contribution to both the history of healing practices in Japan and the intellectual history of the Japanese right wing. Its value is magnified by the fact that it appears in an anthology that surveys the history of “folk spiritual therapies” (*minkan seishin ryōhō*) and the occult in modern Japan, co-edited by Tsukada, Kurita Hidehiko, and Yoshinaga Shin’ichi.

as we will see below, Mitsui's primary interest in *tanasue no michi* had to do with its potential as an integral component of a broader nationalist ideology that would solidify moral relationships in the family and the nation.

Mitsui first encountered *tanasue no michi* through his wife, who attended Eguchi's workshop (Mitsui 1929c). Soon afterwards, he developed a collaborative relationship with Eguchi, which culminated in the special issue of *Japan and the Japanese* devoted to *tanasue no michi* in June 1929. Mitsui's own nationalist political monthly, *Genri Nippon*, featured many articles on the topic over the next several years, detailing theories related to the healing method, as well as descriptions of workshops held in various locations. Mitsui tended to use the term *tenohira ryōji*, literally "palm healing," to refer to the practice when addressing a broader audience, such as in the case of *Japan and the Japanese* and books he authored on the topic. Palm healing, Mitsui noted, was a vulgarized way of referring to *tanasue no michi*, which used an ancient word meaning fingertips (*tanasue*) found in the eighth century *Nihon shoki*. Thus, the term *tanasue no michi*, literally the "way of fingertips," suggested a transmission of an ancient practice native to the Japanese revived in the modern era. In reality, Mitsui provided no evidence regarding the historical lineage of the practice, and instead tended to focus on scientific explanations, as we will discuss below.

Eguchi and Mitsui's promotion of *tanasue no michi* rested on two claims. First, the practice was not only effective against most afflictions, it could easily be learned by anybody. Thus, *tanasue no michi* served as a practical solution to the issue of high healthcare costs, which made medical treatment financially out of reach for most Japanese (Mitsui 1929c: 28-30, Eguchi 1929: 51). Second, the practice of healing strengthened social relationships, especially when practiced among family members, and contributed to a stable society, which they believed was founded upon adherence to a moral code rooted in tradition. This latter claim allowed Mitsui and his colleagues at *Genri Nippon* to weave anti-Marxist polemics into their championing of *tanasue no michi*. To them, *tanasue no michi* offered an authentic, Japanese foundation for social harmony, in contrast to what they saw as inauthentic, materialist diagnoses of social ills offered by Marxism. The years between late 1928 and 1932, during which Mitsui wrote the vast majority of his essays on *tanasue no michi*, coincided with a time when his anti-Marxist crusade was especially personal. As described in more detail below, Mitsui, a prominent landowner in Yamanashi prefecture, was forced to leave his village in the spring of 1929 due to heated disputes with farmers who were tenants on his land. He would return to his village in 1933, eventually serving as mayor and recovering his place of prominence in the community. His public expression of concern for the health of the nation and his crusade to spread the practice of *tanasue no michi* seems to have ended around that time, as his attention shifted to polemics against scholars he unilaterally labeled as traitors.

Science and Religion in the Practice of Healing

Scholars have frequently remarked on the popularity of transnational discourses of spiritualism and vitalist philosophy in the early twentieth century Japan as an important context to understanding the emergence of healing practices during that time (Stalker 2008, Hirano 2016). These practices were not necessarily a repudiation of logical and scientific thinking per se; many healing practitioners explained their methods using a scientific rhetoric. If laboratory science could not explain the effects of healing practices, it was not necessarily because healing did not take place; it was merely that science had yet to discover the methods to describe the phenomena. Mitsui, too, drew upon transnational trends in building his theory of *tanasue no michi*. He also employed the rhetoric of science, though like other healers of his age this did not necessarily mean that the phenomena and results that he was describing were repeatable and reproducible. It is notable that Mitsui came of age as a public intellectual in a climate in which the very idea of science (*kagaku* 科学) was under scrutiny from the perspective of philosophy.⁶

Mitsui explicitly argued that *tanasue no michi* was different from spiritual healing—his closing essay in the 1929 special issue was titled “*Tenohira ryōji* is Not a Method of Spiritual Healing” 手のひら療治は心霊療法に非ず. In explaining the practice, Mitsui relied on a broad, international array of scientific studies and philosophical theories. Mitsui’s interdisciplinary approach to the explication of palm healing was consistent with his approach to the field of literature and philosophy. It was a self-consciously modern project, which sought to synthesize what he called “primitive ancient spirit” (*genshi kodai seishin*) and “modern culture spirit” (*kindai bunka seishin*) as well as the cultures of East and West (Mitsui 1929c: 46).⁷ Mitsui viewed this synthetic approach to be the new trend in post-World War I intellectual culture that began in the realm of philosophy, and was now spreading to fields of pharmacology and physiology.

I have translated Mitsui’s term *shinrei ryōhō* as “spiritual healing” here, but it is notable that he uses the term *shinrei* rather than *seishin*, a word that is perhaps

6. On the history of Japanese philosophers engaging with conceptions of science, see for example Adams 1991 and Godart 2017.

7. This was a popular narrative among intellectuals since the Meiji era, including those who founded the Seikyōsha 政教社, the publisher of *Japan and the Japanese*. For discussion, see Pyle 1998 and Person 2020.

more frequently translated as “spirit.” In their recent anthology on Japanese healing practices Kurita, Tsukada, and Yoshinaga (2019) employ the term *minkan seishin ryōhō* 民間精神療法, which we might also translate as folk spiritual therapies, as a category of healing practices that used powers invisible to the eye. Their use of this category is based on contemporaneous usage, and demarcates a range of healing practices that participants often differentiated from religion. The word “seishin” for Mitsui, however, held important meaning for a modern revolution in scientific thinking. Following Wilhelm Wundt’s taxonomy of sciences, Mitsui proposed that the humanities, or *geisteswissenschaft* (*seishin kagaku* in Japanese, literally “spirit sciences”), contained the methods for an understanding of the world that accounted for human subjectivity, the unpredictable nature of which lay beyond the purview of logic and the natural sciences. When Mitsui employs the word “science” in describing his methods, he is referring to a notion of science in a broader sense than simply natural sciences.

Despite his arguments to the contrary, Mitsui’s *tanasue no michi* fits squarely within the history of Japanese occult healing practices. In his overview of the history and historiography of *minkan seishin ryōhō*, Yoshinaga (2019) suggests that the period in which Mitsui operated witnessed an increase in healers identifying with religion (15-16). Indeed, as Tsukada (2019) points out in his contribution to the same volume, Mitsui described *tanasue no michi* as a “worship ritual of the national religion 国民宗教礼拝儀式” (177). Mitsui’s appeals to “science” in distinguishing his practice from others was an important feature of that discourse, and not an anomaly. In Mitsui’s case, it mostly amounted to an armchair anthropological conviction that politics and health could be improved by rediscovering and updating ancient practices he considered to be more authentic to human life.

Eguchi and Mitsui’s writing on palm healing advocated a broad mindset to health encompassing concerns about nutrition and preventative medicine, which echoed the information campaigns of health experts and officials of that era. In the wake of World War I, Japanese officials in various government agencies sought to create a healthier population that was on par with the standards of other imperial powers (Moran 2018, Hopson 2019). Mitsui argued that poor health was in part a cultural phenomenon, brought on by the rise of consumerism in the realm of diet and changes in the lived environment which required people to walk less.

Mitsui’s answer to this was *oshimono no michi*, or “the way of food,” a theory of nutrition that sought to bring the Japanese back to an older, traditional regimen of healthy eating. Though Mitsui offered no evidence that his culinary prescriptions were indeed based on ancient eating habits, the word *oshimono* itself is an ancient word meaning food. Despite *oshimono no michi*’s far-fetched pseudo-historical claims, the method was inspired by contemporary nutritional studies, such as the nutrition theories of hygiene specialist Miyairi Keinosuke 宮入慶之助 (1865–1946) and the macrobiotic diets of Ishizuka Sagen 石塚左玄 (1850–1909) and Sakurazawa

Yukikazu 櫻沢如一 (1893–1966).⁸ Mitsui argued that reduction in the consumption of meat, polished rice, and other luxury foods would not only improve individual health, but also contribute to solving the nation's food shortage crisis and improving personal finances (Mitsui 1929c: 32). Though Mitsui cited the latest studies in nutrition and medicine in making these arguments, for him the process of reforming dietary practices to benefit one's body, finances, and nation was not a modern invention. Rather, it was a return to an ancient, and importantly "natural" practice of eating, which included ritually placing one's hands in *gasshō* 合掌 and thanking one's ruler, nation, father, mother, all living things, and heaven and earth for the meal. Here, propriety and the strengthening of established social bonds served as important components of establishing a "healthy" approach to food.

Mitsui, for whom Shinran's thought served as an important intellectual inspiration, also argued that simply following the "natural" way of eating and moving was akin to following the Shin Buddhist idea of "the easy path of Other Power" (*tariki igyōdō* 他力易行道). Mitsui's framing of ancient, traditional, and Japanese (i.e. national) practices as natural and authentic was a fundamental aspect of his thought not limited to health and diet, but also language, poetry, and philosophy.⁹ His modern interpretation of Shinran's thought involved giving oneself up to the natural order of the world, which for Mitsui included ethnic practices, beliefs, and language.¹⁰ In calling his poetic practice a "religion," Mitsui believed he had brought the category to a new, modern status, informed by the anthropological, hermeneutic, and scientific discoveries of the twentieth century. At the same time, Mitsui's *tanasue no michi* served his ideological goal of dissuading the populace from socialist ideas, and his campaign for the health of the nation through the "easy path of Other Power" was paradoxically founded on the idea of self-responsibility in maintaining a healthy life.

Mitsui looked to contemporary scientific writing to help explain the physiology of palm healing as well. According to Mitsui, two aspects of the practice merited comparison to other fields: *gasshō*, or the act of pressing one's hands together in a

8. Mitsui references Miyairi's *A New Theory of Nutrition* 新栄養論, as well as Ishizuka and Sakurazawa's linking of food and health to ancient Japanese practices. On Ishizuka and Sakurazawa, see Shimazono 2003 and Namimatsu 2015.

9. On the politics of nature and nationalism in Imperial Japan, see Thomas 2001.

10. For Mitsui's thoughts on giving oneself up to natural/national order of the world, see his discussion in Mitsui 1928. Many of his essays on Shinran were collected and published as *Shinran kenkyū* in 1943.

prayer gesture, and the placing of one's hand on the afflicted area of the patient or one's own body. Mitsui hypothesized that the gesture of *gasshō*, the preliminary step of palm healing, activated one's healing power by bringing two poles of the body together. Palm healing practitioners were taught to sit quietly in *gasshō* for approximately twenty minutes, at which point they would begin to feel a tingling sensation between their hands. This was an indication that the healing powers of the body had been activated. According to Mitsui, *gasshō* was not simply a gesture used to greet acquaintances or to show reverences to the divine, but in fact had a powerful physiological effect at its foundation. Mitsui surmised that *gasshō* had originated in India before reaching Japan, but the gesture was likely rooted in human intuition itself, and he concluded that future researchers would prove that it is a universal human trait (Mitsui 1929c: 36). As it linked two "poles" of the body to create a healing effect, Mitsui noted that palm healing was similar to a popular healing device called Oxyhealer オキシヘラー: a metal tube with wires on each end, which the user attached to two areas of the body.¹¹ The Oxyhealer claimed to improve the user's blood circulation through a thermomagnetic process created by the tube (Tanaka 1996: 103). The comparison was typical of Mitsui's rhetorical style in explaining the "science" of *tanasue no michi*. Without the burden of actually proving a correlation, almost anything could appear to suggest the viability of *tanasue no michi*.

To explain the phenomenon of healing through the hand, Mitsui looked to new developments in ray theory and physiology. For example, in a July 1931 editorial entitled "The Communization of Rural Villages; *tanasue no michi* and Contemporary Physics, etc.," Mitsui introduced recent developments in a field called mitogenetic radiation, citing the work of Alexander Gurwitsch (1874–1954), Dennis Gabor (1900–1979), and Tiberios Reiter (1903–?). Gurwitsch, the discoverer of biophotons, conducted experiments on onion roots, and proposed that they emitted ultraviolet radiation that assisted growth in proximate roots by sparking cell division (Johnston 2006: 50). A different study, cited by Mitsui in the same editorial, conducted by E. Ferdinand Sauerbruch (1875–1951) and W.O. Schumann (1888–1974) proposed that electrical emanations from the human

11. Mitsui notes that the device was recommended to him by the writer Iwano Hōmei 岩野泡鳴 (1873–1920). The Oxyhealer did not produce the advertised effects for Mitsui, however. See Mitsui 1929c, p. 35. Nakao (2019) is a fascinating study of ray theory and radiation in Japan that also briefly discusses the Oxyhealer.

body had implications for promoting health.¹² Mitsui believed that these new findings were preliminary steps to proving that ancient practices like *tanasue no michi* produced scientifically verifiable results. According to this understanding, living organisms, including humans, possessed the ability to communicate with one another on a subconscious level through naturally occurring emissions of light that promoted organic regeneration. For Mitsui, the healing potential of the human body was not a capacity limited to the Japanese body, but to all people. In punctuating this point, he closed his essay in the *Japan and the Japanese* special issue with an anecdote related in the Gospel of Luke in which an ailing woman touched the robe of Jesus and was healed (Mitsui 1929c: 48). According to Mitsui, this was not a miracle at all—Jesus was a practitioner of a power that is latent in all human beings.

In this same 1931 editorial, Mitsui warned his readers that “vital rays” (using the German phrase *lebenstrahlen*, which he also glosses in Japanese as *seimei kōsen* 生命光線) should not be confused with brain waves (*gehirnstrahlen*, glossed as *nōkōsen* 脳光線), a method of “sending thoughts concocted by mystical occultism (*shimpigaku okkaruteizumu* 神秘学オッカルテイズム)” (Mitsui 1931: 16). *Tanasue no michi* was no occult practice; it was a modern, scientific rediscovery of an ancient practice. For Mitsui, the fact that *tanasue no michi* could be described through reason, the language of science, made it distinct from the irrational, mystical practice of the occult, although scholars of occultism today interpret it not as a revolt against scientific thinking, but a phenomenon intrinsic to modernity itself (Bogdan and Djurdjevic 2015: 2). In the case of *tanasue no michi*, Mitsui compared scientific experiments and discoveries he read about in magazines and books to results he perceived in the practice of palm healing. He applied no scientific method of analysis in suggesting such a correspondence, but nevertheless presented his analysis as scientific.

If Mitsui believed *tanasue no michi* produced effective results, it did not always cure his colleagues of their illnesses. The *Japan and the Japanese* special issue featured an essay by one Tashiro Jun’ichi 田代順一 (1886–1930), a teacher and a long-time contributor to nationalist magazines edited by Mitsui. Tashiro suffered from Pott’s disease, a form of tuberculosis that severely limited his mobility and future prognosis. Tashiro’s essay recounts his grim outlook at the time of his diagnosis, which forced him to leave his teaching job and enter a largely immobile

12. These experiments were covered in the August 1928 issue of *Popular Science* in the feature “Onward Strides of Science.” Sauerbruch and Schumann’s research is introduced under the heading, “Your Body a Radio Station.” See page 60 of that issue.

lifestyle. The healing provided by *tanasue no michi*, argues Tashiro, gave him a new lease on life, miraculously improving his mobility and delighting his physician with his drastically improved health. While Eguchi and Mitsui's essays listed numerous examples of patients young and old who benefited from the restorative powers of *tanasue no michi*, Tashiro's contribution was a dramatic testimonial demonstrating the virtues of the practice. Little more than a year after the publication of the issue, Tashiro's symptoms returned, and he died in July 1930.

Healing, Nationalism, and the Body of the Imperial Subject

Mitsui's public reaction to Tashiro's death reveals the heightened stakes of the ideological side of *tanasue no michi*. The September 1930 issue of *Genri Nippon* was devoted to the memory of Tashiro. In his customary editorial column, Mitsui focused not on the failure of palm healing to cure Tashiro, despite the optimism of the months prior, but rather reaffirmed the ideological mission of *tanasue no michi*, which offered Japan an alternative paradigm of socio-political change to the "revolutionary violence" of Marxism (Mitsui 1930: 50). Tashiro was a "fallen comrade" in this fight, whose "corpse they must step over in progressing in the battle."

Given Mitsui's other intellectual output throughout his career to that point, his explicitly ideological vision for *tanasue no michi* was not at all out of the ordinary. We can say the same about the other contributors to the 1929 special issue in *Japan and the Japanese*. All five contributors to the issue aside from Mitsui and Eguchi were frequent contributors to *Genri Nippon*, arguably the most significant publication in the history of academic suppression in Imperial Japan. One of them, Miyazaki Gorō 宮崎五郎 (d.u.), was a protégé of Mitsui who would publish a series of curated collections of Mitsui's works after his death. Miyazaki married Eguchi's daughter and continued his work on palm healing well into the postwar era. A month after the palm healing special issue, two other contributors to it published articles in *Genri Nippon* accusing Tokyo Imperial University professors Suehiro Izutarō 末弘巖太郎 (1888–1951) and Hozumi Shigetō 穂積重遠 (1883–1951) of treason. Mitsui's ideological brand of palm healing fit neatly in the nationalistic program of the Genri Nippon Society and its allies.

Eguchi, too, believed in the ideological potential of palm healing. In his introduction to its methods in the special issue, he argued that palm healing had the power to strengthen human relationships through the physical act of laying one's hand on the patient. He hoped that every household would develop a palm healing practitioner, not only because of the health benefits, but also because it would serve to strengthen family bonds. He characterized this aspect of palm healing as "an active measure for 'thought guidance' (*shisō zendō* 思想善導)," echoing a term then used by the Ministry of Education in its anti-communist campaign

in the universities (Eguchi 1929: 52).¹³ Fittingly, Mitsui and Eguchi made their acquaintance at a local meeting to discuss the so-called thought problem (*shisō mondai*), a catch-all word that could refer to unionization movements, Marxist study groups in the universities, tenant farmer rallies, and organized responses to political-economic inequality (Mitsui 1929c: 18).

Mitsui's interest in *tanasue no michi* coincided with an especially difficult period in his life. His hometown in Nakakoma County in Yamanashi was engulfed in disputes between landowners like Mitsui and tenant farmers who worked the land in exchange for rent (Smethurst 1986, Ōkado 1994). After a series of ugly confrontations, in March 1929 the outspokenly anti-Marxist Mitsui declared that he would accept his tenants' contract demands if they rejected Marxism, and signed a contract with forty tenants while the local police chief acted as arbiter (Mitsui 1929a: 20). Less than a week later Mitsui moved to Kōfu, the prefectural capital, claiming that he could no longer afford to live in his home village due to the demands of the contract, and published bitter poems lamenting his "exile." He had been a frequent critic of Marxism and socialism throughout his career as a political pundit, but now matters had grown personal.

These developments were an important context to the moralistic anti-Marxist language that peppered Mitsui and his colleagues' treatment of *tanasue no michi* in *Japan and the Japanese* and *Genri Nippon*. In the same month that the special issue in *Japan and the Japanese* was published, Mitsui published a pamphlet that proposed to dissect the arguments of communized (*sekka* 赤化) professors in the imperial universities using the method of *Shikishima no michi*, a theory of poetry described in more detail below (Mitsui 1929e). The pamphlet attacked the theories of professors Yoshino Sakuzō 吉野作造 (1878–1933), Makino Ei'ichi 牧野英一 (1878–1970), and the aforementioned Suehiro Izutarō, whose proposals for alleviating rural poverty had already made him the target of Mitsui's ire over the previous decade. The first in a series of pamphlets published by the Genri Nippon Society, the volume also featured a short essay by Minoda Muneki that bizarrely labeled constitutional theorist Minobe Tatsukichi 美濃部達吉 (1873–1948) an anarchist. Though none of the four professors targeted in the pamphlet were communists, Mitsui and Minoda argued that they encouraged the spread of communism through their non-intervention. Six years later, Minoda would lead a campaign against Minobe in the infamous Imperial Organ Theory incident 天皇機関説事件, after which the

13. On the thought guidance campaigns, see Ogino 2007.

government banned Minobe's work dealing with the place of the emperor in the constitution (Miller 1965, Uemura 2006).

Eguchi's *tanasue no michi* also retained aspects of Usui's Reiki practice that resonated with Mitsui's intellectual projects. Usui encouraged his followers to recite the *waka*, or "august creations" (*gyosei* 御製), of the Meiji Emperor as a form of self-cultivation (Stiene and Stiene 2003: 74-77). When Mitsui met Eguchi in 1928, Mitsui had just published a study on the *waka* of the Meiji Emperor, a statement on the importance of poetry, and in particular the emperor's poetry, in building an orderly moral society (Mitsui 1928). Mitsui positioned the Meiji Emperor as a model for patriotic consciousness for imperial subjects to follow, and believed that the late emperor's poems were the medium through which one could tap into his nationalist passion. According to Mitsui's theory of Japanese poetics, *waka* is the genre of poetry most suited to expressing the poet's emotions directly.¹⁴ Compared to the shorter, seventeen syllable haiku, where brevity forces the poet to be more impressionistic and abstract, the thirty-one-syllable *waka* is long enough to accommodate a direct transcription of emotional experience. Mitsui called this practice of poetic transcription *Shikishima no michi*, or the way of Shikishima, a term referring to Japan used in the ancient classics. In contrast to the more intellectual genre of haiku, *waka* required the poet to transcribe his or her emotions without reflecting upon them, as this would derail the process of expressing true emotion by tainting it with intellectualism. Under this understanding of *waka*, the "august creations" of the Meiji Emperor constituted the authentic emotions of Japan's first modern monarch. By reciting his *gyosei* in preparation for healing, the practitioner synchronized his or her psyche with Meiji, creating a healthy (i.e. patriotic) mind that could restore the health of others (Mitsui 1929c: 27).

Mitsui's first mention of *tanasue no michi* in *Genri Nippon* appeared in the May 1929 issue, the first issue to appear after his departure from his village. The issue opened with four *gyosei* followed by a short editorial entitled "Pre-meal *Gasshō*," in which Mitsui promotes the "joy that comes from one's heart" achieved through *gasshō*, frugal meals, and *tanasue no michi* (Mitsui 1929b: n.p.). In the following issue, Ōtsuka Hideo 大塚英雄 (d.u.), Minoda's student and an enthusiastic supporter of *tanasue no michi*, offered editorial notes in place of Mitsui, who had likely been

14. See for example Mitsui 1906, an early work which lays out his theory of *waka* and human psychology. For further discussion, see chapter one in Person 2020.

occupied by his transition to Kōfu. There Ōtsuka summarized the Genri Nippon Society's understanding of the significance of *tanasue no michi*:

The strict and faithful attitude that the natural sciences bring to their objects of study and perspective must be adopted by the human sciences (*seishin kagaku* 精神科学). The fruits of their research can be developed into a technique that can be made to flourish within the emotional lives of the nation (*kokuminteki jōi seikatsu* 国民的情意生活). This will allow it to pivot away from the self-destructive, intellectualist analysis of Euro-American culture, and turn towards a sacrificing (*hōkōteki* 奉公的), cooperative work for the purpose of protecting the ancestral land. There I think we might find a concrete beginning towards a way to rectify the principle of loyalty of *Shikishima no michi* in opposition to the mechanization of life and labor problems that accompany the development of massive enterprises under capitalism. Today, Shinran's easy path of Other Power through *nenbutsu* 念仏 and *gasshō* 行 (Yamaga) Sokō's 山鹿素行 practical learning have nostalgically and splendidly returned in the study, practice, and elaboration of *tanasue no michi* and *oshimono no michi* (Ōtsuka 1929: 34).

Ōtsuka cites Mitsui's theory of *Shikishima no michi* in articulating his hope that *tanasue no michi* will contribute to a project of socially engineering the working class of Japan into a population that is happy to work and sacrifice for the benefit of the nation. He frames "labor problems" as an issue of ideology, born of the intellectualism (i.e. materialist theory of Marxism) from foreign countries and the mechanization of life, which are in his view both inauthentic elements plaguing society. The tripartite philosophy of *tanasue*, *oshimono*, and *Shikishima* would bring an authentic, national, and therefore loyal way of healing, eating, and feeling to the daily lives of Japanese workers.

Mitsui was by no means a pioneer in claiming the bodies of workers in Japan as essential components of a national security apparatus. Meiji era state officials and intellectuals understood that healthy and loyal imperial subjects were necessary in building a strong, unified nation with the military at its foundation (Burns 2000, Fruhstick 2003). This imperative of building a rich country and strong military underwrote the establishment of institutions and practices that promoted hygiene, nutrition, and physical fitness. These discourses of imperial bodies dovetailed with Mitsui's anti-Marxist views and his socio-economic status as a landowner.

At times, these social innovations were accompanied by occult variations, like *tanasue no michi* and *oshimono no michi*, that blended beliefs concerning purportedly ancient practices with the modern project of health and fitness. Tokyo Imperial University law professor Kakei Katsuhiko's 笈克彦 (1872–1961) nativist exercise, *Yamato-bataraki* 日本體操 ("Japanese calisthenics"), is a fascinating example. Though later surpassed in fame by *rajio taisō* ("radio exercises"), which succeeded in creating a shared, national experience of calisthenics through the medium of the

radio, Yamato-bataraki was similar in its ambition to create a short and systematic program of fitness accessible to imperial subjects young and old (Kakei 1929: 50). Originally developed in 1920 as “imperial land exercise” (*kōkoku undō* 皇國運動), Kakei sought to assist imperial subjects in embodying the Japanese spirit through physical movement and exercise, a method of exercise which he juxtaposed to others that merely focused on the physical body, and was thus merely “materialist” (Kakei 1929: 79).¹⁵ Kakei offered spiritual commentary for each movement of the exercise, which participants were asked to slowly learn over time through repetition. In developing the exercises, Kakei claimed to draw from ancient gestures and “divine movements” (*kami asobi* 神あそび), such as bowing, breathing, swinging the arms, and chanting exclamations.

Like *tanasue no michi*, Yamato-bataraki called upon the moral example of the Meiji Emperor. Kakei’s 1929 manual opens with selections from the *gyosei* of the Meiji Emperor that supposedly represented each of the movements of Yamato-bataraki. The first of these reads as follows:

Do not seek beyond the white clouds, the true way of the people of the world is the Shikishima Way.

This *gyosei* was also a favorite among Genri Nippon contributors, who cited it frequently as evidence that the Meiji Emperor identified nationalism as the “true way” over abstract theories beyond the clouds (i.e. Marxist materialism).¹⁶ As Nakafusa (2016) has shown, Yamato-bataraki was widely used in programs to train farmers during the crisis in the agricultural sector in the early 1930s and ultimately in the immigration programs to Manchuria. There, as in *tanasue no michi*, a healthy imperial subject implied not only a body fit for work and service to the nation, but

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15. It should be noted that *tanasue no michi* also possessed its own program of calisthenics called *tanasue no michi* “method of exercise” (*taisōhō* 體操法), included in the aforementioned *Tenohira ryōji nyūmon*. The chapter is credited to Asakawa Genchō 浅川源澄, who appears to have accompanied Mitsui and Eguchi on some *tanasue no michi* workshops. Though the printed instructions for the exercises include illustrations and photographs, it is not accompanied by an explanation of its role in the broader ideology and methods of *tanasue no michi*. See Eguchi and Mitsui 1930: 204–214.
16. See for example Mitsui 1928: 51, 156, 272, 280, and Minoda 1933: 73, 589. Mitsui also cites it in his essay in the *Japan and Japanese* special issue on palm healing. See Mitsui 1929c: 19.

a mind and spirit in sync with an imagined authentic tradition that originated in ancient times and crystalized in modern times in the *gyosei* of the Meiji Emperor.

A year after the publication of the *Japan and the Japanese* special issue, Mitsui's palm healing venture appeared to be a great success. The June 1930 issue of *Genri Nippon* celebrated by announcing the establishment of the Tanasue no michi Society. The joint declaration by Mitsui and Eguchi announced that the society would harness the science of *Shikishima no michi*, the life methods of *oshimono no michi*, and the worshiping method of *tanasue no michi* to establish the laws and principles for the labor (*rōsaku* 労作) of Japanese imperial subjects. The English literature professor Matsuda Fukumatsu, a founding member of the Genri Nippon Society, contributed an essay detailing British variations of palm healing, while another contributor, Katō Shigeru, declared the practice the cure to the ills befallen modern society. Meanwhile, the magazine continued its usual fare of sensational nationalist essays, with Minoda leading the issue with an essay attacking Minobe Tatsukichi, and nationalist polymath Fujisawa Chikao 藤澤親雄 (1893–1962) commenting on humanity's hope and anticipation for the future of the Japanese race. On the pages of *Genri Nippon* in 1930, palm healing and radical nationalism converged as an ideological weapon against Marxist and democratic politics.

Conclusion

Though in 1930 it seemed as if Mitsui was not interested in writing on any topic other than palm healing, the following year his attention returned to the task of criticizing communist and socialist ideas. By the end of 1932, Mitsui had ceased referring to *tanasue no michi* altogether. Though he never articulated the reason behind this change, we can raise several possibilities. Between those years, several prominent members of the Genri Nippon Society grew ill and died. Though Mitsui mentions practicing *tanasue no michi* with them, and the aforementioned Tashiro was a believer in the practice, palm healing did not cure them of their maladies. More articles touting the universal healing powers of *tanasue no michi* would have sat awkwardly alongside the many obituaries featured in *Genri Nippon* during those years.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Eguchi Toshihiro left Yamanashi in April 1932, taking a position in Tokyo (Mitsui 1932: 45). Though Mitsui lamented Eguchi's departure

17. Tsukada (2019) mentions that not all adherents to *Shikishima no michi* were convinced of the utility of *tanasue no michi*. In the *Japan and the Japanese* special issue, Mitsui revealed that he received a letter voicing skepticism. It is possible that Mitsui faced opposition regarding this issue within the Genri Nippon Society community. See Mitsui 1929d: 82.

in an editorial, the two fell out of touch and Mitsui apparently never visited Eguchi before the latter died in 1946 (Mitsui 1957).¹⁸

These developments coincided with the rise of *Genri Nippon* as an important player in the politics of anti-communism on the national stage, likely contributing to Mitsui's change in focus. In June 1932, Mitsui's Shikishima no Michi Society released a statement announcing its intentions to take a more active role in politics. This "Statement Regarding Current Events" (*Tai Jikyoku Sengen* 対時局宣言) went to press two weeks after the assassination of Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi at the hands of radical nationalist officers in the Imperial Navy, an event that marked the end of political party cabinets in Imperial Japan. The "Statement," likely written by Mitsui, traced the grievances of radical nationalist military personnel (political corruption, economic inequality, the London Naval Treaty, etc.) to the spread of "materialist" thinking. It advocated a return to the "way of the subject (shindō 臣道)," which required that people respect the words of the emperor and follow the *Shikishima* way, the "divine way" (*kannagara no michi* カムナガラノミチ) in which imperial subjects refrained from asserting themselves (*kotoage senu* コトアゲセヌ).¹⁹ The statement concluded with the declaration that "Marxism and democracy are the two objects to be decimated by Japanist *Shikishima no michi*" (*Shikishima no Michi Kai* 1932: 4). Though there is no mention of *tanasue no michi* here, its ideological message of obedience and sacrifice remains.

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18. In the June 1938 issue of *Genri Nippon*, Mitsui contributed five *waka* poems addressed to Eguchi that read like a short letter. There Mitsui notes that he has not been able to write to Eguchi for reasons that he is unsure of, but that he is continuing his practice of *tanasue no michi*. It was not uncommon for members of the *Genri Nippon* community to use the *waka* column to address one another. Mitsui once again mentions his inability to write to Eguchi two years later in a series of poems featured in the *waka* column of the July 1940 issue.
19. This latter point was an allusion to a poem by Kakinomoto no Hitomaro 柿本人麻呂 in the ancient classic *Man'yōshū*, a favorite topic of Mitsui. Hitomaro's poem reads, in part, "The rice-abounding Land of Reed Plains / Is a divine land [where things are as the gods will] / And man need not offer prayers [*kotoage*]." Herbert Plutschow, from whose work I have borrowed the preceding translation, suggests that the line was part of a ritual to prepare the traveler for a journey. The poem continues "Yet [today] I must offer prayers: / 'Travel safely and be fortunate! / So that no evil will hinder you, / So that you will be fortunate, / I will offer prayers over and over, / Like the waves spilling on the rocky shore, / A hundredfold, a thousandfold.'" (Plutschow 1990: 90). Mitsui's reading is a typical conservative one, in which the practice of *kotoage* is something reserved for *kami*, and that this is the natural order of Japanese life. It is not clear to me why Mitsui uses *katakana* in writing these words beyond simply being an attempt to add emphasis.

Meanwhile, Minoda Muneki raised his profile as an influential nationalist voice, playing a key role in the scapegoating of Kyoto Imperial University law professor Takigawa Yukitoki 瀧川幸辰 (1891–1962) in the infamous Kyōdai Incident of 1933, in which Takigawa was dismissed from his position after being falsely accused of promoting communism. The university's entire law faculty resigned in protest in the aftermath, as scholars, intellectuals, and politicians debated the autonomy of public university faculty in matters of research and personnel. Mitsui remained in the front line of nationalist opinion leaders who labeled critics of the state and nationalist ideology as traitors, and played a leadership role in organized, and in many cases successful, efforts to purge scholars he deemed to oppose the values of the *kokutai* (national essence).

None of the above is to suggest that Mitsui's interest in *tanasue no michi* was not motivated by a genuine interest and belief in its powers to heal, nor that he had lost interest in the practice. Mitsui continued to practice palm healing until his death in 1953. His circumstances had drastically changed by that point. In April 1947 he suffered a brain hemorrhage and lost mobility on his left side (Yaku 1967). The following year, the US Occupation included him among those purged for war collaboration. He lost a significant portion of his wealth in the Occupation-led land reforms. Miyazaki Gorō—Mitsui's protégé and Eguchi's successor—published his postwar correspondences with Mitsui, and there we find Mitsui practicing palm healing on himself and encouraging Miyazaki in his efforts to publish new material on *tenohira ryōji*. In a letter written in March 1950, Mitsui refers to *tenohira ryōji* as “a scholarly new religion (*gakujuutsuteki shin-shūkyō* 学術的新宗教) that does not oppose medical science and practice, but rather supplements, corrects, and guides it” (Mitsui 1957: 68–69). According to these correspondences, later that year Mitsui contributed a preface to a palm healing manual authored by Miyazaki and published through his Society for the Study of Palm Healing (*Tenohira Ryōji Kenkyūkai* 手のひら療治研究会).²⁰ The *Genri Nippon* line of Reiki continued well into the postwar era through the work of Mitsui and Miyazaki.

20. I have not had the opportunity to view this preface. The volume in which the above correspondence between Miyazaki and Mitsui are published, edited by Miyazaki, contains an advertisement for this book. Miyazaki authored several more works on palm healing, including manuals and anthologies of writings by his father-in-law Eguchi. Between 1955 and 1956 he serialized an essay on *tanasue no michi* in the monthly magazine *Saana* サーナ, published by Sakurazawa Yukikazu, aka George Ohsawa, the inventor of the Daoism-inspired macrobiotic diet referenced above. On Sakurazawa, see Namimatsu 2015.

This article demonstrated the ideological dimensions of that palm-healing tradition, particularly with regard to an important context to its emergence: the hysteric reaction among conservative intellectuals towards anything that remotely resembled, to them, communism, socialism, and Marxism. As noted above, many of the intellectuals and organizations that Mitsui and his colleagues at the Genri Nippon Society targeted were not communists at all. Rather, they were responding in a variety of ways to the political and economic conditions of early twentieth-century Japan, as well as philosophical trends then in vogue among intellectuals internationally (Shiode 2003, Takeuchi and Satō 2006, Person 2020). In crafting a physical worship practice counterpart to his theory of poetry as ethnic expression, Mitsui believed that he had invented a holistic approach to life that synthesized modern innovations in the human and natural sciences. Mitsui's encounter with *tanasue no michi* in 1928 provided him with a method of self-cultivation and care in a time of personal turmoil and, perhaps more importantly, a rhetoric that addressed some of the symptoms of political and economic inequality without necessarily threatening his own socio-economic status. For Mitsui, the physical health of the individual was secondary to the ideological health of the patriot, who found the natural way of being in life as a loyal imperial subject.

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