

Reading Tsurumi Kazuko Reading Minakata Kumagusu

Tom Gill *

Minakata Kumagusu was born in 1867 in Wakayama, the son of a pan-maker. He dropped out of the institution that would later become Tokyo University, and went to the United States at the age of 21. He entered Michigan Agricultural College, dropped out again, travelled through Central and South America and the West Indies with a travelling circus, moved to England in 1892, lived in London for seven years, became an Oriental Research fellow at the British Museum, published hundreds of articles on biology, botany, religion and folklore in the journals *Nature* and *Notes and Queries*, and returned to Japan in 1900, where he lived quietly in rural Wakayama for the rest of his life, collecting and drawing botanical specimens and researching Japanese religious traditions. He died in 1941. After decades of relative obscurity, he was rediscovered and had his complete works published in 1971. Tsurumi Kazuko played a major role in establishing his reputation, notably through the critical biography of Minakata she published in 1978. Something of a Minakata boom followed, and today there are dozens of books devoted to him, plus a couple of CD-ROMs and a half-completed biographical film by alternative director Yamamoto Masashi. Minakata's life has also been celebrated in drama and modern dance, and even in cartoon form.

The theme of this symposium is "forms of creativity", and I think it is fair to say that in one way or another, a large part of Tsurumi Kazuko's work is motivated by her determination to refute the common assumption among Europeans and Americans that they have a monopoly of creativity, or at least the really important forms of creativity, while eastern countries like Japan can only imitate, adapt and modify, activities usually construed as inferior, however well done. Her work on "endogenous development" attempts to show Asian creativity at work in the field of industrial technology and economic development, while the writings about Japanese folklorists make a similar claim in the academic context. And although Tsurumi Kazuko has done much to champion the reputations of Yanagita Kunio, Origuchi Shinobu and others, there is no doubt that Minakata Kumagusu occupies a special place in the Tsurumi pantheon of creativity.

Yet in some ways, Minakata is a controversial choice to represent Japanese creativity, for a lot of his work was of the kind that tends to be viewed as not particularly creative – I mean data collection. If you travel down to Kumano, the area of Wakayama prefecture where he spent his latter years and did much of his botanical research, you'll find a museum dedicated to Minakata. It advertises him as "the genius who knew 18 languages". Another one of the Minakata myths is that he memorized an entire encyclopedia in his childhood. Like the British Pakistani boy who has recently become famous across the Islamic world for memorizing the entire Koran at the age of ten, he is associated with feats of memory that some cultures view as marks of genius, but others as mere curiosities.

* Presently at the Institute of Social Science, Tokyo University

In an age that valorizes specialist knowledge, Minakata's very wide range of interests also raises eyebrows. Folklore and botany are his two best-known fields, but his published works also range widely across philosophy, religion, sexology and astronomy. There were plenty of intellectual all-rounders like him in the Meiji/late Victorian age, but few are still respected today.

Again, Minakata is renowned for having discovered about 100 different species of slime mold (*mycetozoa*), and one new genus that a British expert was kind enough to name after him. So quite a lot of Minakata's work makes him look like a collector – "a butterfly collector", to quote Edmund Leach's contemptuous dismissal of Radcliffe-Brown. There is nothing particularly creative about amassing gigantic quantities of knowledge – the question is what you do with it.

But Minakata Kumagusu did do interesting things with his vast store of knowledge. One of Tsurumi Kazuko's achievements has been to show how his many different fields of inquiry related to an overall holistic view of human beings and their position in the natural environment.

Consider for instance Minakata's interest in slime molds. Minakata noticed that certain aspects of their life cycle make them appear more like animals than plants. They appear to move along the surface of the tree, looking for bacteria or leaves to prey upon. Minakata loved the ambiguity of these organisms. He actually claimed that slime molds were primitive animals in a report presented to the Crown Prince, the future Emperor Hirohito, though this view was strongly opposed by other biologists of the time.

Anyway, the point is that slime molds threaten orderly scientific categories. As well as mixing animal and vegetable characteristics, they also tend to look dead when they are most alive, and alive when they are actually dead. Minakata loved anomalies – a 1911 letter to Yanagita contains delighted references to egg-laying mammals like the duck-billed platypus and hairy birds like the kiwi (Matsui et al 1993:23). These bizarre animals were reminders that the natural world would not meekly obey the dictates of human science. So Minakata's obsessive collecting of specimens was not just collecting for its own sake – though it is clear from his correspondence with Yanagita (among others) that he did keep score and took a certain innocent pleasure in amassing specimens. But the net result of all this collecting was an acute awareness of the position of slime-molds in the overall eco-system which led to his becoming an activist for environmental protection about half a century before this became fashionable.

Minakata's scepticism regarding the Linnaean classification of species also applied to the Darwinian view of species evolution. He observed both progressive and regressive changes in his botanical specimens, while some forms of fungus and mold in his garden in Nachi appeared to "evolve" into new forms, only to return to the original form a year or two later. This confirmed his suspicions that evolution did not proceed in the unilinear, ever-upward fashion that Darwinism seemed to imply. He was even more critical of the kind of social Darwinism propounded by Herbert Spencer. In what ways were "modern" societies superior to "primitive" ones? Surely human evolution had negative, as well as positive aspects. It was more messy than Spencer and his followers seemed to believe. I cannot say how much validity Minakata's biological observations had, but in social terms he was quite right to query the ethnocentric belief that contemporary white European society represented the pinnacle of human evolution – a belief implicit in many forms of social Darwinism (Matsui et al 1993: 19-26). The famous incident when Minakata punched a Mr. Thompson on the nose in front of 500 people in the British Museum reading room (Tsurumi 1978: 212) was a particularly forthright rejection of that

belief – Mr. Thompson had made insulting comments about the inferiority of Orientals to Europeans.

Let me note in passing that Minakata's critique of unilinear social evolution is echoed in Tsurumi's work on endogenous development: she also criticizes the concept of "a unilinear progression" and draws attention to negative aspects of Euro-American development (environmental damage, growing North-South income inequalities, the arms race etc.) while pointing to other kinds of development going on in other countries, especially Japan and China (Tsurumi 1992:85). If this is an example of Minakata's work influencing Tsurumi Kazuko, she has repaid the debt by resurrecting Minakata's reputation and drawing out the theoretical consistency linking the various strands of his massive, complex and varied body of work. Without her interpretation of his work, he might still be remembered mostly as a sort of intellectual oddity, rather than the important figure in Japanese intellectual history which is how many people view him today.

I would now like to take a fairly close look at one specific instance of how Tsurumi Kazuko has gone about this interpretative operation: the case of the Minakata-Mandala.

The Minakata-Mandala

When Japanese academics talk about the Minakata-Mandala, they tend to use the term in two different senses. Firstly they use it, as he did himself, to describe the pattern of interrelated fields of scholarship that made up his body of work. Secondly they use it to describe a particular diagram that appears in a letter Minakata wrote in 1903, which in some ways seems to rather neatly encapsulate the Minakata philosophy. Tsurumi Kazuko has done more than anyone else to popularize the term, and her fascination with the Minakata-Mandala is reflected in her choice of the title *Tsurumi Kazuko Mandala* for her own collected works.

In 1995 the Institute of International Relations at Sophia University published an English-language paper by Tsurumi entitled "Minakata-Mandala – A Paradigm Change for the Future." In this paper, Tsurumi makes a very big claim on Minakata's behalf: not just that he was a ground-breaking folklorist or an innovative biologist, but that he came up with a new way of envisioning the world which was fundamentally different from the prevalent western view of a world governed by Newtonian mechanics. In fact she says that this new way of thinking is so fundamentally different that it deserves to be called a "new paradigm", and it is so valuable that even now, nearly a hundred years after Minakata first thought it up, it has potential to help humankind in the future.

This paradigm she refers to as the "Minakata Mandala". A mandala, of course, is a symbolic diagram of the universe used for ritual purposes in tantric Buddhism. Frequently represented in Chinese, Japanese, and Tibetan Buddhist art, the mandala generally consists of a group of cosmic deities (or their associated symbols), arranged in one or more circles and oriented toward the points of the compass. The strongest influence on Minakata was the Shingon Buddhist mandala, with the Dai-Nichi Buddha (the Great Sun Buddha, or *Vainocana* in Sanskrit) at the centre, and the other Bodhisatvas arranged in their appropriate positions relative to the Dai-Nichi.

Like all mandalas, this one gives an orderly, hierarchical picture of the universe. Rather like some Christian iconographies of heaven and hell, with the thrones, powers and dominions of heaven and the concentric circles of hell, this is a system with a place for everyone and everyone in their place. Now for contrast, let's have a look at the Minakata mandala (figure 1, p.130). This diagram appears in a long, rambling letter which Minakata wrote during three days and nights of sleepless intellectual

frenzy and sent to his friend, the Shingon Buddhist priest Toki Hōryū (1854-1922) in 1903. It certainly doesn't look like an image of order and hierarchy. Actually it looks more like a spilled bowl of noodles. Minakata never called this diagram a mandala himself. The name was given to it by Nakamura Hajime, a scholar of Buddhist philosophy. Tsurumi happened to show him the diagram in 1978, and he reacted by saying "Ah, this is Minakata-Mandala, is it not!" (Tsurumi 1995:4).

So we appear to be skating on thin ice here. We have a diagram by Minakata that looks like a spilled bowl of noodles, which appears not in an academic publication but in a private letter; which someone else (Nakamura) decides to call a "mandala" long after Minakata has died, and which a third person (Tsurumi) claims to be a "new paradigm for the future" and "a new model of scientific method". Can such portentous language possibly be justified?

Well, first of all we need to look at Minakata's own explanation of this enigmatic diagram. The letter's general theme is how the universe works and man's position in it. The passage relating to the diagram starts by distinguishing between two kinds of mystery: "great mysteries" (*dai-fushigi* 大不思議), which are the province of religion, especially Shingon Buddhism; and "miscellaneous mysteries" (*sho-fushigi* 諸不思議), which man can reasonably attempt to challenge with the power of reason. These latter he divides into four kinds: mysteries of abstract things, concrete things, the soul and reason (*koto, mono, kokoro, ri* 事、物、心、理). Modern physics is quite good at solving mysteries of concrete things, and the fledgling science of psychology is just beginning to tackle mysteries of the soul. Mathematics and logic have some insight into the mysteries of reason, but the mysteries of abstract things remain untackled, and these are the theme of the diagram.

Minakata describes the diagram as a finite, two-dimensional depiction of an infinite three-dimensional reality, "the human universe" (*seken uchu* 世間宇宙), which he sees as composed of chains of rationality (*jiri* 事理). Elsewhere in the letter he refers to chains of cause and effect (*inga kankei* 因果関係), and I believe that is roughly what he has in mind here. The course of each line is influenced by all the others, apparently by something resembling a magnetic or gravitational force – though Minakata does not use such analogies himself. Theoretically, he says, if one could only plot the precise course of one of these lines, one could deduce the course of all the others. Most of the lines are straight, but a few lines – I think just one in fact – has gone into a wildly curving trajectory. I have shown this line in bold in figure 1. This is an example of a chain of cause and effect that has been hurled off course by the influence of other intersecting lines.

As you can see, some of the lines intersect with each other far more than others. Note that the various labels applied by Minakata sometimes apply to points, sometimes to lines. Point A (katakana ア) is a point where many lines of causality intersect, making it relatively easy for humans to be aware of the existence of these criss-crossing influences on their lives. The existence of line B (□) is not perceptible by man until it intersects with other lines of causality at points C and D (チ and リ). Until it reaches one of those points it has no practical use for mankind, and since mankind is obsessed with utility, it will tend to pass unnoticed. The same goes for line E (ニ). It is likely to be noticed at point F (ノ), because although it is not particularly "important" (要用), it is an intersection between two lines of causality. Likewise point G (ホ). Points H and I (ハ and ト) are far removed from people's everyday experience, and have very little relationship with lines of causality other than the ones on which they lie. Hence they are very hard to notice.

Minakata admits in a passing bracketed comment that all this talk of "distance" from human experi-

ence assumes that humans are at the centre of the system. He does not ascribe great importance to this, however. I think we are supposed to assume that the diagram depicts the human universe as seen by ego. Nevertheless, there are radical implications here. Humans would never be found at the centre of a Shingon Buddhist mandala. And although Minakata had a great respect for religion in general and Shingon Buddhism in particular, God is strikingly absent from this diagram of the universe – left aside as one of the "great mysteries" for Toki Hōryū and his fellow monks to tackle. But God is certainly not at the centre of the Minakata-Mandala. Instead, as Tsurumi points out, the centre is defined simply as the most dense intersection between lines of causality criss-crossing the grid. God, if anywhere, is outside the system. So where the Shingon mandala is a hierarchy centered on a personalized God (the Dai-Nichi Buddha), the Minakata-Mandala is impersonal and non-hierarchical.

Back to the diagram. Line J (又) shows a chain of events so remote from human experience that it only lightly impinges on our world at points K and L (オ and ワ). Finally, line M (ル) is like "the trajectory of a passing comet". It never touches us at all, and we can only become vaguely and fleetingly aware of it at points K and L (オ and ワ), through its weak influence on line J (又).

What is he going on about? Well, though the diagram may look like a complete mess, Tsurumi teaches us that it subtly balances chaos with order, mysticism with rationality, and chance with fate. Modern science can explain a single chain of causality, but does not know when or how that chain may be interrupted or deflected by an intersection with another passing chain. These intersections (*suiten* 翠点) appear to be pure chance, but if only we could perceive the whole picture (which we never can), we would see that there was, after all, a pattern to events. Minakata boldly claims that some, at least, of the intersections are knowable to human intellect; while gracefully acknowledging the unknowable "great mysteries" that are beyond our ken, knowable only to the Dai-Nichi Buddha himself.

The intersections on the Minakata-Mandala he sees neither as determined by fate nor as purely random events. Instead he has to invent his own word to describe them: *yariate* (やりあて). Derived from the verbs *yaru*, to do, and *ateru*, to hit, it suggests contact derived from action. He also proposes the English word "tact", not in its modern meaning of "tactfulness" but in its older sense of "touch", as in "contact" or "tactile". As an example of "tact" or "yariate", he mentions the dreams he has had of discovering new kinds of slime mold – dreams which came true. He is rational enough to admit that his many successes in discovering new kinds of slime mold may be explained by the fact that hardly anyone in Japan bothered to look for them before he came along, and he characteristically places this rationalist explanation alongside his prophetic dreams as complementary components in his slime-finding success – an intersection, if you like, between a pair of lines, one rational and one mystical.

Tsurumi ascribes the intersection between rationalist and mystical strands in Minakata's thought to his immersion in the two very different traditions of Shingon Buddhism and modern British science. To these two strands Tsurumi herself has added the theoretical framework of post-war American social science, leavened with her own intuitive understanding of the Minakata project. She has also been able to set Minakata in the context of modern discoveries in physics. Heisenberg's uncertainty principle treats of the movements of subatomic particles in ways rather similar to Minakata's view of cause and effect in human affairs, and more recently chaos theory has come along to further undermine belief in the essential orderliness and knowability of the cosmos. In my view one of the weaknesses in Minakata's work is an occasional vagueness as to whether he is talking about people, particles or abstract relations. But today, whether we look at the strong and weak forces of subatomic physics, or at the struggle

between bloody chaos and orderly relations in world politics, there are plenty of structures about that remind us of the Minakata mandala and very few that resemble the Shingon mandala. I guess what I'm saying is that the world today *does* look pretty much like a spilled bowl of noodles.

And so on the whole I think Tsurumi Kazuko is justified in claiming that Minakata Kumagusu was a thinker ahead of his times, and in stating that his ideas have value for the future. This area is far away from my usual field of study and it is purely by chance that I myself have "intersected" with Tsurumi Kazuko and her work on Minakata Kumagusu. Then again, something tells me it may not have been pure chance. It may have been *variate*... it may have been 'tact'.

References

Matsui Ryugo et al, 1993.

Minakata Kumagusu o Shiru Jiten (A Dictionary to Know Minakata Kumagusu). Tokyo: Kodansha.

Tsurumi Kazuko, 1978.

Minakata Kumagusu: Shikō no Hikaku-gaku (Minakata Kumagusu: a Global-oriented Comparativist.) Tokyo: Kodansha.

Tsurumi Kazuko, 1992.

"Aspects of Endogenous Development in Contemporary China and Japan." In *Power Shifts and Value Changes in the Post Cold War World*. Okayama and Tokyo: Kibi International University, Sophia University and International Christian University.

Tsurumi Kazuko, 1995.

"Minakata-Mandala - A Paradigm Change for the Future." Sophia University Institute of International Relations Research Papers A-65.

Figure 1

(Emphasis added by Gill)

The Diagram of the "Minakata Mandala"
 As seen in a letter from Minakata Kumagusu to Toki Hōryū, July 18, 1903.
 いわゆる「南方曼陀羅」の図
 (明治36年7月18日付土宜法竜宛書簡より)

Tom Gill, Paper at Tsurumi Kazuko Symposium, Kyoto Bunkyo University, June 19, 1999.