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Japanese "New Imperial History" in Comparative Perspective
The Cases of Okinawan and Taiwanese Migrations

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Introduction

The subject of this workshop is "Migration and Colonization in the 19th century World". However, this paper is not about the migration and colonization in the 19th century world simply because the Japanese colonial empire did not rise until the late 19th century, and migrations became popular among common Japanese only after the turn of the 20th century. Nevertheless, the study of Japanese migration and colonization in the 20th century world might help people reconsider what the phrase "the 19th century world" means, and to question how we can critically utilize the concepts developed by the British "new imperial history" to compare different colonizations and migrations beyond the British empire. This paper first elucidates the characteristics of Japanese colonial empire in comparison; the second part demonstrates the case studies of colonial migrations across Japanese colonial empire — Okinawan migration to colonial Taiwan and Taiwanese migration to Manchukuo. By doing so, the paper aims to discuss some implications of the "new imperial history" to contemporary studies of Japanese imperial history.

Japanese Colonialism in Comparison

Japan colonized or otherwise militarily occupied countries and regions that were geographically proximate. Geographical proximity also meant that the racial distinction between the Japanese and other Asians was blurred, at least at the anthropological level. After all, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and other East Asian countries were, for centuries, more or less under the great influence of Chinese civilization. Thus, when the Japanese first occupied Taiwan, Japanese militants, who apparently did not know how to speak the native language, were able to communicate with Taiwanese people in written Chinese. Such occasion may not have been observed when British colonized the Asian countries at the first instance.

The regional dimension of Japanese imperialism also leads us to ponder the timing of Japanese imperialism. In the late 19th century the Japanese politicians' primary concern was not to colonize neighboring countries, but to escape from European colonization and to establish a centralized nation-state. Later, Japan ruled the South Sea Islands, which became the League of Nations Mandate after WWI, and effectively controlled Manchukuo between

1932 and 1945. In summary, Japanese imperialism and colonial migrations took place while colonialism had already lost its legitimacy, and national self-determination became the center of world political discourse. Yet, it does not mean that Japanese colonialism was essentially unique in comparison to European empires during the 19th and the 20th centuries. Indeed, Japanese imperialism was in sharp contrast with British imperialism in many ways. However, when including the Russian, German, and French empires in comparison, it is clear that Japan was not the only modern empire that colonized countries and regions that were racially akin and geographically proximate. Some scholars categorize Japanese imperialism as "continental imperialism", borrowed from Hanna Arendt's discussion on German imperialism in Europe. Although there is a risk of missing out historical details of different imperial histories, such labeling might be helpful for scholars to compare different imperial histories in the world of the 19th and the 20th centuries.

Each colony had a particular relationship to its metropole, and the circumstances of each colonization were different. Still, there are several different patterns of Japanese colonial migrations in relation to the roles of the metropolitan state's authority and military in mobilizing civilian migration. For instance, a significant number of Japanese civilians migrated to the Korean peninsula before the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910[1]. In contrast, no Japanese on record migrated to Taiwan prior to the Sino-Japanese War. In other words, the state played a vital role in initiating Japanese migration to Taiwan although the Government-General was unsuccessful in mobilizing Japanese civilians to settle down in Taiwan. In the early stage of colonization, the Japanese colonial government inaugurated the agricultural migration project and recruited Japanese farmers to cultivate Taiwan's soil. However, the project ended in failure, and few Japanese farmers settled in Taiwan. By contrast, the Japanese government played a great role in mobilizing Japanese farmers and sending them to Manchukuo in the 1930s[2]. I should also note that some countries, such as the Philippines, Indonesia, and other Southeast Asian nations, were briefly controlled by the Japanese military in the early 1940s. A significant number of Japanese civilians resided in these countries before the Japanese military rule, and their status and circumstances were greatly changed during the Japanese military occupation.

In summary, the Japanese state's authority played diverse roles in mobilizing Japanese civilians to settle in colonized territories. Still, generally speaking, the Japanese government and the political leaders tended to think civilian Japanese migration to the colonies was favorable and should be promoted for several reasons. First, there was a social fear of overpopulation and a shortage of agricultural land in the Japanese Islands. Both the Japanese government and opinion makers believed that migration was the only solution to this problem. Second, the Japanese government initially promoted international migrations to North America to solve the issue

(1) Uchida Jun, *Broker of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea*, 1876-1945, Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London: Harvard University Press, 2011.

(2) Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998.

of overpopulation, but the anti-Japanese sentiment in the U.S. and Canada eventually closed the door to Japanese labor migrants. Having observed Japanese migrants being expelled from the U.S., Canada, and Australia, the Japanese government was convinced that the Japanese citizens should migrate to its own colonies in Asia, where there was no need for fear of racial discrimination and expulsion.

Third, the Japanese government believed that Japanese settlement in the colonies would contribute to the assimilation of the native population into the Japanese culture. It is difficult to elucidate the details of the assimilation policy in the Japanese colonies because racial discourse altered from time to time, and there were no consistent cultural policies in the Japanese colonial empire. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that geographical and racial proximity between the colonies and the metropole set the precondition of its cultural policies.

It should be important to note that the Japanese tended to consider their colonies as a security border zone because of their geographical proximity. In other words, the government expected the colonized population to fight for and defend the Japanese border in case of war. Conversely, the Japanese continued to maintain the racial boundaries between themselves and the others; this was a fundamental aspect of colonial rule. In practice, the Japanese government utilized the family registry (*koseki*) to administer all national and colonial subjects. The family registry recorded all births, deaths, marriages, and divorces. In the Japanese empire, nationals who were registered in metropolitan Japan, including Okinawa, held the domestic registry; those who were registered outside of Japan, held the external registries. Indeed, the Japanese family registry was like a racial package that contained actual people who had various racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic attributes. Because the domestic and external registries were not legally inter-connected, the Japanese and Taiwanese were not officially allowed to get married, although the Japanese government thought that a marriage between a Japanese and Taiwanese citizen would promote Taiwanese assimilation to Japan. This indicates that the meaning of inter-racial marriage in colonial contexts varies, depending not only on the metropolitan government's policies, but also on the racial discourse and institutions that were embedded in local-context and created through history(3).

Imperial Careering in Japanese Colonial Empire

Like other imperial history studies, scholars of the Japanese empire did not pay much attention to civilian migrations to the colonies until the 1980s. However, as social and cultural histories became integrated into imperial history study, civilian migrations came to be the focus of serious historical studies. Besides this, contemporary scholars of Japanese imperial history are increasingly interested in the inter-relationships between different colonies, rather than investigating the bi-

(3) For the study of interethnic marriage in Taiwan, see Barclay Paul D., 'Cultural Brokerage and Interethnic Marriage in Colonial Taiwan: Japanese Subalterns and their Aborigine Wives, 1895-1930', in *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 64, no.2, 2005.

lateral relationship between a metropole and a colony[4]. The final part of this paper demonstrates two cases of movements of people that tend to be neglected in the political history of the Japanese empire. The first case is the Okinawan migration to Taiwan, and the second is the Taiwanese migration to Manchuria. Both migrations took place in the early twentieth century, when Japan colonized Taiwan and aggressively extended its influence over northeastern China. I suggest that these two cases should be understood in terms of "imperial careering", which is also utilized in contemporary British imperial history.

Taiwan was ceded to Japan in 1895 at the end of the Sino-Japanese War, at which time the number of Japanese settlers continuously increased until the fall of the Japanese empire. When Japan lost WWII in August 1945, there were approximately 350,000 Japanese civilians and military personnel in Taiwan, nearly 30,000 of whom had registered their addresses in the Okinawa prefecture. Some of these settlers had emigrated from Okinawa before WWII started; some were drafted and came to Taiwan as a member of the Japanese military; and others were born in Taiwan as second or third generation Okinawan immigrants.

The terms "Okinawan" and "Ryukyuans" were powerful signifiers used to downgrade a certain group of people. Indeed, while Okinawa is considered the representative ethnic minority of the modern Japanese nation, numerous scholars have studied how Okinawa was the victim of political, social, and cultural discriminations and the illusion of Japan as a "homogeneous nation"[5]. The circumstances of Okinawans in the Japanese colonial empire are best compared to those of the Irish in the British colonial empire. It has been pointed out that there are some commonalities between the two — both were colonized by people who were racially akin to them and who were, in fact, their geographically proximate neighbor; both sent a number of emigrants overseas against a backdrop of poverty, underdevelopment, and increasing population. Ireland is often deemed the first "victim" of British colonial expansion. Yet recent developments in "new British imperial history" have revealed that the Irish, as merchants, adventurers, soldiers, administrators, missionaries, and other professionals, played an active role in the expansion of the British Empire[6]. This refreshed viewpoint is certainly helpful in understanding Okinawa's ambivalent position as "not only a half-hearted colony," but "also a half-hearted component of the imperial metropolis"[7].

While the Japanese population steadily increased throughout its colonial rule, the growth

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(4) See, for example, Thornber, Karen Laura, *Empire of Texts in Motion: Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese Tranculturations of Japanese Literature*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009; Yang, Daqing, *Technology of Empire: Telecommunications and Japanese Expamsion in Asia, 1883-1945*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.

(5) See, for example, Gavan McCormack and Satoko Oka Norimatsu, *Resistant Islands: Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012; Eiji Oguma, *The Boundaries of 'the Japanese': Volume 1: Okinawa 1818-1972*, translated by Leonie R. Stickland, Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2014.

(6) See Barry Crosbie, *Irish Imperial Network: Migration, Social Communication and Exchange in Nineteenth-Century India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012; Kevin Kenny ed., *Ireland and the British Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

(7) Alvin Jackson, "Ireland, the Union, and the Empire, 1800-1960", in Kenny, ed., *Ireland and the British Empire*, 136.

rate of the Okinawan population rose higher especially from the mid-1920s to the mid-1940s. This time, when the total number of emigrants particularly increased in the Okinawa prefecture, also greatly suffered from an economic depression. The backgrounds of Okinawan migrants were indeed diverse. Both women and men with different educational backgrounds migrated to Taiwan, searching for a better life. Similar to the rest of the Japanese population, the majority of Okinawans were associated with either commercial business or public office. However, Okinawan female migrants were different from others as many came to Taiwan for work whereas it was rare for Japanese mainlanders women to do so(8).

To understand the background of migration from Okinawa to Taiwan, we need to stay away from the conventional understanding of "the developed and civilized metropole" and "undeveloped colonies". In fact, whereas Okinawa remained marginalized within the framework of metropolitan Japan, Taipei was heavily invested in by the Japanese government, and developed to be one of the most highly modernized cities in the Japanese empire by the 1920s. Having maintained relative autonomy from the Japanese central government, colonial Taiwan was indeed like the "Kingdom of the Government-General". Whereas the public offices in Okinawa were dominated by settlers from the Japanese Main Islands, Okinawans utilized their "Japanese status" to get better pay. Henceforth, Okinawans left their homes for the colony next door, which was rather modernized and urbanized; there were apparently more opportunities in both the commercial world and public offices(9).

Okinawans considered colonial Taiwan not only as a place for work, but also as a place of study. While there was no high school or university in Okinawa, the Government-General in Taiwan established middle schools, high schools, and universities where both Taiwanese and Japanese students were co-educated. Many Okinawans who were willing to receive tertiary education chose to do so in colonial Taiwan, Korea, and Manchukuo. In particular, colonial Taiwan was popular because the school fees were relatively cheaper and it was geographically closer to home. Okinawa lost a great number of male professionals and students in a tragic ground battle in 1945. After the fall of the Japanese empire, Okinawans who had resided in the colonies repatriated to Okinawa compensated the paucity of male labor power, and made a great contribution in re-building Okinawan society after WWII.

The Okinawan migration to colonial Taiwan can be interestingly compared to the Taiwanese migration to the Guangdong province, which was administered by Japan starting in 1905 and Manchukuo, the so-called puppet state, founded in 1932. As mentioned, as the Government-General of Taiwan was dominated by Japanese settlers, the Taiwanese were hardly able to occupy the higher positions. However, in the Guangdong province and Manchukuo, the Taiwanese who were familiar with both the ethnic Han Chinese and Japanese cultures

(8) Matsuda Hiroko, 'Moving out from the "Margin": Imperialism and Migrations from Japan, the Ryukyu Islands and Taiwan', in *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 32, 2008.

(9) Ibid.

were relatively well-treated, given much better access to higher positions, and received a better salary. According to Xu Xuechi's study, one of the earliest Taiwanese migrants, Xie Ji-shi, later became the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of Manchukuo, and Manchukuo's ambassador to Japan. His success greatly encouraged other Taiwanese to migrate to Manchukuo during the 1930s. In particular, medical doctors accounted for the biggest majority of Taiwanese migrants in Manchukuo, and the public officers and employees of state-owned companies were also common occupations for Taiwanese. Some medical doctors opened hospitals and had great success over there. Others occupied the highest positions in the Manchukuo government(10).

It was also common for Taiwanese students to study medicine in Manchuria. It is recorded that more than a hundred Taiwanese graduated from Manchu Medical College in Guangdong province. This should be interestingly compared to the fact that the majority of Okinawan students who were willing to become medical doctors went to Taipei Medical College. After the war, some of the elite Taiwanese migrants in Manchukuo, including Xie Ji-shi, were arrested and executed in China because of their collaboration with imperial Japan. Other elite migrants were also persecuted after repatriating to Taiwan, but many survived the dark time of the Taiwanese under the rule of the Republic of China, and made elite careers by utilizing their pre-war experiences(11).

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated the possibility of comparing different imperial networks in the modern world. Debates and discussions of the "new imperial history" are certainly suggested to re-consider modern empires other than the British Empire, on the condition that scholars should be aware of the subtle differences of racial discourse and institutions that were created through history and local contexts. It is also important to consider the outcome of colonial migrations from a postcolonial perspective. In other words, scholars need to examine the transformation of imperial networks and the circumstances of migrants after the fall of an empire. The British and Japanese empires were different not only because the British Empire was older and greater, and the British were white supremacists, but also because these two empires fell apart very differently, and accordingly the destinies of migrants were highly different.

(10) Xu Xueji, 'Taiwanjin no "Manshū" taiken', in *Shokuminchi bunka kenkyū: Shiryō to bunseki*, vol. 1, 2002.
(11) Ibid.