

Guest Editor's Introduction: Japanese Imperialism, Modernity, and Korean History

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Dear Reader,

As the guest editor of the present issue of the *International Journal of Korean History*, I ask that you oblige me in a slightly unconventional introductory essay. Given the contrast between the typical purview of this journal and the contents of the articles contained in this special issue, I decided that a direct and open address in an autobiographical, epistolary mode would be appropriate.

The genesis of this special issue reaches back to a panel that I organized for the Association of Asian Studies 2019 AAS-in-Asia conference held in Bangkok, Thailand. The panel was entitled, "Displaced Subjects of Japanese Modernity," and featured excellent contributions by the historian Tomoko Seto (Yonsei University) concerning the communal reckoning with the massacre of Koreans in Tokyo after the historic 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake, and Japanese literature expert Kathryn M. Tanaka (Hyogo University) on patient literature in Japanese Hansen's disease sanatoriums throughout the empire, as well as insightful commentary from the historian Araragi Shinzō (Sophia University). My own paper was on the Manshū/Manchurian Japanese-language literary community. When the IJKH associate editor Leighanne Yuh approached me the following

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year about guest-editing a special issue, I myself was somewhat surprised at the request—as a specialist in Japanese literature and area studies with few direct professional interests in Korea and limited training in historiography, I was uncertain of how close I could organize an issue relevant to the typical IJKH reader. However, with the encouragement of Prof. Yuh, I accepted the task and am pleased to offer four papers on the topic of Japanese Imperialism and Modernity by Kathryn M. Tanaka, Nicholas Lambrecht (Osaka University), Ozaki Natsuko (Hirosaki University), and me.

All four papers presented here are heavily literature focused and, in some capacity, Japan oriented. At the same time, however, they address Japan-Korean relations, issues of ethnic politics and empire, and (hopefully) other topics of interest to our readers.¹ The Japanese empire was, of course, carried through geopolitical space in the arms of soldiers and on the backs of so-called “pioneers” [*kaitaku-sha*]²—Japanese civilians, often from poorer, rural regions of the metropole, paid by their government to repurpose land abroad and incorporate it into the “national land” of Japan.³ But empire was also synthesized, proliferated, and maintained through an ever-expanding discursive field. This work was carried out through not only newspapers, government reports, and public debates amongst the influential intelligentsia; but also through a variety of coterie journals, culture film, children’s literature, so-called “pure literature,” extensive collections of travel writing, in the space of mass entertainment magazines, and other artistic and otherwise cultural venues.³ Indeed, just

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- 1 It is with this sense of inclusivity in mind that I limit my citations to English sources in this introduction wherever possible. As my research on empire has focused primarily on Manchuria and Manchukuo, my sources and examples are biased toward northeastern China rather than Korea, Taiwan, or other areas historically under Japanese domination.
 - 2 See, e.g. Mariko Asano Tamanoi, *Memory Maps: The State and Manchuria in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), Chapter 2.
 - 3 See, e.g., Kimberly T. Kono, *Romance, Family, and Nation in Japanese Colonial Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), chapter 5; Hanae Kurihara

as in the more widely studied case of the British Empire, literature often operated as a tool of the Japanese Empire, giving both impetus for colonial expansion and justification for its benevolent rule over ostensibly benighted subalterns.⁴ (And, needless to say, in other cases offered critique of that same empire.) Where the esteemed statesman Nitobe Inazo presented speeches to the United Nations espousing the civilization and enlightenment his native empire brought to the so-called primitive peoples of Formosa (Taiwan), novelists and poets spilled much ink depicting the native residents of the South Sea islands as “savages” [*yaban*] categorized into discrete “cultural levels” [*mindō*] based on their proximity to Japanese modernity.⁵ Even the undisputed giant of modern Japanese literature, Natsume Sōseki himself seemed generally supportive of the Japanese imperial project on the Asian mainland and compared the continental Chinese encountered on his tour of Manchuria to insects.⁶

On the other hand, the operation of empire is rife with self-contradiction and ambiguity, and not all Japanese were equally complicit or subjective in their participation in the empire.⁷ As Jean Paul Sarte so

Kramer, “Film Forays of the South Manchuria Railway Company,” *Film History* 24, no. 1 (2012): 97–113; Kawamura Minato, “Popular Orientalism and Japanese Views of Asia,” in *Reading Colonial Japan: Text, Context, and Critique*, eds. Helen J. S. Lee and Michele Mason (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 271–298.

- 4 See, e.g. Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Litearture: Migrant Metaphors*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Mary Ellis Gibson, “Introduction,” *Anglophone Poetry in Colonial India, 1780–1913: A Critical Anthology*, 1–29 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011).
- 5 Nitobe Inazo, “Japan as a Colonizer,” *The Journal of Race Development* 2, no. 4 (1912): 347–61. doi:10.2307/29737924; Robert Thomas Tierney, *Tropics of Savagery: The Culture of Japanese Empire in Comparative Frame* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), introduction.
- 6 Kono, 122.
- 7 The same kind of messiness can be observed in the literature of British empire as well, for which reason Boehmer rejects a simplistic “center/periphery” paradigm of empire. Elleke Boehmer, “Introduction,” *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Coloni-*

presciently describes in his essay on the “colonial system,” colonialism engenders a tripartite structure of unequal economic relations not unlike the mercantilism familiar to students of US history: subalterns and continental resources were both squeezed by the colonists, whose production served to prop up the economy of the metropole.⁸ Herbert Bix’s research on the economy of quasi-occupied Manchuria between the years 1900–1931 supports a similar understanding of the later imperial age in East Asia. Specifically, he identifies a division in economic mode between the subaltern “traditional economy” and the Japanese “modern economy.” The resulting system simultaneously posed Japanese Manchuria as a market for excess Japanese goods while forcibly maintaining the non-modern economy for everyone else.⁹ In such a system, Japanese colonists were, in many cases, simultaneously purveyors (or, in Jun Uchida’s terminology, “brokers”) and victims of empire.¹⁰

Literature identified these contradictions, and was also used to resist empire, explore the ambiguities in status and identity born of the colonial system, and to sympathize with the plight of the subalterns who bore the weight of the system on their backs. Karen Thornber describes these unequal exchanges across contact zones as “transculturation”—flux, affirmation, critique, resistance, collaboration, and acquiescence—and identifies what she terms “artistic contact nebulae” through which colonial and colonized writers and artists together navigated these transculturations.¹¹

al Literature 1870–1918, xv–xxxvi (New York: Oxford, 1998), xxi.

8 Jean-Paul Sartre, “Colonialism is a System” *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, 9–19, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (New York: Routledge, 2001 [1964]).

9 Herbert P. Bix, “Japanese Imperialism and the Manchurian Economy, 1900–31,” *The China Quarterly* 51 (1972): 425–43.

10 See, e.g. Louise Young, *Japan’s total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (California: University of California Press, 1998), Chapter 1; Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876–1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

11 Karen Laura Thornber, *Empire of Texts in Motion: Chinese, Korean, and Taiwan-*

Such cultural producers included Aoki Minoru, who sympathized with continental Chinese and wrote a series of so-called “Manchurian works” from their perspective critical of the Manchukuo government’s idealistic representations of ethnic relations.¹² The nine-author anthology *Miyaohoi*, edited by Asami Fukashi, also contains numerous works depicting the various plights of Manchurian residents of all backgrounds, emphasizing the darker realism and humanity of their lives.¹³

My point is that within this colonial system existed a complex network of unequal relations more complicated than a simple duality of colonizer-colonized, or even of a two-dimensional map of concentric circles radiating from the imperial seat in Kyoto. Rather, the imbalance of these relations was highly contextual, often based in ethnic, racial, or gender-oriented prejudice.¹⁴ The four papers collected here each contributes to illuminating some of such details in the broad tapestry of Japanese imperial history.

Ozaki’s paper, “The Politicality of *Modern Japan: Korea Editions*’ Use of Korean Literature” is ostensibly the most literary of the four, as it constitutes one of the first comprehensive English-language introductions to the popular entertainment magazine *Modern Japan*. Her article provides background on the conditions of the magazine’s founding, paying special attention to the head editor, Ma Haesong’s influence over its direction. After describing its position in the mass-entertainment market and aesthetic concept of “the modern,” she turns her focus to the tenth-anniversary editions, both referred to as the “Korea Editions” (Chōsen ban), as their entire focus fell on providing a (largely propagandistic) look

ese Transculturations of Japanese Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), Introduction.

12 Aoki Minoru, *Manshū nite* (Japan: Sakubun-sha, 1980).

13 Asami Fukashi, ed., *Miyaohoi: Manshū sakka kyūnin shū* (Japan: Yumani shobō, 2000 [1940]).

14 For such an intersectional analysis of female Chinese writers in Manchukuo, see Norman Smith, *Resisting Manchukuo: Chinese Women Writers and the Japanese Occupation* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).

at the status quo of the Chōsen (Korean) peninsula. Ozaki indicates the strange juxtaposition between voices of the Japanese state—articles by and interviews with such personages as Konoe Fumimaro, a former member of the cabinet of the Japanese prime minister, and Minami Jirō, the governor-general of occupied Korea—and literary works ostensibly aimed at a mass-consumption audience. Yet, as she carefully demonstrates in a close reading of Pak T'aewŏn's short story "A Street Darkly" (Michi ha kuraki wo), the editions contained works by highly skilled and leading-edge Korean writers tapping into both universally-recognized modernist themes and the specific conditions of occupied Korea.

Lambrecht's paper, "Missing Keystones: Echoes of Empire in Kobayashi Masaru's 'Bridge Building,'" by contrast, is not specifically about contemporary reactions to the occupation. Rather, it treats the postwar period as an extension of empire as it continued to reverberate and "echo" throughout the lives of Japanese colonial repatriates. Through a close reading of Kobayashi Masaru's Akutagawa Prize-nominated short story "Bridge Building" (Kakyō, 1960), he demonstrates how empire did not end as the last repatriation boats withdrew from the shores of the continent. The effects of empire continue to play out in Kobayashi's mind, and he gives voice to this struggle in his writing. "Bridge Building" pairs a Japanese repatriate and a *zainichi* [Japanese-resident] Korean in a plot to sabotage a shipment of US supplies leaving Japan to support the Korean War. While Kobayashi's protagonist sympathizes with the plight of the Japanese-resident Koreans and attempts to join their political struggle, he ultimately must come to an understanding that there is an irreconcilable gulf of historical and personal experience between them. Thus, Lambrecht argues that this story challenges the postwar narratives of Japanese repatriate victimhood and that the effectiveness of Kobayashi's critique perhaps resulted in the lack of critical and academic attention paid to his work, and this story in particular.

Tanaka's paper, "Hansen's Disease and Empire in Patient Writing from Colonial Taiwan's Sanatorium, 1934–1944," focuses on the imperialization of medical institutions as kinds of "affective imperial communities,"

like artistic contact nebulae, drawing connections throughout the empire. The paper focuses on poems published in *Papaya*, the institutional publication of the Rakusei Sanatorium for Lepers in Taiwan, in addition to writing from Manchukuo and colonized Korea. Tanaka argues that poetry—the short Japanese *tanka* verse in particular—was a medium of self-expression comparatively accessible to non-native Japanese speakers throughout the colonies, and therefore an effective tool for generating and engaging with a polyvocal colonial identity. Through a series of close readings of her artful translations, focusing on both thematic content and linguistic and orthographic detail, she demonstrates a contiguity of experience shared by patients interned in disparate institutions and argues that this literary communication created affective community among the writers and readers. At the same time, writing patient life and engaging in “leprosy relief” often worked in service of empire as they arose in response to imperial discourse and created meaning and belonging within that context.

Finally, my paper—Solomon, “Remnants of Manshūkoku (Manchukuo): Imamura Eiji, Korean Identity under Japanese Imperialism, and Postcolonial Asian Studies”—examines the literary production of Imamura Eiji (1911–?) while examining the ways in which his life and personal identity have been reappropriated in contemporary scholarship. Imamura, an ethnic Korean born and raised under Japanese occupation, was active in the Japanese-language literary establishment of Manchukuo. His most well-received story, “Travel Companions,” clearly articulates his grappling with a liminal—or perhaps “transculturated”—subjectivity. Yet, the little contemporary scholarly work on Imamura that exists in English, Japanese, and Chinese tends to project ethnic identity and meaning onto him rather than appreciate the complexity and contradictions of his own writing. I aim for a more careful and critical reading of his work, as an example of minor literary style, while also contextualizing it through another of his short stories, “New Womb,” introducing it to English readers for the first time.

The paper also attempts to tie some of the themes raised by my col-

leagues together. Ozaki's and my papers take up literary engagements with ethnic identity, both identifying the "performance" of Japanese identity by ethnic Koreans but to widely differing effect. Tanaka's and mine both address issues of the creation of imperial subjects (*kōminika*, in Japanese) through institutionalization of medicine and education. Similarly, Lambrecht and I both investigate the multilayered unevenness of the experience of empire.

Combined, these papers give a broad view of Japanese empire spread across diachronic time and from a multiplicity of perspectives. All of them use literature as a mirror to reflect experiences grounded in a historical moment, while addressing the growing body of contemporary scholarship on their various topics. In this way, they are relevant and original scholarship, and I hope they can offer some unfamiliar perspectives to the presumably historiographically-minded regular readers of this journal, and perhaps also attract new audiences as well.

Sincerely,
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