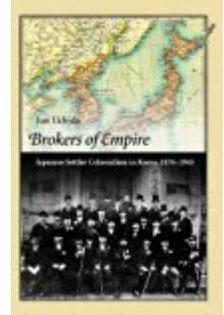


**Jun Uchida.** *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876-1945.* Harvard East Asian Monographs Series. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011. xvi + 481 pp. \$49.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-06253-5.



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Throughout history, the project of empire has always involved an unequal dispersal of power. Few empires have been so elaborately stratified as that of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan, however. Not only did Japan's overseas expansion give rise to a hierarchical colonizer-colonized relationship, but the Japanese Empire also found itself in a subordinate position in the global imperial competition. This led to a complex dynamic whereby the Japanese fostered a victim consciousness at the same time as Japan victimized its neighbors, leading to a paradoxically "anti-imperial imperialism."<sup>[1]</sup>

In spite of these complexities, Jun Uchida asserts that this is not the full picture. It is also necessary for historians to distinguish between the roles of the state and settlers in Japan's imperialism: "To conflate settlers and state as fellow 'colonizers' is to miss the messy nature of this partnership that drove the construction of empire" (p. 137). Settlers, Uchida demonstrates, often assisted the colonial state, but not always, constituting yet another stratum of Japanese imperialism with its

own goals and interests. Nor was this all; Uchida's research also throws light on a significant hierarchy among the colonized. Nevertheless, settlers remain the focus of Uchida's study, for they "serve as a particularly useful prism through which to refract the complex and contingent inner workings of colonial power" (p. 30). Drawing on a wide variety of primary and secondary sources in English, Japanese, and Korean, Uchida's masterful study of Japanese settlers in colonial Korea treats these many levels of imperialism in all of their complexity.

Tracing colonial power relations across nearly the entire period of modern Japanese imperialism in Korea, Uchida aims to show that "settlers played a pivotal role in each stage of Korean governance" (p. 394). The book is chronologically divided into three parts. Part 1 describes the emergence of Japanese settler colonialism in Korea from the 1870s up until the March First Movement of 1919, in which Koreans held mass demonstrations against Japanese rule. In the early years of the Japanese penetration of the peninsula, pri-

vate Japanese individuals exerted considerable influence over the course of events that would lead to Korea becoming a Japanese protectorate in 1905, whether as adventurers involved in palace coups or businessmen establishing trade networks. According to Uchida, settlers coalesced into a community with a distinct identity from an early stage. After 1905, in their continuing struggle to carve out a space for themselves in colonial governance, these colonists pushed hard for annexation,[2] bringing them into conflict with Resident General Itō Hirobumi's promotion of protectorate rule. Following the annexation in 1910, however, settlers grew frustrated with the increasingly autocratic rule of the government general, which quickly snuffed out their elected local assemblies. This move infuriated Japanese colonists by placing them in a position that was too close for comfort to the status of Koreans, leading to a protracted effort to raise the level of settlers' legal rights to that of metropolitan Japanese.

Part 2 forms the core of the book, covering the period from 1919 to the Manchurian Incident of 1931. The March First Movement prodded the Japanese government to soften its strategy of colonial rule, a step that included bringing more settlers into colonial governance in both formal and informal capacities. Uchida argues that the explosion of Korean nationalism even prompted Japanese settlers and administrators to retool their discourse about Koreans. Although continuing to use stereotypical tropes of Korean "laziness" or "toadyism" as well as distorted accounts of regional history to justify Japanese rule, "the Japanese [colonial] monologue was modified through conversation and debate with Korean interlocutors" (p. 224). Here and elsewhere, Uchida dexterously attributes agency to Koreans in the peninsula's colonial history without downplaying the harshness of Japanese rule. In a chapter on industrial development, she demonstrates that Koreans and settler leaders often set aside their differences when it came to lobbying a reluctant metro-

politan government to industrialize the peninsula. These campaigns met with some success in overcoming metropolitan manufacturers' protests and presaged the government-driven rapid industrialization of Japan's empire from the 1930s. Cooperation between settlers and Koreans was often rockier in the struggle for political participation, however. Japanese colonists struggled to expand their legal rights (especially obtaining suffrage) without losing their privileged status over Koreans, who also proved adept at using colonial rhetoric on assimilation and harmony to press for increased political participation.

Part 3 examines the last decade and a half of Japanese imperialism in Korea and chronicles the effects of Japanese expansion into Manchuria, the rise of corporatism, and the advent of total war. Uchida insightfully argues that the proliferation of fascistic organizations granted the settler "brokers of empire" unprecedented opportunities to influence colonial politics, while at the same time paradoxically causing them to be "subsumed in the state's ruling structure" as they "morphed into organs of the state" (p. 28).

Theorizing Japanese settler consciousness in terms of liminality, Uchida's study reveals that Japanese settlers inhabited an ill-defined space on the margins of Japanese colonialism, a condition that deeply affected their self-perception and interaction with other strata of Japan's empire. Much like metropolitan leaders' attitudes toward the international "colonial club," Japanese settlers considered themselves victims of the colonial state even while abetting its rule. Japanese settlers' liminality was not just a feeling, however, but in many ways a legal reality. Unlike white settlers in many contemporaneous Western colonies, Japanese colonists in Korea were consistently denied metropolitan voting rights during the entire period of Japan's colonization, even while Koreans and Taiwanese residing in the metropole were sometimes allowed to vote. During the period 1910-19, these settlers were even stripped of

the nominal local self-government they had successfully fought for during the preceding decades.

As a result, Uchida argues, “at times the settlers’ efforts to overcome their marginal status in the empire ... intersected with the Korean struggle for equality to forge a powerful alliance against the colonial state’s monopoly of power” (p. 264). Settlers and Koreans, especially Korean elites, often worked together toward specific goals, but as Uchida astutely observes, “rather than mere ‘collaboration’ ... each locus of settlers’ joint activity with Koreans became a dynamic arena of contestation, negotiation and accommodation. Relations always remained asymmetrical, but in each changing historical context that asymmetry took on a new form” (p. 28). Following the March First Movement of 1919, and especially after the exigencies of total war caused the Japanese state to rapidly raise the legal status of Koreans in the late 1930s and 40s, Japanese settlers began to fear Korean gains and resent the Japanese state that increasingly seemed to favor them. As Uchida presciently puts it, in a “warped reflection of settlers’ own subaltern status in the empire ... Japanese settlers were apt to interpret every sign of Korean empowerment as sabotaging their own struggle for supremacy” (p. 389). Thus, Japanese colonialism in Korea was characterized by constantly shifting alliances between two of the three major stakeholders on the peninsula: the state, the settlers, and the colonized.

Uchida paints a fascinating picture of power relations on the peninsula, but it is not always clear which settlers she is describing. The terms “settlers,” “settler leaders,” and “brokers of empire” are frequently used more or less interchangeably, but as the book progresses it becomes increasingly clear that Uchida primarily focuses on settler elites. Indeed, according to her definition, the “brokers of empire” are “influential long-time Japanese residents who came to constitute the ranks of the local elite” (p. 91), as are nearly all of the individual colonists she singles out as ex-

amples. While there is nothing wrong with focusing on the settler elite, one must keep in mind that they are not necessarily representative of Japanese settlers as a group. As Uchida briefly notes, much Japanese migration to the peninsula was of a temporary character and the majority of settlers did not “strike it rich” in Korea (p. 3).[3] Unlike some Western tropical colonies, Korea was not merely dominated by a tiny minority of wealthy colonists who all belonged to the elite, but was heavily settled by Japanese of all classes. Although Uchida is able to present a compelling historical case even without examining lower-class settlers in detail, I believe that her theories of Japanese settler liminality could be even more intriguing if applied to the history of this group, a topic that hopefully will be elaborated in future scholarship.

Another limitation of this book is that its detailed focus on Korea precludes any analysis of other parts of the Japanese Empire. This is hardly surprising given the book’s already ambitious scope, but it is important to recognize that a different dynamic between settlers, the state, and the colonized existed in other imperial territories (not least in Taiwan, home to two groups of the “colonized”: Chinese and Taiwanese aboriginals). Moreover, each of the Japanese Empire’s constituent parts had a different legal status, affecting the precise nature of settler liminality.[4] Nevertheless, several existing studies on Japanese settlers in other colonies indicate that Uchida’s theoretical approach to settler colonialism has much to contribute to future studies of these territories. [5]

Although rarely juxtaposing Korea with other Japanese colonies, one of the greatest strengths of Uchida’s book is how it is laced with insightful comparisons with Western imperialism. Given the mimetic nature of Japanese colonialism, most studies of the Japanese Empire make at least some connections with its European and American counterparts, but the parallels that Uchida draws are unusually numerous and well informed. Com-

paring the situation of Japanese settlers in Korea with above all that of white colonists in Africa, Uchida adroitly describes how these groups had much in common but also harbored key differences, notably, those resulting from their diverging legal statuses. The last section of the book, covering the rise of corporatism and the increasingly pervasive nature of state control in the 1930s and 40s, draws parallels mostly with metropolitan Japan, but I feel that this could even serve as the basis of a fascinating comparison with Western fascist colonial programs like that of Vichy France.[6] All too often, researchers of comparative colonialisms or postcolonial theorists have neglected the important insights offered by research on Japanese imperialism. Insightful, readable, and thorough while remaining accessible to non-Japan specialists, *Brokers of Empire* has the potential to be an important resource for such scholars.

#### Notes

[1]. See, for example, the introduction in Robert Thomas Tierney, *Tropics of Savagery: The Culture of Japanese Empire in Comparative Frame* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), quotation on 34.

[2]. I use the terms "settler" and "colonist" synonymously in this review, even though the latter often carried agricultural connotations in the context of colonial Korea. Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 295.

[3]. Peter Duus makes this point in greater detail. See *ibid.*, chaps. 8-9.

[4]. "Manchukuo" was of course considered an independent state by the Japanese government and Karafuto did not possess a judiciary independent of the metropole the way Japan's other colonies did, for example. See Edward I-te Chen, "The Attempt to Integrate the Empire: Legal Perspectives," in *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, ed. Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peat-

tie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 240-274.

[5]. A vintage article by Edward I-te Chen describes settler discomfort with calls for greater rights by the colonized in Taiwan: Edward I-te Chen, "Formosan Political Movements under Japanese Colonial Rule, 1914-1937," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1972): 477-497. More recently, a dissertation partly influenced by an earlier version of *Brokers of Empire* chronicles Japanese colonists' struggle for suffrage and other rights in Manchuria: Emer Sinead O'Dwyer, "People's Empire: Democratic Imperialism in Japanese Manchuria" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2007).

[6]. For an account of Vichy France's colonial corporatism, see Eric T. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

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