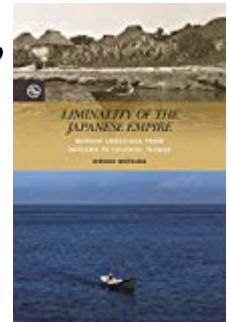


Hiroko Matsuda. *Liminality of the Japanese Empire: Border Crossings from Okinawa to Colonial Taiwan.* Perspectives on the Global Past Series. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018. Illustrations, maps, tables. 220 pp. \$68.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8248-6756-0.



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Dresner on Matsuda, 'Liminality of the Japanese Empire: Border Crossings from Okinawa to Colonial Taiwan' (2018)

The experience of Okinawans in Taiwan was unquestionably complicated, legally, socially, and personally, but "liminal" requires more than the failure of binary categories to encapsulate reality. Similarly, "agency" is not just people making choices within their historical context, but it is hard to tell from Hiroko Matsuda's presentation that either of these terms carry more subtle and critical meanings. Nevertheless, this is a clearly written and reasonably efficient book for anyone interested in the histories of Japan, China, Taiwan, Okinawa, diaspora, or empire, and would work well in both graduate and undergraduate courses.

The westernmost islands of Okinawa are about two hundred kilometers from Taiwan, and the main island groups Matsuda focuses on are roughly equidistant between Taiwan and the main island of Okinawa. This raises what my advisor, Albert Craig, called "the propinquity principle," which is a fancy way of saying that people interact more

with people who are physically closer. These geographic neighbors certainly interacted in the pre-modern past, but more anthropological and archaeological work will be necessary to reveal those connections.

The modern relationship between Taiwan and Okinawa was complicated by dramatic changes in status and sovereignty over the last century and a half. The Ryūkyū kingdom was a sovereign, tributary state of both China and Japan for centuries, treated as a sub-domain of a Japanese daimyō lord in premodern Japan and then absorbed into Japan administratively in the 1870s through manipulation of the international treaty system, backed up by substantial military force, eventually becoming Okinawa Prefecture. The Yaeyama island cluster in the southwest, nearest to Taiwan, could have been under Qing sovereignty had the Chinese ratified the agreement but ultimately was integrated into Japanese Okinawa without open conflict. Af-

ter World War II, Okinawa was a US military protectorate until most of it was reverted to Japanese control, against the will of many Okinawans, in the early 1970s.

Taiwan was largely independent of established states, though part was controlled by Dutch interests, before the Qing dynasty conquered it as part of the Manchu pacification of China. After two centuries of being a Chinese periphery with substantial indigenous populations, Taiwan was turned over to Japan as part of the settlement of the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). Suppression of Han Chinese and indigenous Taiwanese resistance to Japanese rule involved considerable violence. After World War II, Taiwan became a Nationalist (Pinyin: Guomindang; Wade-Giles: Kuomintang) stronghold, defied the unification of mainland China under Communist rule, and still occupies a nearly unique unofficial autonomy.

Matsuda expands this context to include geographic and ethnic divisions in Okinawan society that affected identity formation and group cohesion of Okinawan migrants, and Japanese policy toward Okinawa that sometimes treated it like a colonial territory and sometimes like a rural part of mainland Japan. Okinawa is well known for having a high rate of modern emigration but is better known for the overseas diaspora communities that persisted after World War II than colonials. Okinawa is well known for having suffered greatly during the Battle of Okinawa but not for its post-war repatriates who had different wartime experiences, including a surprisingly large contingent of Okinawans evacuated to Taiwan and mainland Japan prior to the battle.

It is, then, perhaps no surprise that the unifying theme of this history is liminality, emphasizing the inability of binary categories to capture the status or experience of Okinawan Japanese moving to and within Taiwan under Japanese rule. A lot of this discussion takes place through the lens of empire, to problematize ruler-ruled dichotomies in multiethnic societies with nationalistic discourses;

Prasenjit Duara is cited in the very first footnote. Though there is a solid theoretical foundation overall, there is little attention to comparative cases, which leaves gaps in the analysis. Engagement with other diaspora histories regarding "middleman minorities"—Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, Korean shopkeepers in the United States, Jewish populations almost anywhere, etc.—might alleviate the binary nature of the argument. Similarly, contrasts with other peripheral regions as studied by geographers would bring productive issues into play. There is an intriguing comparison made early in the book to Irish migrants in the context of the British Empire, and a brief discussion of Hokkaido as a possible parallel (see page 157n12 on Tessa Morris-Suzuki), but Matsuda never returns to either question, otherwise treating Okinawans migrating to Taiwan as *sui generis*.

Matsuda notes the diversity of Okinawans and the ways it was reflected in Taiwan. Okinawans went to Taiwan as soon as Japan claimed it, rather than waiting for the commercial or official labor agents who facilitated and homogenized so many other modern migrations. The ratio of commercial and white-collar workers was not typical of Okinawa socioeconomics generally, though it was largely consistent with Japanese colonial populations. Okinawans were about 4 percent of the Japanese population in Taiwan at a time when they were about 1 percent of the population of Japan proper, but the only fields they dominated were fishery and domestic service, where they were about one-quarter of Japanese workers (see figure 1.4 on page 37; additional figures from the Statistics Bureau of Japan; Matsuda often gives absolute population numbers but not percentages). Fishers constituted about 10 percent of the Okinawan presence, but the stereotype of Okinawans as fishers was strong: Matsuda opens the book with the recent dedication in Taiwan of a statue in honor of Okinawan fishers as a symbol of peaceful Taiwan-Okinawa relations. The opportunity to send remittances back home was not always a factor, as many migrants explained their movement

as a desire for a "more civilized" environment, reflecting the image of Yaeyama as a backward region, Taiwan as urbanized. Matsuda makes a lot out of "not always" points regarding common historical tropes such as emigrant remittances; it can be a useful corrective, but it is often unclear who she is refuting (see also the discussion of Matayoshi on page 11, "bitterness" on page 70, racism on page 76ff.).

Okinawans were affected by the expansion of nationalist rhetoric across the empire, which privileged a mainland-normative homogenized culture, including educational and cultural initiatives directed at Japan's own rural society. Japanese discrimination against Okinawans shows up in many ways in this history, including underinvestment in Okinawan education, which is highlighted by Okinawans using Taiwanese colonial institutions. Matsuda introduces the concept of "imperial schooling" to describe this mechanism of advancement and notes how acculturation with the new Japanese mainstream in language and culture served both to assimilate Okinawans into Japanese mainland culture and to distinguish them from Taiwanese (p. 19). Matsuda uses "contact zone" theory to explain interactions between Okinawans, Japanese institutions that were often *de facto* segregated, and Taiwanese locals. Okinawans often worked and studied in positions technically open to Taiwanese but that privileged Okinawans with normative Japanese-language skills.

Japanese imperialism was hindered by tropical diseases, as so often happens, so despite rising modern standards and professionalism in Japanese medicine generally, Taiwan and other colonial territories needed infectious disease specialists and built schools to supply them, often at much lower cost and with easier entry requirements than Okinawan or mainland education. A lot of Okinawans with medical training were conscripted in the 1930s and served in military capacities in China and the South Seas. Imperial school-

ing, as well as frequent job changing, are used as evidence of the personal agency of Okinawans. Sayaka Chatani's *Nation-Empire: Ideology and Rural Youth Mobilization in Japan and Its Colonies* (2018) addresses similar questions and sources but with a subtler approach to agency in the imperial context.

Two-thirds of Miyako Islands students who went to medical school did so through colonial institutions but many Okinawans considered them second-rate (p. 96). Inafuku Zenshin (b. 1909), for example, is quoted as saying, "Having been a precocious and ambitious boy, I was disappointed when my relatives encouraged me to go to Taiwan Medical College. I had never imagined that I would end up as a humble town doctor. However my family was poor, and my father was already dead. I had no choice but to rely on relatives to go to a school" (p. 95). The frankness of Matsuda's interviews is quite bracing, at times. Matsuda resists the label "racist" being applied to Okinawans in Taiwan who objected to being educated with Taiwanese, though it is unclear what other term would fit, or why it is brought up at all (p. 114).

The last chapters bring questions of identity into sharper focus, detailing how Okinawans in Taiwan adopted a range of tactics and self-descriptions. On one extreme were migrants who changed names, assimilated mainland language, and changed personal registries to obscure their Okinawan origin, as well as children born to Okinawan parents in Taiwan who considered themselves Japanese rather than ethnic Okinawan. Matsuda uses both assimilation and creolization (though the latter term is never defined) in analyzing the multigenerational process, as in "their imperial Japanese identity was not naturally constructed but shaped by their parents' concealment of their Okinawan heritage and active assimilation into the culture of Mainland Japan. In other words, the assimilation and creolization of Okinawan migrants are both distinct and entangled" (p. 108). On the other extreme was an Okinawan

pride movement whose leadership included anthropologically informed mainlanders with an interest in folklore.

The repatriation of colonial Japanese after World War II affected high-emigration regions like Okinawa particularly strongly, but the combination of the distinct experience of the Battle of Okinawa and the diversity of Okinawans in Taiwan resulted in complicated, emotional interactions. Matsuda's recounting also makes clear how confused and drawn-out repatriation was, simply as a mass displacement. Rural Okinawans considered returnees to have had sophisticated experiences that culturally changed the migrants into outsiders; Okinawans who lived through the war on the main island considered returnees to lack the experience necessary to be fully Okinawan; and many returnees had reservations about Okinawan ethnicity after living as assimilated Japanese. Matsuda also argues that Okinawan postwar history needs to be understood in the light of the educational and professional development of Taiwan migrants: "the life histories of repatriates from Taiwan demonstrate the extent to which postwar Okinawan society was built on Japanese colonial rule in Taiwan. For instance, many of the repatriates from Taiwan took leading roles in politics and industries in Okinawa" (p. 141). This is obscured, she suggests, by discourses of historical memory in Okinawa that privilege the wartime experience in Okinawa itself, as well as labor migration flows to overseas communities, especially in the Americas.

Despite some overreach and underdevelopment of theory, this is a valuable, accessible work illuminating a fascinating set of interactions and reactions. The book clearly and deliberately sits at the intersection of many current lines of scholarly inquiry, and should be taken seriously by people working on modern Pacific history, empires, geography, ethnicity, and migrations.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-migration>

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