

Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea 1876-1945*, Harvard University Asia Center: Cambridge, Mass: 2011, 350pp., ISBN 978-0-674-06253-5

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In *Brokers of Empire*, Jun Uchida takes to task conventional studies of Japan's colonization of Korea by offering us an original analysis of the Japanese settler community which is likely to become a must-read for those interested in imperialism in Asia. In the past historians have tended to limit their examination of the colonized-colonizer dichotomy in colonial Korea by maintaining a focus on the relationship and tension between the colonial state (the Government General of Korea) and Korean society. Adding the obscured history of the Japanese settler community to the picture and not taking for granted its subservience to the Government General, Uchida allows us to appreciate the sheer diversity of interests that characterized the settler community and how its presence very much complicated the operation of colonial rule. Effortlessly zooming in on the details of the everyday activities of individual settlers, whilst zooming out to allow us to appreciate the implications of such activities for colonial rule, Uchida provides us with a highly readable account of the development of one of the largest colonial communities in the twentieth century which numbered close to 700,000 by 1940.

Following a convincing introduction which highlights the importance of the topic and the merits of the focus and approach taken, the work is divided into three parts. The first of these three parts titled "Emergence," contains two chapters that cover the formative period of Japanese expansion into Korea, providing a profile of the settler community, their role as sub-imperialists and their early relationship with the state which turned sour when Governor General Masatake Terauchi abolished settler self-government in order to create a uniform authority, eliminating distinctions between settlers and Koreans. The second part, "In Action," is made up of four chapters that examine how various groups including businessmen and "men of letters" tried to assist the colonial government in reinvigorating the colonial enterprise which had been shaken by the Korean independence demonstrations of March 1919. Before summing up, the third part "Organs of the State" guides readers through the complexities of the period following Japan's seizure of Manchuria in 1931 in which settlers and the state grew closer in order to take advantage of the expanding borders of the Japanese empire (chapter 7) on the one hand, and acted as grassroots agents in the intensified efforts to mobilize Korean labor and resources for looming total war (chapter 8).

The main strength of the study is that it allows us to look beyond the organs of state in the study of Japanese imperialism locating the Japanese settlers as a self-interested, dynamic group operating at the ground level of Japan's expansion, advancing their own commercial interests while

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contributing (often indirectly) to the expansionist project of Imperial Japan. Settlers were agents and intermediaries, acting on their own initiative in crossing over to Korea and thereafter contributing at all levels to the redrawing of political, economic and cultural boundaries, though not always in ways that Tokyo would have wished. Though it is hard to criticize the work, one feels that in examining the settler community the spotlight has perhaps been too often placed on its elite class of businessmen, journalists and intellectuals at the expense of a better understanding of the “ordinary” settler. In some ways this focus is justified given their significance to the settler community and influence on the colonial regime, it may also have been unavoidable given that it is the elite who tend to leave behind the largest volume of source materials. However, at times one wonders if Uchida could have given us more of an insight into the world of less influential settlers especially as the work embraced oral sources which could have made such an endeavor possible.

In addition to this throughout the book, Uchida made reference to and comparisons with European settlers in Algeria, Kenya and Rhodesia, which for the large part are illustrative and useful, but are included at the expense of other Japanese settler communities elsewhere. Whether or not, a similar dynamic could be observed in Taiwan or Karafuto for example – Japanese colonies which also had sizeable settler communities and were under colonial rule for longer – would have provided an illuminating reference point from which to examine the validity of the major findings of the work. Uchida clearly has geared the work towards a western audience and comparison with more familiar cases serves this purpose well, yet when Uchida refers to the Japanese settler community’s “cousins” in colonial Africa (p. 395) one can’t help but wonder about their “brothers” elsewhere in the Japanese empire.

Minor points such as these do not, however, detract from the value and quality of the work. In this landmark study Uchida skillfully navigates the intricacies of the settler community, its relationship with the colonial state and Korean society and its overall effect on the operation of colonial rule leading us to a much more complex and decentralized understanding of colonial Korea. The decade long endeavor which the author pursued in the completion of this work will not have been in vain as the total re-examination of Japan’s presence in colonial Korea it offers is sure to leave a long-lasting imprint on the literature of both the histories of Japan and Korea, but also that on historical imperialism.