## Introduction

This reader analyzes the formation of the Japanese empire and also challenges traditional ideas about the origins and contours of the Japanese empire. Instead of viewing the 1895 Chinese cession of Taiwan as Japan's first colonial acquisition and the start of Japan's imperial drive, the authors featured in this reader locate the beginnings of Japanese imperialism earlier in the 19th century, when rising western powers created a sense of crisis and threat in Japan. These fears first led to the colonization of territories whose sovereign nature was ambivalent—namely Hokkaido (Ezochi) in 1869 and Okinawa (the former Ryūkyū Kingdom) in 1879. Locating the first imperialist acts here reminds us that some regions of Japan today were independent two hundred years ago. Essays in this reader examine how and in what ways the Japanese government simultaneously worked to evade becoming a colony of other powerful nations and asserted that it had the right to control other places.

While early Japanese imperialism was fueled by this attempt to resist colonization by western powers, this imperialist drive would later take on a more aggressive form. Japan's increasingly isolationist policies and creation of the puppet state of Manchukuo would propel it into a multi-front war, known as the Asia-Pacific War, which ended in Japan's defeat in 1945. The Japanese empire's brutal wartime aggression during wartime led to many horrors: the recruitment of military "comfort women," the medical experiments conducted on human subjects by Unit 731, the Nanjing Massacre, and the Japanese Imperial Army's encouragement of Okinawans to commit suicide during the Battle of Okinawa, to name just a few. Although colonial policies restricted freedoms and the ways in which colonial subjects could participate in everyday life in Japan even before war broke out, the advent of war altered colonial subjects' lives to an even greater extent. Some colonial subjects believed they could become Japanese by serving in the Imperial Army while other colonial subjects' experiences of war reconfirmed their lowly status in the empire. For example, some were conscripted into forced labor typically under much worse conditions than experienced by Japanese. A second example is the many Okinawans who were singled out by the Japanese Imperial Army as "spies" during the Battle of Okinawa, since the Japanese distrusted the local civilians due to exaggerations of their supposed differences.

The Japanese empire comprised a variety of legally subordinated areas: formal colonies (Taiwan, Korea, Karafuto), an ostensibly independent puppet state (Manchukuo), and territories which it controlled under a League of Nations Mandate (islands in Micronesia). In addition, as mentioned above, the formerly independent areas of Okinawa and Hokkaido were naturalized (made to appear as if it already belonged) into the nation state proper (*naichi*).[1]

[1] Although Okinawa and Hokkaido were both incorporated into the nation state some differences in their governance distinguished them from other prefectures. For example, the military conscription of Okinawans and Ainu began in 1898, twenty-five years after implementation of the nationwide conscription law in 1873. Furthermore, differences in educational and economic administration distinguished both Okinawa and Hokkaido from other prefectures. In Okinawa, land reform, tax reform, and full representation in the Diet were all delayed.

Most essays in this reader explain the contours of the empire, the processes of imperialization, and what it meant for colonial subjects to "become Japanese." These essays do not fully show the brutalities of the colonial experience, in part because some of the worst events took place during the Asia-Pacific War. Those interested in the wartime experiences of the colonized should also examine the APJ course readers, "Minorities in Japan," edited by Gerald Iguchi (2013) and "War in Japanese Popular Culture," edited by Matthew Penney (2012).

The essays chosen for Part I illustrate current trends in analyses of the Japanese empire, which consider the processes of empire building to be synonymous and intertwined with those of modern nation building. Each author uses a different lens to examine Japanese empire building, such as the colonization and transformation of urban and natural space, the mapping of territories, and the creation of new forms of imperialism that were not modeled on the empires of European powers. While these new forms of imperialism—as exemplified by Manchukuo—were influenced by the west and even shaped by that influence, their institutional framework and the rhetoric underlying their establishment were themselves original creations.

The essays in Part II all explore colonial subjecthood through an examination of colonial literature, non-fiction writings of colonial subjects, and the memories of colonial subjects seeking to "become Japanese." All the authors in this section argue for a complicated and ambivalent understanding of the location of subalterns (those of inferior rank)[2] in the empire. The diversity of colonial experiences and the complexity of relationships formed between colonizer and colonized cannot be depicted in the black-and-white terms of oppressor and oppressed. Essays in this reader illustrate this ambivalence by showing how colonial subjects understood and negotiated their place within the empire.

Beyond demonstrating this multiplicity of experiences, the essays in this collection also show how colonial subjects created mixed and hybrid identities in the postcolonial period: some former colonial subjects rejected their heritage to maintain their Japaneseness, some fiercely guarded their ethnic diversity with pride, and still others sought a dual identity as not either/or but both. Authors of these essays would agree that there is no singular Korean, Okinawan, Ainu, or Taiwanese Aborigine voice, and that ethnic identities are constantly being reformed and rearticulated well into the postcolonial period.

This postcolonial experience is the main theme of Part III. The harsh realities of forced labor and military conscription of colonial subjects before 1945 continue to affect diplomatic relationships between the Japanese government and former territories once under Japan's rule, such as Korea and Taiwan. These tensions flare up over such issues as repatriating both people and the remains of the dead, and controversies over depictions of colonial histories and war. These issues illustrate the very real struggles by former colonized subjects to receive compensation or acknowledgement of their past oppression.

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[2] "Subaltern meaning 'of inferior rank,' is a term adopted by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) to refer to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes." He defined peasants, workers and other groups denied access to "hegemonic power" as subaltern but in colonial and postcolonial studies subaltern has become synonymous with defining both the colonized and those at the peripheries of society due to their race or gender as well as Gramsci's class concerns, or a combination of all these factors. See Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2001): 177-8.

In the postcolonial world order, some former colonized people—such as the Ainu and Taiwanese Aborigines—have become involved in a transnational movement predicated upon a platform of indigeneity (the state of being native or belonging naturally to the land). As indigenous people they fight for three main goals: 1) the recognition of their indigeneity by the government, 2) a stake in the political process, and 3) redress for the effects of colonization, discrimination, or economic marginalization. Many former colonized subjects struggle to maintain their individual points of view in a climate in which various groups attempt to mobilize ethnicity and indigeneity for different geo-political purposes. The issue of indigeneity, and contestations over who has the right to speak on behalf of an indigenous group, remind us that claims of representation are often contested processes imbued with power struggles among the members of indigenous groups. For study beyond the introduction to the Japanese empire that these essays provide, interested individuals are encouraged to consult the suggested reading list at the end of this course reader.