Flow and Stoppage of Early Globalization in East Asia: Through the Lens of Pusan in the 1930s

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Introduction

During the last decade of the twentieth century, globalizing phenomena greatly impacted on world history, impressing some commentators who envisioned a totally new world. Yet others also point out that the change of the rate of internationalization in the contemporary world is in a number of ways in terms of trade, investment and capital flows far less than it was in the period prior to World War I.[1] This earlier globalization is often overlooked. In the East Asian context, Japanese colonialism was the first serious transnational wave in the twentieth century. It broke open the former barriers between polities through the revolutionization of transportation by land or sea. It was an immense force in an infrastructural sense. This revolutionization had its effects not only on the "pan-Asian divisions of labor,"[2] rendering Japan into the position of core in the empire, but also on the diffusion of such imperialist (but transnational) discourses as "the greater East Asian prosperity sphere."

Few people know that Pusan in the 1930s was the pivotal point linking Japan and Europe overland. More specifically, Pusan, the largest harbor in Korea at its southeastern tip, connected Japan with northeast China (nowadays, Dongbei, or Manchuria in which Japan's puppet state Manchukuo lasted between 1932 and 1945). At that time Pusan was known as the "gateway to East Asia." The connection from Japan to Europe was critically achieved through Pusan to Manchuria.

Despite its oblivion after 1945, Manchuria was an inalienable part of the social imagination in Korea in the 1930s. There was a constant human and material flow between Japan's two peripheries. Transport conditions were revolutionized between Japan and Manchuria via Pusan. Quite a number of Korean and Japanese intellectuals visited or decided to live in Manchuria, often boarding the express train *Nozomi* at one of its stops between Pusan, Fengtian (nowadays, Shenyang) or Xinjing (nowadays, Changchun), the largest city and the capital of Manchukuo, respectively.

Such flows were not without bounds, however; sometimes human and material transfers were blocked. This paper will explore this cross-border flow and the possible reasons for its intermittent interruption. I will first describe the advent of the transnational era in East Asia in terms of the view from Pusan harbor. I will then contend that colonialism is a Janus-faced phenomenon of transnational flow and the establishment of quasi-sovereignties, of blurring and reproducing boundaries inside the empire.

1 Weiss 1998, p. 170.

2 Sugihara 1996.

The Coming of the Transnational Era

The founding of Manchukuo brought a great transnational wave in Pusan. One sensed that the empire was broadening into a new horizon. The new Manchukuo gave great excitement to the citizens of Pusan, particularly to its Japanese settlers, just as the Manchurian Incident in the previous year had swept the whole of Japan with imperial jingoism.[3] Businessmen—mostly Japanese—in Pusan had high expectations of exporting goods and traveling to Manchukuo.[4] There was a flood of lectures on the "Man-Mo" (Manchuria-Mongolia) problem and a special column series in a Pusan newspaper, with topics broadly covering investment, exports, coal mining, Korean migration, security, transport and so forth.

Manchurian fever was fanned by the Man-Mo Exhibition in spring 1932, which was planned for a fortnight but was extended for ten more days, attracting tens of thousands of spectators from all over the southeastern part of Korea. Several kinds of tourist groups bound for Manchukuo came to Pusan from Japan. Officially sponsored by the Japanese government after the Russo-Japanese War,[5] tourism to Manchuria exploded after the founding of Manchukuo. The number of tourists reached into the tens of thousands during summer 1932. Ferries between Pusan and Shimonoseki were full from the March. Adventurers seeking to reach Manchukuo by automobile or bicycle or on foot, and some boys seeking to "join the Manchurian bandits" went up to Fengtian, Xinjing, and further to Harbin even in winter, overcoming the continental cold. Some bar hostesses in Japan and Pusan also joined in the exodus.

The demographic and physical expansion of Pusan corresponded exactly with the founding of Manchukuo. For a decade from 1925 to 1935, the increase in population in Pusan was the highest in Korea (at 74 per cent).[6] Every year the number of passengers of railways and ferries broke records,[7] having the colonial government promise to build the "number one harbor in Asia" there. Although the main infrastructure of Pusan was industriously built up during the whole colonial period, constructions after 1932 surpassed those of the previous period in terms of speed. Pusan Great Bridge, among them, raised seven times a day, became the symbol of the "gateway to East Asia." About ten thousand foreigners from 30 countries—including royal families, VIPs, and envoys of Japan, Manchukuo, Germany, and Italy—passed through Pusan every year.[8] Super-large vessels (six to nine thousand tons) bound for Europe and the USA passed through Pusan, bringing it

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3 See Young 1998, pp. 55–75.

4 Pusan had the highest ratio of Japanese settlers in Korea in the 1920s and 1930s: 38.4 percent in 1925 and 31.3 percent in 1935. See *Chōsen sōtokufu tōkei nenpō* (hereafter *Chōsen sōtokufu*), 1937, pp. 23–29.

5 Liu 2002, pp. 15–17.

6 *Chōsen sōtokufu*, 1925, pp. 34–41 & 1935, pp. 23–9.

7 The number of ferry passengers (in both directions) rose from about 0.7 million in 1932 to 1.9 million in 1939. That of railway passengers surpassed one million from 1932, reaching 200,000 in one month alone in 1939. See *Pusankō bōeki gairan* (hereafter *Pusankō*), 1933, pp. 265, 268 & 1937, p. 284 & 1940, p. 322.

8 5,821 foreigners from 30 countries came to Pusan in the first half of 1936. *Fusan nippo*, 21 July 1936.

the status of an international harbor. It also became a gateway of fashion. Young women arriving in western clothing with hats and parasols became targets for photographers from local newspapers. Mountains of Japanese magazines were piled high at the pier.

Above all, Pusan's citizens were urged to direct their gaze toward Manchuria, as epitomized in the speech of the new governor-general Minami jirō, ex-commander of the Kwantung Army. In Pusan in March 1937 he said, "Let us face the continent (which largely meant Manchuria then) with our eyes wide open."[9] Manchuria came close to their daily lives. Also, Japanese soldiers bound for Manchurian or Chinese battle fronts continually landed in Pusan. They would march through the downtown area to a wild ovation from the city's Japanese settlers. The pier and the station square were full of brass band music and *hinomaru* flags, waved by Japanese settlers, students and geishas welcoming the northbound soldiers.

The Manchurian dream co-existed with the "Manchurian retreat," however.[10] Those Japanese who went bankrupt in Manchuria came down to Pusan to stay aimlessly in crammed public shelters. The war-wounded also marched through main streets, and the remains of the war dead were returned to Japan through Pusan. After the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War there were city-wide rallies celebrating the fall of Nanjing, Guangdong, Hankou and Wuhan, in spite of the increase of the returning war-dead remains. To mark the fall of Nanjing, a high tower was built in front of the city hall and smoke rose at the Yongdu Shrine (the ritual center for Japanese residents in Pusan) in celebration. After the war deepened, there arose new rallies to support it. At every important event, all citizens paid one minute's silent prayer to the war dead. A transnational climate arrived in Pusan with joy and sorrow intersecting—with march and retreat, the passage of northbound soldiers and their southbound remains.

Integration of Empire

Manchukuo became accessible to Korea and Japan with the revolution of transportation. Astounding efforts to integrate the Japanese empire were made with qualitative breakthroughs in transportation, and many kinds of transportation competed with each other in the 1930s. This went hand in hand with industrialization in the Japanese empire, which was unique in comparison with Britain (where the development of transportation came after the industrial revolution) or the USA (where the opposite pattern prevailed with waterways preceding railroads as the essential transportation system).[11]

The whole development of transportation in the Japanese empire involved Pusan. The time of the ferry voyage from Shimonoseki to Pusan was reduced from nine-and-a-half to seven hours in 1933. The capacity of the ferries increased dramatically. Two super-large vessels of 7,000 tons discharged two to three thousand passengers each at the Pusan port daily from 1936, whereas ships had carried only two to three hundred people in the 1920s. From the end of 1937, passengers could buy tickets for express trains to Manchuria on board. The schedule of the express train was fixed according to the arrival of the vessels.

9 *Fusan nippo*, 3 March 1937.

10 *Ibid.*, 29 October 1933.

11 Shivelbusch 1986, pp. 90, 93.

Submarine telegraphs between Pusan and Shimonoseki, Hiroshima, Seoul and Fukuoka, and wireless telephone calls between Japan and Manchukuo, Pusan and Manchukuo were subsequently initiated. Manchukuo was getting closer to Pusan and Japan by air, too.

The most impressive effort was made on the railway, with the catch phrase of "Speedo-afu" (speed-up), starting from Pusan. The Pusan-Manchukuo trains kept shortening their journey times; their endless record-breaking in the 1930s was like that of a 20th-century Olympic marathon race. In 1933 there appeared an express, *Hikari* (which, along with *Nozomi*, nostalgically gives its name to one of the super-express Shinkansen trains in Japan) from Pusan station to Fengtian. The whole trip all the way from Tokyo to Xinjing by sea and rail was reduced from 70 hours to 55 hours, and finally 51 hours in 1934. The *Nozomi* and *Ajia* (Asia) expresses ran from Pusan to Manchukuo and from Dalian to Xinjing respectively. The ambitious goal of reaching Xinjing from Tokyo in 35 hours was set. Slogans such as "breakfast in Pusan, dinner in Andong (near the Yalu river in Manchukuo)" appeared, with the high-speed train *Akatsuki* flying from Pusan to Seoul in eight hours by the end of 1936. In 1939, deluxe trains, *Tairiku* and *Kōa* ran between Pusan station and Beijing, connecting Pusan to the Chinese continent over Manchuria. There were speed races everywhere. Trains and ferries connected Japan, Korea, Manchukuo and the Chinese continent at an amazing speed. Pusan was the pivotal point.

The Manchurian Exodus

Owing to the revolution in transportation, Manchuria became part of daily life not just in Pusan, but throughout the whole of Korea. The most important happenings in Manchukuo were reported in Korea.[12] The Manchurian boom that hit the Japanese society in the early 1930s came to the whole of Korea in the second half of the 1930s. Newspapers and magazines took the lead, with numerous articles, columns, travel accounts and analyses of political matters in Manchuria. Films were made and hundreds of songs written about Manchuria,[13] and a number of writers visited Manchukuo or moved there to live.[14] Manchuria provided a broad spectrum for them.

An exodus of Koreans to Manchuria occurred in the late 1930s. In Korean historiography, Korean migration to Manchuria has so far been explained in terms of such structural factors as the deprivation of land of Koreans by the colonial government (in the aftermath of the Grand Cadastral Survey in the 1910s in order to provide land for Japanese settlers), the industrialization of Manchuria which absorbed labor from Korea, or a tactic to divert Korean migrants bound for Japan in order to protect Japanese labor markets.[15] One problem with these explanations is that they cannot account for the exact timing and

12 *Maeil shinbo*, 22 June 1936; *Shengjing shibao*, 20 June 1936.

13 These showed up in pro-government magazines. One exemplary film was *Pokjimanri* (Blessed land of ten thousand kilometers). There was a song with the same name. See Kim Chŏl 2002, pp. 149–50.

14 A gigantic figure in the Korean literary history, Choi Namsŏn joined the faculty of Jianguo University in Manchukuo. See Allen 1990, p. 788. The Korean novelists who settled in Manchuria were Kang Kyŏng'ae, An Sugil, Pak Yŏng'jun and Yŏm Sang'sŏp.

15 See Grajdanzev 1944, p. 76; Chung 1966, p. 27; Cumings 1981, p. 55.

the sudden increase in the Korean population in the latter half of the 1930s.[16]

Korean newspapers suddenly began to beat the migration drum in 1936, with special series on Manchuria. It was a natural disaster that triggered this. The catalyst severely hit the southern regions in successive seasons, and offered the colonial government a chance to fulfill its old idea of transferring idle labor to Manchuria. Almost every summer from 1933, flooding attacked these regions. The disaster in 1936 was gigantic, affecting "one million sufferers" and leading to replacement of the governor-general, the superintendent governor-general and the police chief of the most afflicted province. In the case of Koryŏng-gun, which was entirely destroyed, people "ate the roots of herbs and the bark of trees."[17] The colonial government acknowledged the disaster as the worst since the annexation of Korea.

Manchuria was seen by the government as the ultimate solution, and peasants afflicted by the floods were induced to migrate there. Most peasants in Mil'yang-gun, for instance, told reporters that they "would rather go over to Manchuria" than stay and rebuild.[18] The Korean-Manchurian Colonization Company was finally launched, with the grand plan of sending ten thousand households to Manchurian each year for 15 years. With this announcement, the wind of migration swept through the whole of Korea. The first project of the company began in spring 1937, sending two to three thousand families each year until the demise of Manchukuo. In a strict and organized way, the Korean and Manchukuo governments dispatched and received Korean peasants through the company, providing transportation and allotting permits to people in each province of Korea. Finally, about 0.7 million Koreans (including the "frontier migrants") went over to Manchuria in the 1930s, most of them (over half a million) in the latter half of the 1930s, making their number over two million in 1945.[19] They became omnipresent in Manchukuo. There were all kinds: anti-Japanese fighters and collaborators, "frontier migrants" and wanderers, ordinary farmers, opium dealers, and smugglers. Manchuria became their El Dorado.

The Borderline between Manchukuo and Korea

While the boundary between Manchukuo and colonial Korea for human flow was porous, that for material flow was less permeable. Customs officials on both sides busily checked all outgoing and incoming goods. Vigilance on the Manchukuo side was intense, and its officials searched Korean goods and smugglers tenaciously. On one occasion Manchukuo officials in the Andong office hunted down Korean smugglers and murdered them with clubs; this became a diplomatic concern on both sides.[20]

Both sides also fought fiercely over the jurisdiction of the so-called Japan Sea Route

16 The increase in the number of Koreans in the whole Manchuria (Manchukuo plus adjunct regions of the South Manchuria Railway) was greatest in the latter half of the 1930s. The increase rate was 16 percent in 1915–20; 15.7 percent in 1920–25; 14.1 percent in 1925–30; 36.1 percent in 1930–35; and 75.5 percent in 1935–40. Kimura and Kōno, 2004, vol.6, p. 82, table 9.

17 *Maeil shinbo*, 21 August 1936.

18 Ibid., 22 August 1936.

19 *Kangde qinian linshiguoshi diaocha*, 1940, p. 422; Li 2002, p. 58.

20 *Fusan nippo*, 16 July 1935.

(connecting the three new ports in northern Korea and cities in Japan along the sea between Korea and Japan). While Manchukuo's Southern Manchuria Railway Company was initially in charge of managing the three ports (Ung'ki, Najin and Chŏngjin) and a new railway between Jilin and Hoeryŏng , most of these ports had been taken by the Korean side by 1940. Korean government-general also frustrated Manchukuo's proposal to establish its own customs offices in these cities, designed to bypass double-checking procedures on both sides.[21]

Above all, one might observe that Manchukuo refused to belong to the hierarchy of the Wallersteinian world system theory with Japan as the producer of sophisticated manufactured goods, colonial Korea specializing in basic, unsophisticated industries, and Manchuria (including China after the Sino-Japanese War) furnishing raw materials.[22] The material flow between Korea and Manchukuo deviated sharply from the classic form of this theory. Few Korean firms sent branches to Manchukuo to obtain raw materials or cheap labor. Korea hardly had a semi-peripheral advantage (that is, exporting manufactured goods and importing agricultural or marine products) *vis-à-vis* Manchukuo.[23] Korea generally faced a trade deficit in its economic relationship with Manchuria for about thirty years.[24]

Furthermore, Manchukuo maintained firm tariff barriers toward Japan and Korea. In spite of the vociferous demands of businessmen in Japan and Korea and several high-level meetings of all three authorities, the Manchukuo government would not lower its tariffs on exports from Japan and Korea, and indeed sometimes raised them. The Korean government-general retaliated toward millet and apple shipments from Manchukuo, for example, when Manchukuo levied a 20 to 70 percent tariff on Korean socks and timber in November 1933.[25] The Manchukuo government took the issue of tariffs seriously. One reason is that a decision to make Japanese and Korean products duty-free would drain its budget. From the beginning, the government was steadfast in its position that tariffs were an important revenue source.[26] The Manchukuo side was also afraid that preferential levies for Japanese and Korean products would incite Western powers to retaliate towards Japanese exports.[27]

Ultimately, the sovereign state form of Manchukuo was also a constraint; that is to say, it was feared that Western powers would confirm Manchukuo as merely a Japanese colony. The independent state form of Manchukuo was not a simple matter. Among several colonial or puppet states in the extensive Japanese empire, Manchukuo was the most

21 Tanaka 2004, pp. 143–55.

22 Eckert 1991, p. 115.

23 For instance, Korea exported sugar, cotton, rayon and timber to and imported sorghum, soy bean, sugar, coal and fertilizer from Manchukuo. The two exchanged timber, sugar, steel, fertilizer and soy beans in 1937. See Schumpeter 1940, p. 295.

24 Korea had a trade surplus with Manchuria for the seven years from 1914 to 1945, mostly related to the special boom of the Sino-Japanese War. See Yamamoto 1997, pp. 142–43.

25 *Pusan nippo*, 18 November 1933.

26 Ibid., 15 July 1932.

27 Tanaka 1996, p. 121.

cantankerous, often conflicting with Tokyo.[28] Its sovereign state form exercised several functions.[29] One of them was contribution to the autonomy of state-builders of Manchukuo *vis-à-vis* Tokyo. In its earliest stage, they exploited the quasi-independent form, when resisting the directives from Tokyo. Hence, in spite of several tariff amendments, Korean and Japanese products could not pass the Manchukuo trade barrier smoothly until 1944, when the tariff was abolished in the final stage of the Pacific War.[30] Until then, there was a borderline of substance between Korea and "sovereign" Manchukuo.

Conclusion

The perspective of Pusan Harbor reveals an early transnational wave in Korea in the twentieth-century. The Japanese empire opened a new era in Korean history by absorbing a new periphery, breaking open inner barriers with its powerful arsenal of trains, ferries, and telecommunications. The compressed speed of Japan's drive for competition in the world capitalist system reflects its late-comer imperialism. Pusan harbor became the "gateway to East Asia," connecting Japan and continental China and finally Europe. In a sense, Pusan became a "global city" (a term borrowed from Saskia Sassen)[31] in the empire, linked with the big cities of Tokyo and Fengtian—and bypassing other cities in Korea.

With these relentless innovations in transportation, Manchukuo was brought close to Korea. Manchukuo became a land of opportunity not only for Japanese, but also for Koreans, and numerous Koreans entered the whirlpool of Manchurian migration in the late 1930s, particularly, as noted, after a series of natural disasters in Korea.

However, the boundaries inside the empire were not so permeable. It was not a homogeneous horizon, but was composed of individualistic colonial states, each claiming its own jurisdiction. There were physical borderlines across them for geographic or administrative reasons, though they were not as "hard" as those of contemporary sovereign states. Basically, they functioned as checking points. The borderline between Korea and the puppet state Manchukuo (but claimed as "the sovereign state") was substantial. Manchukuo constructed a high tariff wall toward Japanese and Korean products, not only because tariffs afforded an important budget source, but also because its sovereign form mandated such a gesture towards the outside world. Korean migration to Manchukuo in the late 1930s was also under the scrutiny of both Manchukuo and Korean authorities. Some Korean smugglers also risked their lives at the border.

Japanese empire brought not only a transnational stream to East Asia, but also tangible nodes with several internal boundaries within, formal or informal. Then, colonialism is a doubling phenomenon, both erasing and reproducing boundaries. It provides an infrastructural basis for the future regional integration. At the same time, it bears the seeds of segments (or sovereignties) with boundaries drawn by alien rulers.

28 Coox 1985, pp. 61–62; Nakagane 1989, p. 142.

29 See Han 2004, pp. 462–63.

30 Tanaka 2004, p. 160.

31 Sassen 1991.

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