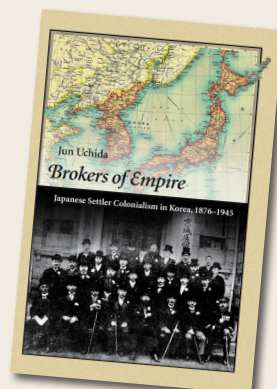


## BOOK REVIEWS

### *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876–1945*

Jun Uchida

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Shortly after the Treaty of Kanghwa was executed in 1876, a few Japanese moved to the Korean peninsula to take advantage of the provision that permitted Japanese to reside and conduct trade in three newly opened ports. They were the pioneers of a community of Japanese settlers in Korea that by 1945 came to number over 700,000 (a figure that excludes 200,000 Japanese military in Korea).

Jun Uchida rescues these settlers from historical obscurity in her impeccably researched monograph *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876–1945*. The word “brokers” in her title signals her thesis: these ordinary people acted as intermediaries in many of the transactions that determined the political, economic, and social development of Korea from the end of Chosŏn rule through the era of Japanese colonial government. This book goes a long way toward correcting a distortion in previous accounts of this period. With very rare exceptions, the settlers have been overlooked. Researchers have focused on bureaucrats, policemen, and expatriate business leaders on the Japanese side, and independence activists, ethnic nationalist passive resisters, and collaborators on the Korean side.

“Tremendous diversity”—in class, social status, income, and occupation—characterized Japanese migrants to Korea (p. 64). Uchida came to appreciate this by reading deeply and widely in published and unpublished sources in both Japanese and Korean. Her staggeringly extensive bibliography will impress the most exacting of professional historians, and she marshals it masterfully. Moreover, she writes from an informed comparative perspective, having steeped herself in the literature on European imperialism, particularly recent work on settler colonialism. *Brokers of Empire* speaks directly to researchers on European interventions in Africa and Asia as well as to historians of East Asia.

Japanese on the peninsula, “like the French in Algeria, stood out in fully replicating the metropolitan social hierarchy (including its lowest strata) in a single territory” (p. 66). While they mirrored the society of the homeland, however, settlers were inevitably affected by the different milieu. From 1910 to 1945, Korea was a space where “the colonizer and the colonized adopted each other’s customs, habits, and values, transforming each other’s culture, if unevenly and unconsciously, in the process” (p. 85). Many settlers became concerned about preserving Japanese identity, fearing that their community might fall into a “hazy, intermediate realm” that was neither Japanese nor Korean. Self-conscious efforts to maintain a Japanese lifestyle culminated, in extreme instances, in some settlers living in a sort of quarantine from the surrounding Korean society and economy.

In the “period of imperial consolidation” from the establishment of the protectorate in 1905 through the March First Movement in 1919, tensions emerged between settlers and the state. Politically ambitious settlers conceived of themselves as partners in the project of placing Korea under Japanese tutelage and civilizing it. The authorities in Korea saw them differently. Settler activists “unanimously welcomed” annexation when it occurred in 1910 (p. 115). Quickly, though, differences emerged between settlers and Governor General Terauchi Masatake over the issue of Koreans’ assimilation (*dōka*) into the Japanese nation. In principle virtually all Japanese agreed that assimilation was desirable. Settlers, however, keen to preserve the privileges of extraterritoriality, felt aggrieved by Terauchi’s professed policy of impartiality.

Throughout the period of colonial rule, conflicting notions of the meaning of assimilation, and of its feasibility, divided settlers and officials—and settlers among themselves, and Japanese and Koreans. Uchida identifies the key players and exposes rifts and changes of opinion about what was in the best interests of the imperial state, the settler community, and the Korean people. She provides the highest resolution image we have ever had—certainly in English writing—of the complexity of relationships between the colonizer and the colonized.

One way settlers enacted the role of brokers of empire was in the establishment in the 1920s of pro-government organizations with membership that was largely Korean. In most of these organizations the top positions were held by Koreans, but actual operation was managed by settlers. Uchida shows us how “settler leaders effectively coauthored [with colonial bureaucrats] strategies of rule” in their work in such organizations. Especially in the most influential of these, the Dōminkai, “the brokers of empire played a critical role in reconfiguring *dōka* as ethnic harmony, and colonial Korea as a multiethnic polity” (p. 186). Of course by no means all settlers, let alone all Koreans, were won over by the Dōminkai vision.

In the economic sphere, the government after 1919 began to adjust its view of Korea as solely a producer of agricultural products for the home market, and opened the way for limited industrialization. The Government General in 1921 invited twenty prominent businessmen, ten of them settlers and ten Korean, to participate in an Industrial Commission along with a number of bureaucrats. Both settlers and Koreans demanded more than the state was ready to provide, for instance in infrastructure building. The settlers’ positions showed that they “had evolved from agents of metropolitan capital into local actors with their own vested stakes and interests” (p. 260). For their part, the Korean businessmen acted out of economic self-interest and for the purpose of ethnic national strengthening. As in her treatment of civic organizations in which Koreans cooperated with Japanese, Uchida demonstrates that it is overly simple to dismiss these Korean business leaders as craven collaborators. Although they were working within the imperial system, often they were pushing for Korean ethnic national interest.

Uchida writes perceptively about politics in the colony, which unlike the Japanese homeland had neither system of local autonomy nor colony level deliberative body. Settlers could not participate in elections for the Japanese Diet, either, although they were Japanese subjects. Basically settlers took one of two positions, advocating either extension to Korea of the system for electing Diet members from the metropole (*naichi enchō*) or establishment of a system for colonial autonomy. Korean activists split between the same two poles.

With the outbreak of war in China in 1937, settlers, like people in the metropole, became objects or agents of wartime mobilization. For some, especially members of the Ryokki Renmei, which traced its origin to an esoteric Buddhist study group formed in the mid-1920s, the project of homogenization of the homeland and Korea (*naisen ittai*) gained new, preternatural urgency. By energetic proselytizing, the Ryokki Renmei enrolled over 4,000 members by 1941, including some Koreans who became “fanatical ideologues of *naisen ittai*” willing, as one put it, to “abandon themselves and dive into the Japanese state” (pp. 365–66). The Ryokki Renmei position was too extreme for many other Japanese residents, however. For those settlers, “*naisen ittai* policy was a mixed blessing: while mitigating their old fear of Korean unrest, its promise of equality also stoked new fear about Korean empowerment. The mass inclusion of Koreans into the ‘Japanese,’ many settlers worried, threatened to undermine the colonial hierarchy, destabilize their nationality, and contaminate their purity” (p. 392).

*Brokers of Empire* is a magisterial work. This is a lavish compliment, but Uchida deserves it. Her book is grand in the sweep of its reinterpretation and in its command of information about a huge cast of actors. Viewing the Korean colonial experience through the lens of the all-but-forgotten settler community, she compels us to rethink the empire-building process.

**Reviewed by James C. Baxter**