

Introduction

Transpacific Japanese Migration, White American Racism, and Japan's Adaptive Settler Colonialism

At the site of the first Japanese immigrant village on Taiwan's eastern "frontier," a stone-made memorial still stands, bearing the following epitaph that celebrates the "joint endeavor" by Japanese settlers and local Taiwanese to build modern settlements, agricultural industry, and a new civilization. Erected in 1940, the memorial reads:

In the Hualien region that is isolated by high mountains and a rough sea, early efforts at land reclamation and cultivation . . . failed due to obstructions by [indigenous] attacks and tropical diseases. . . . Master farmer Mr. Ōtsuki Kōnosuke was invited [to Hualien in 1910] to take charge of colonial development by facilitating the transplantation of Japanese settlers and steering local indigenous peoples benevolently toward agricultural development.¹

In other parts of the empire, similar memorials were also erected to mark the ascendancy of Japanese settler colonialism, although almost all of them are gone now, along with any trace of local Japanese presence. In the outskirts of Harbin, for example, there used to be a massive monument called a "cenotaph of patriots," which commemorated the heroic deeds of Yokokawa Shōzō and his associate, who were executed as Japanese military agents by Russians on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905. Yokokawa's contributions to Japan's victory and its subsequent settlement making in that part of Manchuria were so widely recognized before 1945 that additional monuments and memorial parks were built in his honor in central Tokyo and his home prefecture of Iwate.²

In Search of Our Frontier explores the complex transnational history of Japanese immigrant settler colonialism, which linked together Japanese America and Japan's

colonial empire through the exchanges of migrant bodies, expansionist ideas, colonial expertise, and capital in the Asia-Pacific basin before World War II. The likes of Ōtsuki and Yokokawa and the migration circuits and interchanges that underpinned borderless settler colonialism across the vast Pacific Ocean constitute that neglected history. Currently, few people, including historians of Japanese colonialism, know about these individuals, whom the empire glorified as pioneer leaders of Japanese settlements in Taiwan and Manchuria. Even more critically, these colonial heroes shared a history of immigration to North America before eventually joining in Japan's imperial endeavors in East Asia. Indeed, during the last decade of the nineteenth century the two transpacific migrants were self-proclaimed frontiersmen and early founders of Japanese Hawai'i and Japanese California, respectively. What may at first glance appear to be an odd coincidence is in fact a key part of their imperial trajectories that have been buried into oblivion, and hence it forms a central contribution of this historical study.

Japan was a latecomer in the imperialist scramble for new territories and settlements in the Asia-Pacific basin. After the restoration of imperial rule (known as the Meiji Restoration) in 1868, the new nation-state self-consciously sought to build a modern monarchy patterned after western models, especially Prussia and Britain. From the outset, not only were Japan's new leaders concerned with establishing the structures and policies that would signal to the West that Japan was not a candidate for colonization, but they also actively set out to engage in imperialistic practices. In this sense, to be a modern nation-state was to be a modern empire. And in Japan's case, this imperialism and its modernity were inextricably tied to mass migration and agricultural colonization, which the government initially experimented with in its northern hinterlands of Hokkaido in the 1870s before shifting its developmentalist gaze to the exterior of the home archipelago. Thus, agrarian settler colonialism was always integral to modern Japanese imperialism, and it constituted one of the many ways in which state officials and social leaders adopted policies and initiated reforms that were intended to both defend the nation against being colonized by western powers and demonstrate that they were worthy imperialists as well in the Eurocentric international order of the time.

Japan's imperial aspirations were finally realized when it gained Taiwan as part of China's war indemnity following the first Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895. Faced with the challenge of administering and developing a new colony, Japanese officials again looked to agrarian settler colonialism for a solution. Around the turn of the twentieth century, Taiwan's eastern frontier emerged as the first site of attempts at "private" immigrant settlement making, albeit with the full support of the colonial regime and its military forces.³ After migrating from Hawai'i to Hualien, Ōtsuki played a central role, as the 1940 memorial attests, in "facilitating the transplantation of Japanese settlers" there. Yokokawa also moved across the Pacific, to Manchuria on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War, with the intent to help Japan's

imperial army take over the land and claim it as the empire's new frontier. These individuals carried the idea of borderless settler colonialism with them and practiced it to wherever they thought was an ideal frontier at a given time. And as the memorialization of Ōtsuki and Yokokawa reveals, their migration-led expansionism most often buoyed Japan's efforts at empire making, or so it was understood.

In Search of Our Frontier excavates the buried history of these transmigrants who crisscrossed the Pacific, carrying the banner of Japanese "overseas development (or progress)" (*kaigai hatten*). Since they traversed and inhabited the colonial spaces of the Japanese and American empires, their idiosyncratic backgrounds and experiences call into question the entire premise of research and interpretation in the studies of imperial Japan and Japanese America. Ōtsuki and Yokokawa, like many others featured in this book, held dual identities as trailblazers of Japan's colonial development and early "pioneers" of the Japanese ethnic community in Hawai'i and the continental United States—the first notable hub of overseas migrant residents, whose history traces to the mid-1880s. Indeed, years before his celebrated role as the pioneer of agricultural settlement making in eastern Taiwan, Ōtsuki had already enjoyed a similar accolade as the first Japanese in the mid-Pacific Islands to grow sugarcane and coffee on his own, and he operated a sugar mill in the early 1890s near Hilo while striving to establish an autonomous "all-Japanese village."⁴ By the same token, Yokokawa was among the first batch of Japanese immigrants to enter California's Sacramento region with an eye to settling down as a frontier farmer in the mid-1890s, long before he found himself in Manchuria.⁵

The ideas and trajectories of Ōtsuki and Yokokawa exemplified a national structure of thought and practice that characterized Japanese settler colonialism, one that not only functioned to shore up the backbone of Japan's empire building but also promoted the borderless quest of Japanese overseas development in accordance with the western precedent of frontier conquest and civilization building. Like these founders of Japanese America, many early immigrants moved across the Pacific to North America because they were inspired by the success of Anglo-Saxon colonialism and economic development in its settler societies, especially the United States. Back home in Japan, ideologues and aspiring agents of national expansion shared a popular notion of frontier conquest with the American West as a key prototype. The first group of self-styled Japanese "frontiersmen" thus congregated in California and Hawai'i between the mid-1880s and the 1910s, boasting that their own agrarian colonization and settlement in the New World frontier constituted an integral part of Japan's overseas expansion. Nonetheless, white settler racism and exclusion propelled many Japanese, including Ōtsuki and Yokokawa, to leave North America in search of their own frontiers to conquer as colonial masters, instead of living as minoritized immigrants under the thumb of another race. *In Search of Our Frontier* teases out the complex mobility, motivations, and actions of those

transpacific remigrants, who refashioned themselves into facilitators of Japanese colonial settlement and agriculture inside and outside imperial Japan across the Asia-Pacific with the backing of their home compatriots.

The ambiguity of the identities that these transmigrants held stemmed from ideas and practices that fused and confused the act of moving among imperial Japan's territories with immigrating to extraterritorial foreign lands, especially the frontier of the American West. Scholars have deemed these matters almost completely separate and different, with the history of Japanese colonizers forming a domain of Japan's national history and that of Japanese immigrants being an integral part of the US multiethnic experience. In their minds and behavior, however, Ōtsuki and Yokokawa never distinguished these matters when they traveled across the transpacific; even before moving to Japanese-controlled Taiwan and Manchuria, they had fully intended to lay the foundation of a "new Japan" in the frontier lands of Hawai'i and California. And just as these transmigrants found no conflict in their pursuit of settler colonialism on both sides of the Pacific, imperial Japanese and their empire could view these early pioneers of Japanese America as their own heroes. Who were these people then? Should we see Ōtsuki and Yokokawa as Japanese Americans or imperial Japanese? These seemingly simple questions actually call for more profound inquiry into the nature of Japanese colonialism, the meaning of migration and settlement, and the accepted ways in which the histories of Japanese America and imperial Japan have been narrated in both academic and public discourse.

JAPANESE MIGRATION AND SETTLER COLONIALISM IN THE COMPARTMENTALIZED IMPERIAL PACIFIC

Addressing such questions empirically and theoretically, this book narrates a transnational history of what I call "adaptive settler colonialism" among pre-World War II Japanese, who viewed both the inside and outside of Japan's colonial empire as their frontiers to conquer and where they would build "new Japans." This settler colonialism also enabled Ōtsuki, Yokokawa, and many other self-styled "frontiersmen" of borderless Japanese expansion to reconcile and coalesce their idiosyncratic thoughts, seemingly variant practices, and conflicting identities. As I flesh out in the ensuing pages, the concept of adaptive settler colonialism emphasizes its contingency vis-à-vis an array of factors and forces. That concept also takes into account settler colonialism's specificity as a historical process in terms of where and how Japanese migrant settlements were established, who moved there, when and why settlers migrated and often remigrated, how they related not only to the colonial metropole but also to the local political economy they entered at different points in history, and the variety of ways in which Japanese settlers constituted interracial/ethnic relations with "natives" and other immigrants at different locations.

This study offers a particularly new approach to the study of settler colonialism because it addresses the Japanese example within a dynamic, multifaceted context of multiple settler colonialisms. In general, settler colonialism has been treated solely within the context of each empire, with little regard for the ways that different empires—and their subjects—overlapped and interacted. Typically, encapsulated in a vacuum of stand-alone imperial rule, settler colonialism is understood and characterized as a combination of immigrant land control; agricultural development; and various forms of indigenous oppression, such as displacement and removal, mass killing and wholesale confinement, and forced assimilation, rooted in what Australian scholar Patrick Wolfe calls the “logic of elimination.”⁶ The history of Japanese settler colonialism shares aspects with that conventional Anglophone model. Yet insofar as it was actually entangled with, or often imagined against, rival settler colonialisms of other empires, the aforementioned characterization does not suffice to explain the degree to which Japanese settler colonialism was situationally adaptive, historically variable, modally diverse, and fundamentally transpacific, spanning multiple imperial spaces through the flexible mobility of (re)migrants, as well as the ideas and practices that they carried across sovereign national boundaries. Because the United States was Japan’s chief imperial rival and the location of what its people saw as the most authentic New World frontier, that white settler society—and its Anglo-Saxon brethren of Canada and Australia—was a crucial factor in the transpacific colonial settler history of pre-World War II Japanese and its constitutive story of first-generation Japanese Americans, who also or subsequently acted as vanguards and exemplars of migration-led expansionism for the home empire.

The intertwined trajectories of Japanese America and the Japanese empire reflected the conflation of Japanese thinking relative to the acts of “migrating” overseas (*imin*) for temporary work and of “colonizing” overseas territories (*shokumin*) as settlers, which culminated in a peculiar expansionist concept and practice of *ishokumin*.⁷ More than a simple combination of the two Japanese terms, this coinage accounted for a nativized idea of settler colonialism in prewar Japan. In tandem with the related notion of “overseas development”—another common expression in the lexicon of Japanese settler colonialism—the convenient and yet elusive concept facilitated the (con)fusion of formal colonial territories and extra-territorial migrant settlements as well as their respective constituents, their diverse experiences, and their contrasting subject positions. Devoting serious attention to this nativized idea, this book examines settler colonialism as an ideology and a practice of moving to a location external to the home archipelago, of engaging in wage labor as a preliminary stage to primitive accumulation (a distinct feature of Japan’s case, as explained later), of sinking roots there by way of farming endeavors, and of building a family and consanguineous settlement of other Japanese immigrants. Rendered as historically specific processes of these developments,

Japanese settler colonialism and its consequences inevitably involved the usurpation of land and other fundamental modes of production directly or indirectly from local “native” residents, the development of commercial agricultural economy, and the rise of a transplanted “national”/“racial” community—one that settlers often referred to as a “new Japan” or a “second Japan.” In essence, the idea of *ishokumin* mirrored a particular understanding of nation that transcended physical territorial boundaries and politico-legal jurisdictions—that is, an idea of borderless empire bound by racial ties and national consciousness, even more than an actual nation-state or a formal empire.

The Japanese idea of *ishokumin* complicates the theoretical distinctions that scholars of Anglophone settler colonialism have made between “colonialism” and “settler colonialism.” Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini argue that the monopolized control of land is absolutely central to (Anglophone) settler colonialism, and hence they identify it as a relationship marked by the dispossession and replacement of natives with settlers’ bodies, cultures, and political economies. On the other hand, they explain that the domination and exploitation of native labor and resources are prominent features of conventional colonialism, in which other agendas, such as industrial development, trade and military control, and administrative minority governance, prevailed over the goal of land seizure and settler community building based on native “elimination.”⁸ According to the Japanese concept of *ishokumin*, however, these separate developments and constructs were packaged as an indivisible pair. That is to say, Japanese settler colonialism looked at its migrant laborers and settler-colonists in a similar vein within the context of their encounter and competition with indigenous residents and other “foreign” groups, immigrants and settlers included. The formative process of constructing a new Japan was inseparable from the triangular relationship that encompassed not only land-grabbing settlers and dispensable indigenes but also preexisting non-Japanese residents and other competing immigrant-settler groups. In the multi-group context of Japanese settler colonialism, the polarized relations of power and the outright elimination of indigenes/natives were neither easily imaginable nor readily practicable, except perhaps in Hokkaido, southern Sakhalin, central-eastern Taiwan, and parts of Micronesia.⁹ Outside these locations, Japanese settler colonialism differed from Euro-American examples in terms of its definitive emphasis on coexistence and assimilation—in rhetoric at least—more than exclusion or annihilation.

The anomaly of Japanese settler colonialism has to do with the timing of Japan’s entry into the global scramble for new territories in the late nineteenth century. When Japanese people started to migrate in search of frontiers, the Asia-Pacific basin—far more densely populated than the “New World” in the first place—had already been partitioned by European powers, with their settlers, industries and moneyed interests, and administrative states. Three notable features emerged from

this geopolitical situation. First, Japan's late adoption of settler colonialism meant that ordinary Japanese "settlers" often found themselves being employed by non-Japanese enterprises rather than working as independent landowning farmers or self-supporting colonial entrepreneurs. Thus, the wage labor of immigrant settlers was always an essential component of Japanese colony making, especially at the initial stage. Furthermore, under the triangular social relationship, the cheapness of labor—whether Japanese immigrants' or natives'—sustained the competitiveness of Japanese settler business endeavors, which were usually exposed to severe competition with enterprises owned by other (non-Japanese) settler groups. The exploitation of coethnic and native labor could not be divorced from the exploitative land grabs and primitive accumulation in the overall scheme of overseas Japanese development.

Second, because of the lateness of Japan's involvement in colony making, the landmasses that the settlers envisioned as their frontiers, including the US West or Brazil, were harder to consider "untouched" than in the earlier peak years of European settler colonialism. Outside of their homeland, Japanese migrants found many extraterritorial frontiers already being placed under the grip of white colonial regimes and their exclusionary race politics. Inside Japan's formal colonies, land was available for legally sanctioned usurpation, but local resident populations were too large to be eliminated, replaced, or shoved out of the settler space. Indeed, Japanese settler-farmers in Taiwan and Korea never exceeded 7 percent and 4 percent of the total populations, respectively, before World War II.¹⁰ This dilemma is another reason that colonialism's practice of native exploitation rather than elimination remained a prevalent feature of Japanese settler colonialism regardless of location. Asymmetrical group relations took more diverse forms in Japanese settler colonization than scholars of western settler colonialism have theorized.

Third, the concept of borderless settler colonialism is inseparable from the problem of Japan's late entry into imperial competitions. Although the logic and operation of every imperialism was inherently borderless, that aspect of Japanese settler colonialism revealed particularly powerful valence in comparison with other imperial projects. This point is tied to the politics of immigration exclusion among other settler societies and colonies in the Pacific basin. Because white settler colonies and nation-states endeavored to seal off the expanding regions of the Asia-Pacific to create bordered spaces for their own development, Japanese were compelled to valorize the borderless (or sometimes transborder) aspect of migration-led national expansion and settler colonization to seek opportunities outside the (seemingly) contracted sphere of sovereign influence and control. Therefore, as I narrate throughout this book, "extraterritorial" and "private" forms of settler colonialism were as important as state-sponsored military conquests and the establishment of legally claimed land territories within and around Japan's formal empire. Furthermore, illuminating Japan's response to race-based immigration exclusion, its

borderless settler colonialism also tended to privilege the (purportedly) immutable ties of blood over other bonds, such as culture and citizenship, in its imaginaries of global imperial diaspora and empire building.

This book represents the first serious attempt to write this idiosyncratic settler colonialism into the interconnected histories of prewar Japanese Americans and imperial Japanese.¹¹ Despite an increase in settler colonial/indigenous studies in the Anglophone world, the paradigm has rarely entered scholarly discourse in the existing literature on the Japanese empire or the non-Anglophone Asia-Pacific.¹² In pursuit of the domestic political imperative of minority civil rights and racial justice, Asian Americanists have generally presented Japanese immigrants as yet another group of racialized Americans who have been wrongly discriminated against under white supremacy. Critics of “Asian settler colonialism” do scrutinize the position and behavior of Japanese and other Asian immigrants relative to Native Hawaiians in terms of the former’s complicity in the oppression of the latter. Yet their critique still stays firmly within the domestic civil rights/racial justice paradigm, without paying attention to imperial Japan as the main source and reference point of a different kind of immigrant settler colonialism—a more transnational one.¹³ Likewise, in Japan studies, migration and settler colonialism has largely escaped attention from historians, although the recent works of Jun Uchida, Emer O’Dwyer, Emily Anderson, Sidney Xu Lu, and Katsuya Hirano take the subject seriously.¹⁴ Still, there is a void in our historical knowledge about the intersecting and overlapping histories of Japanese migration and settlements inside or outside national borders, let alone substantive scholarly deliberations on the relevance of the Japanese experience in North America to Japan’s endeavors to build a settler empire in East Asia, and vice versa.¹⁵

Dichotomized scholarship on Japanese America and imperial Japan, and on transpacific migration and state-backed colonialism, has resulted from the conventional, spatially organized way of learning and research. It has perpetuated the prevailing cartographic practice in North American academia in which the northern Pacific basin is divided into the domain of Asian American studies, which is locked onto the eastern half of the vast ocean and its rim, and that of Asian studies, which focuses on the western half. (The southern part of the Pacific is entirely missing.) The most important reason for this spatial, epistemological, and disciplinary compartmentalization is the institutional split between US domestic “ethnic studies” and foreign “area studies”—the artificial rift that mirrors contemporary politics within academia rather than actual historical circumstances. In the existing literature, thus, the study of the transpacific migration experience traditionally takes place within Japanese American history and U.S. *immigration* history, usually classified as subfields of US national history.¹⁶ Neither the reverse mobility out of the “nation of immigrants” nor the lives of migrants before their arrival in America constitutes a matter of concern for researchers. On the other hand, the

study of colonial mobility and settlement in the northwestern Pacific forms a research agenda for modern Japan specialists. Asian area studies have reified these separate realms of research by disowning transpacific migrants as well as returnees from Japanese America, since they once left the physical boundaries of the “area” the field is supposed to study.

Consequently, the intertwined circuits and fluidity of Japanese migration between the eastern and western halves of the Pacific have generally escaped serious scholarly gaze, and they have been narrated as ostensibly unrelated streams of human mobility and experience within the enclosed spaces of the US and Japanese empires.¹⁷ Due to their flexible movement, crisscrossing two national/area histories, Japanese remigrants from the American West and Hawai‘i to the home empire have been stuck in a historical terra nullius—one that remains invisible between the well-studied world of the colonial master in modern Japanese history and that of a racialized minority in US national history. This book aims to uncover the entire trajectories of some of these transpacific migrants without chopping up their experiences according to the arbitrarily determined boundaries of disciplinary distinctions. A serious examination of the activities of US-originated Japanese colonial migrants and settlers in toto will make it possible to explore the blind spots that have existed between the hitherto nationalized/regionalized historiographies and narratives.

Traversing the uncharted territories of Japanese American studies and Japan studies, this book presents a new way to understand the complexities of Japanese migration and settler colonialism. It specifically looks into the consciousness, practices, and experiences of US Japanese immigrants and their integral and complicit role in the deployment of Japan’s settler colonialism and its racism as well as the making of a borderless and formal empire. As this book narrates empirically, Japanese America and imperial Japan were in fact deeply connected through human mobility and the various forms of adaptation and interchange that they facilitated between and across the bounded national spaces. Nonetheless, the revisioning of transpacific migration and settlement as an essential part of Japan’s colonial history, and vice versa, requires a new interpretive paradigm and analytical scheme, more than the simple critique of disconnected scholarship.

NARRATING TRANSPACIFIC MIGRATION AND SETTLER COLONIALISM FROM AN INTER-IMPERIAL PERSPECTIVE

In order to deterritorialize studies of migration and settlement beyond the prescribed spatial framing of Japanese and American colonial histories, I employ what can be termed an inter-imperial perspective.¹⁸ Such a frame of analysis is useful when thinking about the mutually entangled relations between national

colonialisms and about the complex subjectivity that transmigrants shaped across the intertwined worlds of the two Pacific powers. The inter-imperial relations or intimacies between Japan and the United States comprised what Ann Laura Stoler calls “compounded colonialisms” in global history. As she explains, every national colonialism possessed some “modular qualities” by which to allow different colonial regimes to “build projects with blocks of one earlier model and then another.”¹⁹ In accordance with this view, there are emergent scholarship and vibrant collaborations that examine the formation of compounded colonialisms between and among Euro-American/western powers.²⁰ Yet to date, Japanese colonialism, let alone its settler colonialism and racism, has been a missing piece of the puzzle. Implicitly and explicitly, this book seeks to put the cross-fertilization of colonial projects between imperial Japan and Japanese America (as its colonial diaspora and a part of the rival US empire simultaneously) in conversation with this emergent scholarship.

The inter-imperial framework makes it possible to interject the study of Japanese settler colonialism into the global history of compounded colonialism—with serious attention paid to intimacies and interchanges of the US and Japanese empires. My approach resonates with Robert Thomas Tierney’s characterization of Japanese colonialism as “mimetic.” Predicated on Homi Bhabha’s formulation, Tierney stresses “Japanese agency,” that is, the capacity to appropriate and nativize ideas, precedents, and practices of other imperialisms to suit Japan’s own goals, which also requires the recognition of “Japanese responsibility for its colonization” instead of problematizing deviations from the western models.²¹ Seen from this comparative standpoint, imperial mimicry was not unique to Japan, for the chain of mutual learning and historical referencing involved all imperialisms, including other latecomers such as Germany, Russia, Italy, and the United States. As fellow “latecomers to the colonial division of the globe,” for instance, some leaders of nationalist Italy expressed an admiration for “the example of Japan,” which “had chosen to expand [its] empire through . . . emigration policy . . . [as] one of [its] strongest weapons.” Indeed, Mark I. Choate contends that the history of Italy’s emigration-led colonialism resembled Japan’s borderless empire building more than any other case.²²

Notwithstanding such mutual referencing and parallels, however, Japan’s colonialism was burdened with something different from its western counterparts: its ambivalent position as a “colored empire,” to borrow Tierney’s term.²³ This is the very context in which Japanese settler colonialism negotiated with its US counterpart; former and current residents of Japanese America generated convoluted identities and made politico-ideological moves, and they were able to influence public discourse, national debate, and state policy making in Japan. For example, as much as Japanese practitioners of migration and agricultural colonization were keen students of America’s past frontier development, they were also victims of its race politics, and they developed a peculiar sensitivity and an aversion to the prob-

lem of white settler discrimination. Yet once back in their home empire or under its influence, they could and did victimize other “colored” people as colonizing settlers by referencing the practice of the US racial empire.²⁴ Crisscrossing the vast Pacific basin from one imperial sphere to another, and sometimes back, border crossers of Japanese America were a key link in the compounded colonialisms and racisms between the United States and imperial Japan.

By tracing the footsteps of these colonial settlers across multiple seas and ocean rims, *In Search of Our Frontier* unravels the enigma of their identities and subject positions, which took shape variously in relation to the particular lands and political economies that they viewed as their frontiers to master. The notion of a colored empire and its settler colonialism complicates the biocultural binaries of the categories of historical agents that colonial and postcolonial theories generally presuppose. In European/American imperial examples, colonizers were usually deemed western and white and their victims nonwestern and colored. The case of Japanese transmigrants and (re)settlers, especially those like Ōtsuki and Yokokawa who went back and forth between white America and imperial Japan, defies such a Manichean binarism and the conventional definitions of the colonized or colonizers.²⁵ Depending on where they were situated, prewar Japanese had varied life experiences that ranged from being the colonial master to being a racialized minority. When they resided in the United States or other white settler societies, they were subject to race-based discrimination and treated no differently from those whom they looked down upon as inferior, such as Chinese or Koreans. But even then they were still entitled to the protection of imperial Japan, not to mention they had the option of moving back physically to their home empire to live the life of unmolested and oppressing colonizers. Thus, members of and transmigrants from Japanese America inhabited an interstitial terrain that differed qualitatively from the world of the subaltern stuck in western colonies or white settler societies. Their in-betweenness resembled, albeit with some critical distinctions, the duality of the “colonized colonizer” in Eve Troutt Powell’s study of the Khedivate of Egypt or the shifting positionality of African American settler-colonists who moved from the US South to the black republic of Liberia to serve as purveyors of a “civilized” American lifestyle in West Africa.²⁶

Migration and the contingent race/ethnic relations that it produced between settlers and locals in a given space were absolutely crucial in a context where all sorts of ambiguity took shape. Transpacific migration allowed Japanese frontier trotters to pursue drastically different life chances, identities, and roles in the liminal space of inter-imperial interchange between Japan’s colored empire and America’s white supremacist republic. In order to elucidate the contingency of subject positions in multiple imperial spheres and racial conditions, this book presents many stories of individual (male) migrants from Japanese America, despite the risk of reinforcing the masculine and celebratory nature of orthodox colonial narratives. Detailed

biographies help illuminate diverse (albeit sharing certain common trends) personal choices and trajectories; the stories allow readers to recognize that the self-styled pioneers of Japanese expansion held a significant degree of agency—and hence responsibility—for their decisions and actions. These Japanese Americans did what they did not simply because they were victimized by white racism or driven by Japanese expansionist ideology. Whereas some, like Ōtsuki and Yokokawa, opted to migrate from Hawai'i or California to the frontiers of Japan's formal empire, many others did not leave North America, despite living under common circumstances and being moved by similar enchanting ideas and forces. By offering diverse accounts of personal motivations and experiences of (re)migration, this book intends to delve into the nuances, complexities, and above all randomness of human agency that social science theories cannot predict or generalize.

My analysis of transpacific Japanese border crossing exceeds the problem of migrant/settler identities and subjectivity. It entails serious inquiry into the mobility and circulation of colonialist ideas, agricultural expertise, science and technology, labor management methods, and investment monies between Japanese America and imperial Japan. Bridging imperialisms and colonial capitalisms of the United States and Japan, versatile transmigrants traveled with hard-to-get knowledge in large-scale scientific farming and settlement making. Even when they did not physically move out of Japanese America, many immigrants also lent financial and various logistical support to Japan's pursuit of frontier conquest as colonial investors and absentee landowners. The visions and experiences of settler colonialism that these first-generation Japanese Americans had nurtured on the world's best-regarded New World frontier carried a lot of weight and reverberated throughout the Japanese empire before the Pacific War (1941–1945). This narrative dovetails with the theoretical observation made by some scholars of empire in recent years that forces at work in a colonial periphery often dictated the formation of the imperial metropole's ideologies and practices as much as, if not more than, the latter influenced the former.²⁷ Nevertheless, its peripheral standing within Japan's borderless empire alone does not explain the preponderance of Japanese America's role. This particular community of overseas Japanese had a decisive impact on the imperial formation of prewar Japan because of its integral position in the borderlands of the two competing settler-racial empires. Not only was this community's impact especially notable in the areas of Japan's migration-led expansionism and settler racism, but it was also heavily colored by the examples of US colonial ideas and practices experienced and referenced by these first-generation Japanese Americans.

Given the US residents' precarious but crucial positionality, the state-migrant nexus is another important theme of this book's narrative, which traces both complementary and contradictory relations between the two parties. On the basis of their lived experiences across the Pacific, transmigrants had specific expectations and desires about how the home state should act with regard to the question of

national expansion; conversely, the state treated its overseas compatriots according to its own idea of what imperial subjects should do for the promotion of national interests. Negotiations between state power and migrant agency were always complex and contingent. The contingency derived from a situation in which a wide array of challenges and obstacles was presented constantly by the United States and other competing imperial powers, hostile native/local populations, and the diverse political economies and their power structures. These variables differently affected Japanese migrant settlements and their ties to the homeland/colonial metropole. This also means that the state was unable to keep a firm grip on the action and thinking of its overseas compatriots—including colonists of Japan's formal territories—as Jun Uchida shows in her study of Japanese settlers in Korea.²⁸ As for members of Japanese America who lived outside the realm of Japan's coercive state control, it was up to them to push for, act in conjunction with, or respond to state mandates and policy guidelines. The best the state could do and often did was to invoke the persuasive power of the shared belief in “overseas development” to get them involved of their own volition as self-induced participants in state-backed agricultural colonization, wherein they could see the possibility of reaping personal profits.

Tenuous state-migrant relations became even more convoluted at times for another reason: neither side had a consistent or unified vision. The question of national migration policy, for example, created multiple points of contention among state officials, political ideologues, and social elites at home, as well as overseas residents, including those in Japanese America. A constant tug of war between state and migrant, and internal frictions within each side, provided a crucial context in which Japanese settler colonialism obscured the boundaries between state colonial projects and private migrant enterprises and those of sovereign colonies and foreign ethnic communities. In constructing a settler colonial empire, the Japanese state relied especially on transpacific migrant initiative and service, but it could never master them insofar as the transmigrants were motivated and influenced by their own sense of necessity grounded in their US experiences. Their settler colonialism could not be divorced from its constitutive American context, and despite the contentious relationship with Japanese America, it was that brand of agricultural development and settlement making that Japan's colonial state wished to appropriate for its own frontiers.

AMERICAN FRONTIER MYTH, RACIAL EXCLUSION, AND THE ADAPTABILITY OF JAPANESE SETTLER COLONIALISM

Mediated by the lived experiences of self-styled Japanese frontiersmen in the US West and Hawai'i, “American-style” settler colonialism served as a guiding principle of modernization projects and civilization building in new colonies of Japan

and beyond throughout the pre–World War II era. In the context of compounded colonialisms, prewar Japan came to bear imprints of diverse imperial references. Whereas British imperialism, for example, often had a greater impact than other powers in the area of Japan's endeavor to set up colonial administrative structures and governance, the US model left its most visible mark with regard to migration, colonial settlement, and agriculture-based development.²⁹ In other words, when imperial Japanese expounded on the best form for their settler colonialism, it was likely that they would first consult the historical example and modality of American frontier conquest. In the global context, such a fascination with New World mythology was not restricted to Japanese settler colonialism. Early twentieth-century Italy, for example, likened colonial Libya to a new frontier “awaiting Italian cultivation,” characterizing it as “the new America, ripe for emigrant settlement.”³⁰ Given the “similar environmental constraints to the development of [scientific] agriculture,” Russian settler-farmers in the steppes also eagerly “learn[ed] from the American experience in the prairies and Great Plains” after the late nineteenth century.³¹ Indeed, as historian David Wrobel reveals, the US West was “very often viewed in the nineteenth century as a global West, as one developing frontier, one colonial enterprise, among many around the globe” despite, or perhaps because of, the contrary discourse on “a mythic, exceptional, and quintessentially American frontier West.” The “globally contextualized discussions and representations of the [US] West” as a reference were as prevalent in Japan as in Europe and the United States.³²

The American frontier myth, and the teleological narrative of national expansion, progress, and racial ascendancy that it extolled, had begun to take hold in modern Japanese consciousness rather seamlessly from the late 1860s through the system of new knowledge appropriated from the West. Intended to inspire feudal Japanese to commit to the project of national modernization, one of the earliest intellectual sources was a five-volume compilation of world geography and history. In 1869, Fukuzawa Yukichi, the father of Japan's “western studies,” put together this compendium based on his reading and translation of various imported Dutch and Anglophone treatises, including US publications. Entitled *Sekai kuni zukushi* (All the countries of the world), the book made the idea of “frontier” (*shinkaichi* or *shintenchi*) and its “development” (*kaitaku* or *hatten*) readily available to educated imperial subjects, who were eager to learn and figure out the preferred course of action for them and their nation in the era of intensifying imperialist competition. Fukuzawa particularly lauded the prosperity, progress, and prowess of the United States—which had supposedly rivaled Great Britain and already outstripped France—by ascribing its strength to the vast western frontier and to Americans' national character, which their experience of conquest had purportedly molded.³³ “Their land produce[d] an abundance of grains, animals, cotton, tobacco, grapes, fruits, sugar cane, gold, silver, copper, lead, iron, coal,” marveled Fukuzawa, who

went on to declare, “nothing necessary in daily life [wa]s lacking” in the United States.³⁴ Progress seemed to be limitless there, he continued, because “yearly multiplying millions” of American settlers “ke[pt] on opening up the frontier land and stretching its boundaries east and west, and north and south” for further development of the nation and its economy.³⁵

The American imprint made its first appearance in Japan’s domestic settler colonialism during the 1870s in Hokkaido, the scarcely populated northernmost prefecture. Exemplified in Fukuzawa’s extolment, the popular discourse on US frontier conquest and progress inspired Tokyo officials to invite white American agricultural experts to participate as special advisers in the colonization of the northern domestic territory when the new imperial regime adopted that project as a top priority in the making of a modern nation-state and economy. In 1871, only three years after the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese government hired Horace Capron, who subsequently resigned as the commissioner of the US Department of Agriculture and went to Hokkaido with his colleagues. Capron’s party transplanted American-style agricultural methods (later called “plow farming”) using mechanized farming implements; brought new seeds for western fruits, vegetables, and other crops; and introduced livestock for ranching.³⁶ This imported form of large-scale agriculture served to mesh the Japanese understanding of US frontier development with the notions of modern science and advanced technology. Thereafter, tens of thousands of jobless ex-samurai and other Japanese migrated into Japan’s first settler colony—which was being constructed under American guidance—as armed farm settlers, who endeavored to erect a modern civilization there while fending off the threat of Russian invasion. In sum, as Katsuya Hirano explains, “Japanese settler colonization of Hokkaido was . . . outlined and facilitated by the joint forces of the Japanese state and U.S. experts and technology.”³⁷ This American-inspired frontier conquest established the historical precedent for many enterprises of mass migration and agricultural colonization within and without the Japanese empire.

While Tokyo officialdom envisioned the Hokkaido frontier as part of what Wrobel calls the “global West” and embraced American-style settler colonialism as a model for national development and empowerment, US-based immigrants helped shape the general mind-set of home compatriots accordingly through transpacific print media and involvement in Japan’s domestic politics. Even though Fukuzawa played a predominant role in associating the term “frontier” with “America” in the public discourse of early Meiji Japan, that invention was far from a foregone conclusion until later, because the popular belief in the authenticity and centrality of the US frontier went through a process of being reified and solidified by the writings and actions of residents of Japanese America, returnees therefrom, and their allies in Japan. From the late 1880s, these individuals acted as transmitters and promoters of key concepts of American settler colonialism in a transpacific