

Excluding by Inclusion: Liminal Colonialism and Malleable Identities in Rural Colonial Korea during the Asia-Pacific War, 1937-1945¹

Isabel Kim DZITAC

London School of Economics & Columbia University

“I could not hide my confusion after suddenly being thrown into an urban setting [in Japan]. What was most difficult was how the Korean language would naturally come out of my mouth”—Togawa Akio (Togawa 41).

Studies of colonial Korea are not new. Particularly within the past decade, scholars have recognized that understanding Japanese colonial rule as entirely oppressive neglects a wider range of conditions and considerations (Shin and Robinson 2001). Yet while research has been correspondingly widespread, cities and trade ports have consistently remained at the epicentre of recent scholarship. Although it is essential to remain sensitive to the ways that imperialism inexorably influenced the lives of Korean subjects in urban centres— by employing a one-to-one comparison between the Koreans and Japanese—scholars have glossed over variances that existed across people, space, and time.

Since its inception, liminality has been situated in-between acts of separation and aggregation (van Gennep 1909). According to Arnold van Gennep, liminality exists, irrespective of the cultural context, as “a transition phase” (*une période de transition*). Utilizing colonial Cheju-do (제주도, 濟州島)² as a microcosm, this article will delve more deeply into Gennep’s original rendition of liminality. In an attempt to partially fill the historiographical void of colonial Korean studies, it will outline how Cheju-do was first incorporated into the Japanese empire, then exposed to liminality, and was only after prone to separation from Japan. Although Cheju-do was considered a part of Korea, the geographical affinity it shared with Japan complicated its colonial experience. By recounting a new synthesis of understanding the colonial encounter between Japanese and Cheju-do peoples (Cheju-domin; 제주도민) as mutually shaped, experienced, and negotiated, this paper contends that Cheju-do was neither Japanese nor *Chōsen* Korean, and yet was both at the same time. Distinct from what took place in the peninsula’s urban locales, this form of contact constituted a new mode of exchange across ethnic and linguistic boundaries that I call ‘liminal colonialism.’ Seeking to better understand how individuals represented themselves and their way of life, the trajectory of my analysis is informed by the following questions: what makes the colonial

rural area distinct?; what is the relationship between liminality, exclusivity, and inclusivity across geographical spaces?; in what ways does the existence of hybrid identities refashion conservative approaches of understanding identity formation in the colonial context?

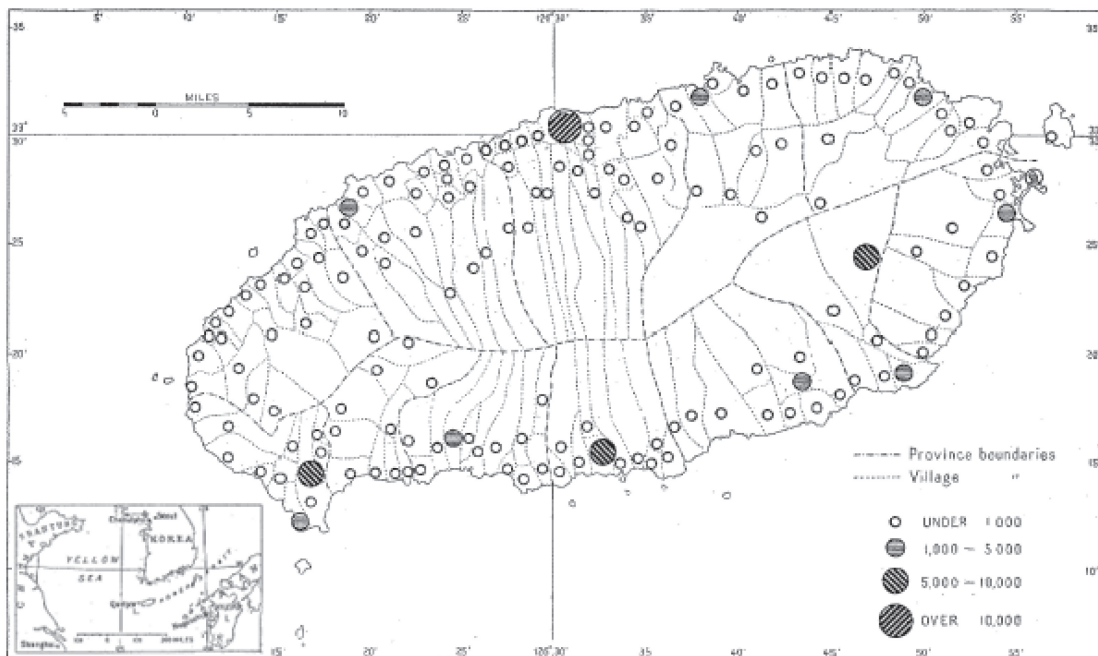


Figure 1. Population Distribution of Cheju-do in 1921.³

With the outbreak of the Asia-Pacific War in 1937, imperial devoutness was utilized as a means of homogenization. Taking an increasingly perilous role, numerous seemingly inclusive wartime measures were implemented. Policies like *naisen ittai* (内鮮一體, ‘Japan and Korea are one’) or *naisen dōjin* (内鮮 同仁, ‘Japan and Korea under Impartial Benevolence’) demanded all individuals affiliated with the empire—whether Japanese, Manchurian, Taiwanese, or Korean—to offer themselves as allegiant subjects to the Japanese emperor and his cause. Cheju-do was not an exception to this trend.

As social hierarchies of civic morality and the politics of allegiance transformed over time so did Cheju-do’s relationship with Japan during the Asia-Pacific War. From its inception in 1910 to its disarray in 1945, the Japanese had varying degrees of influence in Cheju-do. Historians have tended to classify the administrative changes that unfolded in Cheju-do into three discrete periods: 1910-1924; 1925-1937; 1938-1945 (Kang et al. 2009). From 1910 to 1924, scholars like Kang Dongsik, Hwang Kyeong-soo, and Kang Young-hoon trace how Cheju-do experienced “no substantial changes or quality of life differences” (Kang et al. 2009, 3). Introducing little to no commodities in Cheju-do, Japan focused on enforcing a firmer grip

of the peninsula.⁴ During this phase, most, if not all, Japanese goods were distributed in the peninsula (Kang et al. 2009). From 1925 to 1937, the agricultural sector was revamped and trade between Cheju-do and Japan was stabilized.⁵ Although 1925 was decisive in sustaining material exchange between Cheju-do and Japan, the affective importance of Cheju-do's place within empire became especially imperative during the Asia-Pacific War.

Year	Japanese Residents	Total Population
1937	1486	201,277
1938	1355	203,651
1939	1354	206,052
1940	1355	208,915
1941	1402	217,530
1942	1375	224,208
1943	Not available	223,200
1944	Not available	219,548
1945	Not available	Not available

Figure 2. Population Changes in Cheju-do⁶

While historians have tended to examine the strategic importance of Japanese airbases in Cheju-do or the legacies of war-time labour (Cho et al. 2007), they neglect to engage in a bottom-up history. For the grass roots in Cheju-do, increased contact⁷ with the Japanese goaded the emergence of fluid, cross-cultural exchange. In the way that national borders influenced the experiences of the mainland, Cheju-do's close proximity to the Japanese archipelago affected its relations with the metropole. In particular, contact with the sea played a decisive role in sustaining cultural affinity between Cheju-do and Japan. While ferry service existed earlier (Koh and Barclay 2007),⁸ regular passenger ferries were established in the latter 1930s between Okinawa and Cheju-do (Kang et al. 2009). Surrounded by water, both Japanese and Cheju-do peoples were defined by the activities engaged in or experiences encountered on the sea (Barclay 2009). This aspect of *kaijin* (海人) culture coupled with similar climate conditions⁹ fostered a closer relationship between Cheju-do islanders and Japanese peoples (D.H. Kim 176).

Not all individuals who either temporarily visited or permanently resided in Cheju-do were willing to establish relationships with the islanders. More so than others, *Chōsen* Koreans from the peninsula tended to look down upon islands and their inhabitants. Originally a teacher from Kyonggi province, Ch'oe Kilsong was sent by the colonial government to run a school in an undisclosed island. While living there for six years, Ch'oe perceived his experience as "exile" (Kang 2001, 73). Since Cheju-do was classified as "Korean," it may seem contradictory

that *Chōsen* Koreans from the peninsula would view “Korean” islands like Cheju-do with cynicism. Yet, *Chōsen* perspectives of Cheju-do as subordinate, inferior, and degenerate were not particular to the Asia-Pacific War. Negative sentiments extended as far back as the *Chōsen* period.¹⁰

While *Chōsen* Koreans who lived in the urban areas tended to retain a strong ethnic (not necessarily nationalist) identity,¹¹ the rural residents and Japanese settlers were more open to engaging in cross-cultural contact. Kuba Gokuro recounts, for instance, how Cheju-do men would frequently rescue Japanese fisherwomen and their children during fishing excursions (Kuba 1978, 198). Furthermore, in the rural parts of North Kyongsang province, Ch’oe P’anbang explains how after work “we’d [the Japanese and Koreans living in Kyongsang province] go out and drink together... we exchanged some letters...on an individual level, some Japanese are good people” (Kang 2001, 70). The fact that close friendships were created in rural areas beyond Cheju-do reasserts how a liminal space of identity slippages existed where static markers of the “colonizer” and “colonized” culminated into fluid forms of cultural exchange. The resulting hybrid hyphenations which emerged between rural residents like the Cheju-domin and the Japanese formed the basis of open, contingent cultural identifications. Rather than fixed polarized dichotomies, this “third way” of cultural blending spawned individuals to be, as Homi Bhabba contends, “neither one nor the other” (Bhabba 1994, 219).

The primary prism through which the colonial period has been understood refracts the contingent and complex features of a phenomenon like liminal colonialism and its repercussions for individuals who lived in rural locales like Cheju-do. Among others, Togawa Akio’s encounters in Cheju-do during the 1930s and early 1940s percolated his thoughts after repatriation. In 1940 when Togawa returned to Japan for middle school, he experienced a sense of disconnect. Overwhelmed by the urban lifestyle and use of Japanese, Togawa returned to his hometown in Cheju-do. Five years later with the sudden dissolution of the Japanese Empire in 1945, Togawa and his family were forced to return to Japan. Despite repatriation, Togawa reflects how “the simplest memories of my hometown never cease to escape me...the Korean peninsula’s southern-most lonely island of Cheju-do is my hometown...even as decades continue to pass, Cheju-do’s scent will never disappear” (Togawa 1999, 32).

Reference List

- Barclay, Kate. 2009. Ocean, Empire, and Nation: Japanese Fisheries Politics. In *Water, Sovereignty, and Borders in Asia and Oceania*, ed. Devleena Ghosh, Heather Goodall, and Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, Milton Park: Routledge.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Caprio, Mark E. 2009. *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

- Cho, Söng-yun, Yöng-im Chi, and Ho-jun Hö. 2007. *Ppaeatkin Sidae Ppaeatkin Sijöl: Cheju-do Minjungdüil üi Iyagi [A Stolen Period, A Stolen Time: A History of the Cheju People]*. Söul-si: Sönin.
- Cohen, Nicole Leah. 2006. *Children of Empire: Growing up Japanese in Colonial Korea, 1876-1946*. PhD dissertation, Columbia University.
- Conroy, James C. 2004. *Betwixt & Between: The Liminal Imagination, Education, and Democracy*. New York: P. Lang.
- Dower, John W. 1999. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Elkins, Caroline and Susan Pedersen. 2005. *Settler Colonialism: A Concept and its Uses*. In *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century*. ed. Elkins and Pedersen, New York: Routledge.
- Fujitani, Takashi. 2011. *Race for Empire Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Governor General's Office, 1923. *Census Statistics*. Keijo: Chösen Korea.
- Hall, Burnett R. 1926. Quelpart Island and Its People. *Geographical Review* 16, no.1 (January): 60-72.
- Henry, Todd A. 2014. *Assimilating Seoul: Japanese Rule and the Politics of Public Space in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Jeju Provincial Office. 1955. *Booklet of Jeju Island Census*. Keijo: Chösen Korea.
- Kang, Dongsik, Hwang Kyeong-soo, and Kang Young-hoon. 2009. *Iljegangjeomgi Jeju Jibang Haengjeongsa [The Administrative Scrivener in the Province of Cheju during the Japanese Occupation]*. Cheju-si: Cheju's Development Institute.
- Kang, Hildi. 2001. *Under the Black Umbrella: Voices from Colonial Korea, 1910-1945*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Kawamura, Minato. 1993. Taishu orientarizumu to Ajia ninshiki [Popular Orientalism and Japanese Views of Asia]. In *Kindai Nibon to Shokuminchi*, eds. Asada Kyöji et al., Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Kim, Joon Hun. 2014. *The Massacres at Mt. Halla: Sixty Years of Truth Seeking in South Korea*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Kim, Dong Hyön. 2013. Rok'öllit'üüi Palgyön'gwa Naebushingminjirosöüi Cheju [Discovery of Locality and Cheju Island as an Internal Colony]. PhD dissertation, Kungmindae Hakkyo Taehagwön.
- Kimura, Kenji, Jun Uchida, Jae Sun, and Louise Young. 2002. *Japanese Settler Colonialism and Capitalism in Japan: Advancing into Korea, Settling Down, and Returning to Japan, 1905-1950*. Cambridge: Harvard University, Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies.
- Kimura, Masato. 2013. *Tumultuous Decade: Empire, Society, and Diplomacy in 1930s Japan*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Koh Sunhui, and Kate Barclay. 2007. Travelling through Autonomy and Subjugation: Jeju Island under Japan and Korea. *Japan Focus*, <http://www.japanfocus.org/-koh-sun-hui/2433>
- Kuba, Gokuro. 1978. Amakusa Gyomin Kikigaki [Transcripts of Amakusa Fisher folk]. In *Gyomin, Kindai Minshu no Kiroku [Records of Modern Peoples]*, ed. Okamoto Tatsauki, Tokyo: Shinjimbutsu Oraisha.
- Kwon, Aimee. 2007. *Translated Encounters and Empire: Colonial Korea and the Literature of Exile*.

PhD dissertation, UCLA.

- Lee, Hong Yung. 2013. *Colonial Rule and Social Change in Korea, 1910-1945*. Seattle: Center for Korean Studies Publication, University of Washington Press.
- Lee, Sung Yup. Changing Faces: Colonial Rule in Korea and Ethnic Characterizations. In *Racial Representations in Asia*, ed. Yasuko I. Takezawa. Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2011.
- Meteorological Observatory of the Government-General of Chōsen. 1923. Zinsen: Chōsen Korea.
- Nemeth, David J. 1987. *The Architecture of Ideology: Neo-Confucian Imprinting on Cheju Island, Korea*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Oguma, Eiji. 1998. "Nihonjin" no kyōkai: Okinawa, Ainu, Taiwan, Chōsen, Shokuminchi Shihai Kara Fukki Undō Made [The Boundaries of the Japanese]. Tōkyō: Shin'yōsha.
- Oh, Se-Mi. 2008. Consuming the Modern: The Everyday in Colonial Seoul, 1915-1937. PhD dissertation, Columbia University.
- Papastergiadis, Nikos. 2000. *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization, and Hybridity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Ruoff, Kenneth J. 2010. *Imperial Japan at its Zenith: The Wartime Celebration of the Empire's 2,600th Anniversary*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Sakai, Naoki. 2005. Two Negations: The Fear of Being Excluded and the Logic of Self-Esteem. In *Contemporary Japanese Thought*. ed. Richard Calichman. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Shin, Gi-Wook, and Michael Robinson. 2001. *Colonial Modernity in Korea*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center.
- Sin, Chi-yōng. 2012. *Pu/Chae ũi Sidae: Kūndae Kyemonggi Mit Singminjigi Chosōn ũi Yōnsōl, Chwadamhoe* [The Age of Absence : Speeches and Round-table Talks of Korea During the Modern Enlightenment and Colonial Periods]. Ch'op'an, ed. Seoul: So Myeongchulpan.
- Sōng-yun Cho. 2008. *Ilche malgi Chejudo ũi Ilbon'gun yōn'gu* [A Study of Japanese Forces at the End of the Japanese Occupation in Cheju-do]. Sōul-si: Pogosa, 2008.
- Togawa, Akio, and Kenji Matsumoto. *Adūkhan Cheju* [Distant Cheju-do]. Cheju-si: Udang Tosōgwan, 2004.
- Uchida, Jun. 2011. *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876-1945*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center.
- van Gennep, Arnold. 1909. *Les Rites de Passage: Étude systématique des Rites* [The Rites of Passage : Systematic Study of Rites]. Paris: Nourry.

Note

- 1 I would like to sincerely thank the Consortium for Asian and African Studies coordinators, my advisors (Professor Charles K. Armstrong and Professor Odd Arne Westad), instructors, and family for their incessant support, guidance, and patience. This project would not have been possible without the generous funding of Columbia University's History department, Columbia's Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, and the London School of Economics. This article is based upon my master's thesis; any inaccuracies and errors are my own.

- 2 In Korean, *do* is the phonetic transcription of two distinct *hanja* (한자; 漢字; Chinese characters) meaning “island” (島) and “province” (道). While Cheju-do was incorporated as a South Korean province on December 3, 1996, the “do” in Cheju-do is in reference to the character of “island.”
- 3 This map is adapted from a drawing found in R. Burnett Hall’s *Quelpart Island and Its People* (Hall 1926, 63). The population figures are based on original data from 1921 Census Statistics (Governor General’s Office, 1923).
- 4 Policies intensified after the March 1st Movement, 1919. For more information please see Mark E. Caprio’s *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (Caprio 1999, 170).
- 5 For example, the cultivation of barely, chrysanthemum, silk; and, the export of pearls, seaweed, salt to Japan.
- 6 Jeju Provincial Office. 1955. *Booklet of Jeju Island Census*. Keijo: Chōsen Korea.
- 7 While the population numbers fluctuated over time, the coastal areas of the island consistently comprised one-third of the land area and roughly two-thirds of its population. Please see Figure 1 and Figure 2.
- 8 For instance, the *Kampu* ferry ran between Shimonoseki and Busan. Yet, no ferry directly ran from Cheju-do to Japan.
- 9 Cheju-do can be compared to Nagasaki with a mean annual temperature over a 25 year period of 16°, the warmest month being 27°, and the coldest 6° Celsius (Meteorological Observatory of the Government-General of Chōsen 1923). For those unfamiliar with Celsius, the temperatures are 60°, 80°, and 42° Fahrenheit respectfully.
- 10 For more please see, *The Massacres at Mt. Halla: Sixty Years of Truth Seeking in South Korea*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press (J.H. Kim 2014).
- 11 In their analyses of urban sites, Nicole Cohen and Jun Uchida describe how—with the exception of domestic help employed in Japanese households—Japanese and *Chōsen* Koreans rarely interacted with each other (Cohen 2006; Uchida 2011).