

Japanese Imperial Education in Korea and Taiwan and the lens of Reciprocal Assimilation

Devin Sanders

Devin Sanders is a 2023 graduate from Brigham Young University with a major in History (East Asia emphasis). Having been born in Kobe, Japan and lived in the United Arab Emirates for 15 years, he has been exposed to a variety of cultures throughout his life. Focusing on modern-era history, he primarily studies Chinese, Korean, and especially Japanese history with a special interest in the history of education. He will be working as an ALT in the Japanese English Teaching (JET) program in August and will be returning to the US to attend Columbia University where he will work towards a Masters of Asian Studies in September of 2024.

Introduction

During the 19th century, the nation of Japan underwent a variety of political, social, and economic changes, including but not limited to events such as the Meiji Restoration in 1868 and the first Sino-Japanese War in 1894–1895. This paradigmatic shift sought to usher in a new era of Japanese dominance on both regional and international scales. Japanese dominance and international relevance, as indicated by Meiji-era domestic and foreign policy, was to be realized through adopting demonstratively successful policies, technologies, ideals, governments, militaries, economic approaches, and even the appearances of Western powers.¹ Indeed, influential Japanese leaders such as Fukuzawa Yukichi believed that “the levels of intelligence of Japanese and Westerners, in literature, the arts, commerce, or industry, from the biggest things to the least, in a thousand cases or in one, there is not a single area in which the other side is not superior to us,” conceding that the West was vastly superior in its technology and perceived ‘intelligence,’ and that Japan should learn from these differences to become a civilized country.²

Becoming a modernized and Westernized nation during the 19th century was particularly defined by a nation's ability to acquire colonial territory and towards the ultimate goal of building a powerful empire. The

1 Meiji era political structures, policies, and logistics often either mirrored or were entirely modeled after their Western counterparts. One key example of this includes the Meiji constitution which acted as the foundation for the era's socio-political activity. Promulgated in 1889, the Meiji constitution saw to the creation of a national Diet and emphasized Western ideals of equality while also maintaining a national identity grounded in revering a central emperor; The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Meiji Restoration: Japanese history,” *Britannica*, accessed on March 3, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Meiji-Restoration>.

2 Fukuzawa Yukichi, “An Outline of a Theory of Civilization,” in *Volume Two Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600 to 2000 Part Two: 1868 to 2000*, trans. Dilworth and Hurst (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 41.

importance of imperial power as a measure of international influence and modernity was especially emphasized by both a continually growing United States and Britain: the two most powerful Western powers during the 19th century. Japan, therefore, sought to incorporate an imperial system into their government as a means of Westernizing, modernizing, and further centralizing their political system, placing the Meiji Emperor at the top of the social hierarchy. Policies and documents demonstrating an emphasis on gaining colonies and building a powerful empire in Japan during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are especially visible in the Meiji Constitution of 1889, the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890, and the Treaty of Portsmouth of 1905. As political and international focus shifted towards national and Imperial Japanese interests, the development of a powerful and centralized metropole, and the acquisition of colonial territory, the rhetoric that surrounded its foreign and domestic policy evolved simultaneously.

The systematic evolution of Japan's government and military structures during the 19th century ultimately led towards Meiji era armament, war, and the procurement of colonial territories in the form of Taiwan and Korea after the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) in 1910, respectively. These rapid changes all contributed to Japan becoming an imperial power, allowing it to procure land, gain access to key resources such as iron, coal, gold, arable land, and in gaining access to populations of millions of their East Asian 'brethren' that they would eventually seek to mold into proper subjects through assimilatory methods.³ Methods of attempted assimilation most notably included education—either generalized or geared directly towards the national language or *kokugo* (国語), Japanese. Imperial education was crafted to not only be administered and organized in a systematic manner (ultimately allowing for Japanese assimilation to cast a wide net), but also targeted key colonial demographics such as children and young adults that would eventually take account for the future success of the colony. Education, therefore, grew to be a key aspect of Japanese rule over its colonies, first in Taiwan in 1895 and later in Korea by 1910. Historian Patricia Tsurumi particularly emphasizes this as she states that in Taiwan “education was an instrument for the attainment [of assimilation]” that consisted of “Japanese language and arithmetic, some basic sciences, a considerable amount of classical Chinese to attract gentry

3 A. J. Grajdanzhev, “Formosa (Taiwan) Under Japanese Rule” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Sep. 1942): 320, 323; Catherine Porter, “Korea and Formosa as Colonies of Japan” *Far Eastern Survey*, 1936, Vol. 5, No. 9 (Apr. 22, 1936): 83–84.

parents, and singing and physical educational exercises to win the children.”⁴ The Japanese colonial government played to a variety of audiences to achieve this goal, thereby enforcing a rigid education system based on the overarching objective of assimilation. Some of the most important of these measures were first enacted in Taiwan, in which students were funneled from preexisting traditional schools into newly created Japanese schools (often at the primary level), information was censored and/or streamlined in approved textbooks and standardized curriculums, the adoption of Japanese surnames were made mandatory, and traditional cultural practices were replaced by Japanese cultural practices both in private and public spheres where compliance could be closely monitored.⁵ Similar educational policies would be repeated in Korea a little over a decade later, all working towards the same ultimate goal: assimilation into the Japanese metropole. Reiterated by historian Ronald Toby, the “purpose of education in the ‘peninsula’ as Japanese officialdom called Korea, was clearly defined at the outset as the ‘development of loyal subjects in accordance with the intent of the rescript [on education].’”⁶ Education as a key of assimilation was therefore implemented throughout Japan’s colonies in varying institutions with the goal of developing these loyal subjects in mind; including elementary schools, high schools, universities, and government programs.

While the Japanese Empire's colonial relationship with Taiwan and Korea was undoubtedly unequal—the Japanese Empire exerting its power and influence even to a coercive extent in Korea when it brutally suppressed peaceful protest during the May 1st movement—there were also attempts by the Japanese colonial governments and Japanese citizens (both in the metropole and abroad) to establish and maintain a symbiotic relationship and (at least to some extent) learn about the culture, language, and experience of the colonies that the Japanese Empire held. This is especially relevant to

4 Patricia Tsurumi, “Education and Assimilation in Taiwan under Japanese Rule, 1895–1945,” *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 13 No. 4 (1979): 619.

5 Among these practices including adopting Japanese names in replacement of one’s original Korean family name and observing traditional Japanese Shinto religious practices (such as worshipping at Shinto temples on a regular basis). These assimilatory practices were especially relevant in schools as teachers (often either being ethnically Japanese or approved by the Japanese colonial government) were the medium through which Korean and Taiwanese children would have these rules introduced to them and promptly enforced; Hildi Kang, *Under the Black Umbrella: Voices from Colonial Korea, 1910–1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 111–122.

6 The Imperial Rescript on Education was first created in 1890 by the Meiji government, however the rescript was once again extended towards Korea in 1911 after it had been annexed as a Japanese colony. This was done in order to both establish a sense of commonality with ethnic Koreans and to imbue a sense of greater national belonging in the Korean population; Ronald Toby, “Education in Korea under the Japanese: Attitudes and Manifestations” Occasional Papers on Korea, No. 1 (1974): 58.

education as ethnic Japanese both living in colonies abroad and the metropole would either experience firsthand or learn secondhand about the colonies that the Empire had subjugated. The assimilatory policies employed in Korea and Taiwan worked to integrate these colonies and their inhabitants into the Japanese Empire. As ethnic Koreans and Taiwanese began to enter the metropole, they also exposed ethnic Japanese in educational hubs such as Tokyo to the lives of colonized subjects in a more personal manner. Reciprocal assimilation therefore took place as Taiwan and Korea were respectively inducted into the wider Japanese empire because, at the same time that the Japanese Empire sought to assimilate its colonial subjects, Japan too became a part of a wide-reaching colonial family. This would ultimately garner a variety of reactions from its ethnic inhabitants: negative, positive, and even indifferent in nature. Indeed, ethnic Japanese were not monolithic in their opinions of either imperialism or colonial assimilation. Perspectives and experiences gained by Japanese people regarding ethnic Korean and Taiwanese individuals, now brought into a cohesive empire, invariably brought ethnic Japanese closer to the territories that their nation sought to subjugate. Historical analysis of this time period, therefore, benefits from recognizing the reciprocal qualities of Japanese colonial assimilation as it further contributes to evaluations of the Japanese total empire: Japanese citizens sent out from the metropole were indeed assimilatory factors themselves that also experienced a degree of reciprocal assimilation. Ethnic Japanese were especially impacted by newly gained ethnic Taiwanese and Korean brethren attending university in the metropole as illustrated through stories of Pak Sunch'on, Hong Ulsu, Mr. Cho, and in other situations such as Chou Wan-yao's story. The growing exposure through education emphasized the enrichment of both Japanese and colonial culture, language, and identity as this newfound 'imperial family' changed in relation to one another. As ethnic Korean and Taiwanese were pulled by assimilation towards the metropole for education, ethnic Japanese became more than just Japanese, instead becoming members of a wider Japanese Empire in tandem with their newly-gained colonial brethren.

Replacing Local Legacy Educational Institutions

Prior to Japan's annexation of both Korea and Taiwan in 1910 and 1895 respectively, both territories had thousands of schools ranging from informal to formal, elementary to university, and religiously sponsored (such as Buddhist and Confucian schools) to secular. The most popular of these schools included the *mdang*, western, and provisional schools in Korea and traditional Chinese schools in Taiwan. The *seodang*, or village school, were

traditional establishments for the education of boys ages 6–17 in Chinese calligraphy, Chinese poetry, the Confucian classics, and teachings on self-cultivation.⁷ Though some girls would be admitted into these traditional village schools by 1900, *seodang* schools primarily consisted of male pupils and were also exclusively taught by male teachers.⁸ Western schools in Korea were comparatively few—though they began rapidly expanding until the Japanese annexed the peninsula—and would also be pressured and (although rarely) closed under the Japanese government-general throughout the colonial occupation (1910–1945). The education that existed prior to Japanese colonization was not centralized and could therefore be controlled (explicitly by controlling teaching materials, strictly monitoring the actions and statements of teachers, and requiring certain classes to be taught in Japanese), or inhibited once the Japanese government-general had been established by 1910. There were, however, some aspects of choice despite Japanese control of education as *seodang* “continued to be the most common schools” as they, according to Hildi Kang “posed no threat to the new rulers, for in them students learned only time-honored Chinese classics and Confucian ideals of hierarchy and loyalty” that coincided with the Japanese Empire’s goals of assimilation through education and establishing cultural and ideological commonalities.⁹ Schools such as the *seodang* that could work to the Japanese Empire’s advantage would thereby either be incorporated into the Japanese assimilatory process or tolerated as “by 1910 Koreans could choose among modern schools built by Koreans, by newly arrived missionaries, or by the Japanese.”¹⁰

Taiwanese traditional schools were similar in their scope, purpose, and in their reception by the Japanese colonial government during the island’s occupation. Indeed, Chinese traditional schools in Taiwan also focused on the Confucian classics—specifically the *Analects*—and were primarily comprised of young and young-adult boys. Both traditional education systems were not only similar to one another but also similar, and therefore compatible, to Japanese education as establishments grounded in Confucian principles that used (although to varying degrees), the same writing script. Public discourse during the 1920s regarding Japanese colonial assimilation illustrated in accounts such

7 Matthew Burt, “Education Inequality in the Republic of Korea: Measurement and Causes,” *BYU Sigma: Journal of Political and International Studies*, Vol. 24 (January 2006): 3.

8 Burt, “Education Inequality in the Republic of Korea,” 3; Yi Myonggu and William A. Douglas, “Korean Confucianism Today,” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 40 (April 1967): 55.

9 Hildi Kang, *Under the Black Umbrella*, 37.

10 Kang, *Under the Black Umbrella*, 37.

as *Taiwan dōkasaku ron* (On the assimilative policy in Taiwan 台灣同化策論) by Shibata Sunao particularly emphasize the importance of focusing on these principles held in common. As summarized by historian Fong Shiaw-Chian, Sunao states that “the ideals of Confucianism had been incorporated into the Japanese ‘national essence’ (*kokutai* 國體) and that their promotion would contribute to assimilation,” reiterating the importance of “the government-general to coordinate the efforts of several civilian associations to change old customs” and even promoting “the learning of the Japanese language” as a key means of assimilation.¹¹ This contemporary discourse illustrates that there was significant involvement of ethnic Japanese in the conversation of their nation’s imperial aspirations while also demonstrating the unifying nature of assimilation built on a foundation of a cohesive, Confucian international identity. Though the traditional content of these schools were similar, there were far fewer schools available in Taiwan in its early colonization as compared to Korea. This likely benefited the goal of the Japanese Empire to assimilate its ethnic Taiwanese subjects as it allowed the colonial government to present Japanese education in a positive, benevolent light. As stated by historical writers Gary Davison and Barbra Reed, “Taiwanese were severely restricted in pursuit of higher education on [sic] Taiwan, and the most important positions in government went to the Japanese. The Japanese did, however, introduce universal education; as the Japanese era unfolded, a majority of the people on Taiwan gained at least a primary school level, rudimentary formal Japanese education in the Japanese language.”¹² Providing basic education during the formative years of ethnic Taiwanese lives—when Japanese officials believed was most essential for the ‘development of loyal subjects’ and their assimilation—would ultimately allow the Japanese Empire to improve Taiwanese lives while inwardly pushing those seeking higher education outwards towards the metropole. This gravitation towards the mainland illustrates further reciprocal assimilation as Taiwanese—as well as Koreans—lived in Japan in search of higher education, job opportunities, and new lives which invariably impacted ethnic Japanese living in the metropole. Korean individuals such as Mr. Yun, for example, recall the starkly different experience of being educated in Japan, stating that while in high school “the Japanese did not discriminate against us [ethnic Koreans],” he experienced a greater sense of isolation in Japan

11 Fong Shiaw-Chian. “Hegemony and identity in the colonial experience of Taiwan, 1895–1945.” In *Taiwan Under Japanese Colonial Rule 1895–1945: History, Culture, Memory*, Liao Ping-Hui and David Der-Wei Wang eds., (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 168.

12 Gary Marvin Davison and Barbara E. Reed, *Culture and Customs of Taiwan* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press 1998), 19.

while studying at Tokyo Imperial University as “everyone was for themselves, they didn’t make friends or go to play or mix—even the Japanese students separated.”¹³ Other colonial subjects such as Mr. Cho recalled experiencing discrimination in their metropole education from their imperial brethren, as they stated that “Japanese intentionally prevented Koreans from becoming college professors” at Keijo Imperial University.¹⁴ Indeed, Japanese reactions to incoming ethnic Korean and Taiwanese students varied from welcoming, to indifference, to outright discrimination. Although opportunities for higher education were limited to a small number of ethnic Korean and Taiwanese students (primarily men) because of economic and bureaucratic constraints—these being made up of “ambitious members of favored [Taiwanese] gentry families,” and “a few sons [Korean youth] of wealthy families”—this population invariably exposed ethnic Japanese in the metropole to the shifting reality of their nation.¹⁵

As Japanese governments-general in both Taiwan and Korea were established in their respective time frames, pressures exerted on these traditional schools by Japanese officials in combination with the development of a new status quo that hinged on the accessibility of Japanese schools saw to the significant decline of traditional/alternative schooling as Japanese colonial schools continually grew. According to historian Patricia Tsurumi, Taiwan’s pupil population in traditional Chinese schools dropped from 30,000 in 1899 to 20,000 by 1907, a staggering trend that would continue into the 1910s and 1920s as Japanese schooling pivoted more fully from utilizing commonalities to embracing assimilation. This phasing out of traditional schooling in favor of novel Japanese schools created for assimilation was realized as, “throughout the 1910s the common schools put less and less emphasis upon Chinese lessons, making Chinese an optional subject in 1922”.¹⁶ This allowed the Japanese education system to gradually fade out of traditional Chinese schooling and studies in lieu of studying the Japanese language, the importance of which being backed by economic and social consequences as even traditional Taiwanese parents “felt that their children needed Japanese language and modern subjects to win a comfortable and honored life in the new society.”¹⁷

13 Vacante, “Japanese colonial education in Korea,” 155.

14 Ibid., 207.

15 Davison and Reed, *Culture and Customs of Taiwan*, 19; Vacante, “Japanese colonial education in Korea,” 132.

16 Tsurumi, “Education and Assimilation in Taiwan under Japanese Rule, 1895–1945,” 619–621.

17 Patricia Tsurumi, “Chapter 7. Colonial Education in Korea and Taiwan,” *In The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945* eds. Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie, 275–311 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

The socioeconomic repercussions of opposing Japanese colonial policy and resisting assimilation were therefore a direct deterrent for many ethnic Taiwanese, ultimately contributing to increases in enrollments in Japanese schools that would grant some sense of stability for Taiwanese that now faced the reality of their nation becoming part of the larger Japanese Empire. Following a similar trend, Tsurumi points out that the number of institutions also rapidly declined stating that “the traditional Chinese schools which at the turn of the century had been strong competitors of the first Japanese educational efforts had largely faded from the scene: by 1922 they were down to ninety-four establishments with 3,664 pupils.”¹⁸ As these schools declined and conformed to Japanese imperial education standards, reactions to Taiwanese assimilation from ethnic Japanese—living both in the metropole and in colonies abroad—would become increasingly complicated by the reality that Japanese people were now part of a wider imperial family. Indeed, reactions and policy changes from influential Japanese figures such as government-general Den Kenjiō (1855–1930) who actively integrated Taiwanese students with Japanese language proficiency with Japanese students, not only reinforcing a sense of positive assimilation, but also facilitated further reciprocal assimilation in educational spaces illustrate the various reactions to Japanese colonialism and imperial education both by ethnic Japanese and their newly gained imperial brethren.¹⁹

By comparison Korean traditional schools actually experienced an increase—though these schools were still under the same pressure and standardization as enforced by the Japanese Government-General. The number of primary education schools in Korea for example, including *seodang* schools, increased from 343 in 1912 to 3,263 in 1942 with both private and public primary schools showing rapid growth.²⁰ Such an increase in traditional schools illustrates how Korean assimilation was unique. Indeed, a stronger sense of a Korean national identity among ethnic Korean colonial subjects aided in the preventing traditional *seodang* schools from declining in Korea, combined with a demand for educational growth facilitated by the Government-General that provided widespread education regardless of socio-economic background facilitated the increase of traditional education under Japanese

18 Tsurumi, “Education and Assimilation in Taiwan under Japanese Rule, 1895–1945,” 621.

19 Ibid., 623.

20 Oh and Kim, “The Increase of Educational Opportunity in Korea under the Japanese Occupation: For Whom the Bell Told?,” *The Seoul National University Journal of Education Research*, Vol. 8 (1997): 86.

occupation.²¹ Growing opportunities and facilities for education for Korean subjects, however, were not left alone by the Japanese government. Indeed, control over public and private schools regardless of their nature—whether they were of Korean, Western/missionary, or Japanese origin or sponsorship—was experienced in Korea in a similar fashion to Taiwan. Korean schools were directly monitored and controlled as the “Japanese Government-General rapidly centralized the administration of public education...The school curriculum also became standardized and made consistent with new textbooks compiled by the Government-Gen [*sic*].”²² These policies not only saw to the creation of a controlled environment through which ethnic Koreans could be assimilated by the Japanese government, but also would prompt reactions from ethnic Japanese as families living both in the metropole and in colonies abroad continued to learn about, interact with, and react to their ethnic Korean and Taiwanese imperial brethren. Ethnic Japanese were now part of a greater imperial “family” that sought to grow closer together through assimilatory education. Developments of Taiwanese and Korean education, therefore, had a deep impact on both ethnic Taiwanese and Korean subjects and on ethnic Japanese as they grew accustomed to the imperial developments of their nation and reacted to the influx of their new brethren to the metropole. From developing rigidly standardized primary education to the maintenance of similar Confucian bases in colonial schools, and to the mobilization of ethnic Taiwanese and Koreans to the metropole due to a lack of higher education in their respective colonies, Japanese colonial policies on education in both Korea and Taiwan invariably linked ethnic Taiwanese, Korean, and Japanese subjects together under an imperial family that impacted all involved both through assimilation and reciprocal assimilation.

Oral Histories

The ethnic Taiwanese and Korean experience can be extrapolated through a variety of mediums such as diaries, textbooks, government reports, and even pictures. Interviews of individuals who experienced imperial schooling in compilations of oral histories, however, provide unique perspectives that not only unearth key memories attributed to Japanese imperial education, but also illustrate an invaluable aspect of hindsight, memory, and modern-day clarity that ground information in both the legacy

21 Oh and Kim, “The Increase of Educational Opportunity in Korea,” 91–92.

22 Yunshik Chang, “Growth of Education in Korea 1910–1945,” *Bulletin of the Population and Development Studies Center*, Vol. 4 (November 1975): 41.

and implications of Japanese imperialism. Oral histories provide especially valuable insights into the process and impact of assimilation in Korea and Taiwan, as well as how education and language played a significant role in the colonial nation at the individual level. Furthermore, oral histories provide glimpses of how ethnic Japanese reacted to their newly gained Taiwanese and Korean brethren and how they grappled with becoming part of a larger Japanese Empire in a process of reciprocal assimilation.

Korean Oral Histories

Oral histories of ethnic Koreans that experienced Japanese colonialism from 1910–1945 are a particularly helpful source for understanding both the logistics of and deeper experiences associated with the Japanese colonial government (or Chōsen government) in its dealings with education. These oral histories also provide insights into Japanese reaction to Korean and Taiwanese colonization, their entering the metropole for higher education, and the enrichment of the Japanese Empire through further exposure. Influential compilations of oral histories such as Hildi Kang’s *Under the Black Umbrella* and Russel Anthony Vacante’s “Japanese colonial education in Korea, 1910–1945” provide an exceptional case study for understanding assimilatory practices in Chōsen Korea and for gleaning insights on how reciprocal assimilation occurred during Japanese occupation. A variety of Kang’s interviews with individuals such as Pak Songp’il, Hong Ulsu, and Yang Songdok illustrate the extent to which Japanese colonial education and pressures for assimilation not only impacted them and their families, but also influenced ethnic Japanese around them to draw closer to Korean culture and life in a reciprocal—albeit unequal—fashion. Pak Songp’il, for example, tells the story of his aunt Pak Sunch’on, an ethnic Korean teacher in the seaport town of Masan. Pak was arrested and fired from her position as a teacher for participating in a demonstration against Japanese colonialism, forcing her to have to change her name to “Pak Myongyol” and “escape to Tokyo.”²³ This story, however, in addition to illustrating the high degree to which Japanese colonial governments rigidly controlled its teachers and their actions, harshly suppressing demonstrations and open speech, also illustrates the gravitational pull that brought ethnic Koreans to the metropole as another policy of assimilation, as Pak Sunch’on “actually went there [to Tokyo] for two reasons: first to hide, and second, to get higher education.”²⁴ Her movement to Japan

23 Kang, *Under the Black Umbrella*, 21–22.

24 Ibid., 21–22.

depicts a specific, personal instance in which even an ethnic Korean woman during the 1920s sought a higher form of education in the Japanese metropole while also portraying the brutality of Japanese Imperialism and the prospects of assimilation. Pak Sunch'on would have invariably met with and impacted a variety of ethnic Japanese lives during her short time at college in Tokyo (she was caught after only 6 months), and though Pak Songp'il does not detail these interactions, Japanese reactions to her ethnicity, experiences, and identity were by no means monolithic in nature.

Hong Ulsu shares a particularly impactful story regarding Korean assimilation and Japanese imperial education, reiterating his father's lamentations about him attending a Japanese school as he remembered that traditional Korean parents believed that "children would turn into Japanese if they went to Japanese-built schools" and that Japanese went so far as having "dragged all of us [seodang students]—literally by our long braids—to the township office courtyard. They had the hair clippers ready and proceeded to cut our hair right there."²⁵ Not only were ethnic Koreans perceived by their parents as being in danger of 'becoming Japanese' through Japanese education, but they were also brutalized and forced to comply with assimilatory practices conducted by Japanese officials. Just as Pak Sunch'on had done, Hong also traveled to Japan in search of higher education. His story further reflects reciprocal assimilation on an individual level as he describes his life selling natto and eventually working for a *yakuza* boss to get by and support himself in Tokyo as he not only enters the society but also the workforce of the metropole, directly integrating himself as a member of the empire. His relationships in Japan further reinforce a degree of reciprocal assimilation as students a part of a communist study group, all of which being "all Japanese [except him]" sympathized with his experience and reassured him that they would "all work together to drive the Japanese out of your country."²⁶ This experience reinforces the opposite reaction that assimilatory education policies being implemented in both colonial and metropole settings have an impact on both sides as ethnic Japanese understand their place in a wider empire and are exposed to the stories, experiences, and cultures of their ethnic brethren. Indeed, the Japanese had a variety of reactions to Japanese Imperialism and the plight of their gained brethren as some sympathized with Korean struggles and even organized against the Japanese government. Yang Songdok's story further reinforces this as he recalls that in

²⁵ Ibid., 26.

²⁶ Ibid., 31.

his integrated Korea-Japanese primary school there were no “conflicts among groups in the classroom along national lines” and that it was only later in high school that exclusionary groups formed.²⁷ This learned exclusion on national and ethnic lines came after primary school—primary school being the main and for many, the highest level of education the colonies received as a result of financial or geographical constraints, as early education was the most effective area for Japanese assimilation as the colonial government was concerned—emphasizes the assimilative properties of these primary schools as children interacted with one another on equal and undivided grounds.

Russel Anthony Vacante’s oral history on ethnic Koreans and their experiences with education during the Japanese occupational period (1910–1945) tell of similar experiences that further corroborate the stories and feelings of those interviewed by Hildi Kang. Grim stories about the extent of harsh Japanese control over Korean institutions such as Mr. Lim’s emphasize the extreme nature of the shift towards Japanese colonial education around 1930, as he states that his classmates had been “forced out of privately operated Korean schools and into government controlled institutions” and that their “Korean parents were forced to enroll their children into colonial educational institutions” in order to create the organized universal education that the Japanese colonial government strove for.²⁸ Indeed, both Mr. Lim and his father knew that in order to succeed in colonial Korea that they had to “live like the Japanese people.”²⁹ The assimilation came at a deep cultural, monetary, and social cost—ultimately changing the lives of both the oppressed ethnic Koreans and the Japanese oppressors as a whole. Mr. Cho, also interviewed by Vacante, describes the rigidity of Japanese primary school curriculums as he stated that “all of his middle school teachers, with the exception of one, were Japanese” and that “middle school officials allotted very few hours for the study of the Korean language,” as compared to Japanese language and subject learning.³⁰ Indeed, Japanese occupation had a direct impact on him as assimilatory policies impacted his everyday life. Mr. Cho’s memory also gleans insights from reciprocal assimilation as he describes having relationships and ideological alignments both with “students who were pro-Japanese and those students who actively engaged in political resistance,” illustrating the degree

27 Ibid., 45

28 Russel Anthony Vacante, “Japanese colonial education in Korea, 1910–1945: An oral history” Ph.D. dissertation (Buffalo: State University of New York at Buffalo, 1987), 250–251.

29 Vacante, “Japanese colonial education in Korea,” 252.

30 Ibid., 203–204.

to which interactions in Keijo University—being made up overwhelmingly of Japanese students—further diffused political and social ideals within the wider Japanese imperial family.³¹ Other Korean stories, such as those of Mr. Lim, illustrate the negative reactions that came about as a result of ethnic Japanese becoming part of a wider empire through reciprocal assimilation. Lim states that throughout his days in a Seoul commercial high school “all the Japanese students blamed” him for various issues because he was “Korean and looked down at me.”³² Japanese imperial education in Korea as illustrated by these oral histories was not only rigid and brutal in its attempts to assimilate Korean subjects as citizens of the wider Japanese Empire, but also brought forth an opposite (yet, of course, disproportionate), reciprocal reaction as ethnic Japanese both in colonies abroad and in the metropole reacted to (both negatively and positively), learned about, and changed with regards to the Korean colonial experience, coming to understand their newfound place within a wider Japanese Empire as a part of an imperial family.

Taiwanese Oral Histories

Though translated oral histories of ethnic Taiwanese experiences have not been collected to the same extent as translated oral histories of Korean experiences—there being comparatively fewer works published or compilations of oral histories—Taiwanese oral history sources tell very similar stories to those described in Kang and Vacante’s work on Korean experiences: pressure towards assimilation, and a sense that one must adhere to assimilation and the gravitate towards the metropole itself in order to prosper (such as through learning Japanese, complying with colonial forces, etc.). Indeed, the degree of opposition in Taiwan seems comparatively lesser than opposition and tenacity exercised in Korea against Japanese colonial forces. This is further reinforced by academic Leo T. S. Ching, who recognizes the general consensus as being that “If the Koreans speak of oppression and resistance [in regards to Japanese colonial rule], the Taiwanese speak of modernization and development.”³³ Though he states that this generalized and reductive statement should instead be attributed to Korea and Taiwan’s “precolonial and postcolonial histories than Japanese rule per se,” the consequent lack of any organized opposition to Japanese colonial forces in Taiwan lends itself to

31 Ibid., 212.

32 Vacante, “Japanese colonial education in Korea,” 260

33 Leo T. S. Ching, *Becoming Japanese: Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 8.

what seems to be a lower degree of animosity present in Taiwan as compared to Korea—holding this consensus as not incorrect, but only unrefined.³⁴ Sentiments of alternative Taiwanese views towards Japanese colonialism as compared to aforementioned Korean views seem present in the glimpses of oral histories that are available. Historian Chou Wan-yao's recounting of the story of a Taiwanese-born former Japanese soldier, for example, depicts the emotions held by many ethnic Taiwanese that grew up exposed to Japanese colonial rule and education, as the soldier said that "My father has always told me since I was a child that we came from Mainland China and that we are not Japanese," but also that "in that period [of fighting for Japan] we were Japanese, and would naturally show our loyalty to our country."³⁵ Chou emphasizes that these statements are not contradictory, but rather that in respect to one's country, "Taiwanese people were Japanese. But with respect to ethnicity, Taiwanese people were not Japanese."³⁶ It was this complicated identity that arose from assimilation enforced by the Japanese colonial government through mediums such as education that blurred the lines between ethnicity and nationality, especially as one was concerned with the larger imperial system that they belonged to. Chou further analyzes this distinction and how Japan sought to close the rift between nationality and ethnicity with "slogans like 'Japan and Taiwan are one'" that were delivered through Japanese education.³⁷ Indeed, though the attitudes towards policies of Japanese assimilation and colonial education varied between Korea and Taiwan, the same means of assimilation were employed in both colonies, ultimately resulting in the creation of a sort of "Japanified" (being assimilated to different degrees, Taiwan being more deeply changed as compared to Korea), nation that would seek to regain its national identity after the fall of the Japanese Empire in 1945.

The Japanese Perspective

While its colonies were being assimilated through education, the education system in mainland Japan (the metropole) changed its content and language to include, accept, and justify the annexation of colonial territories such as Korea and Taiwan. Such language not only helped construct a greater sense of kinship and national pride in ethnic Japanese youth, but also

34 Ching, *Becoming Japanese*, 8.

35 Wan-yao Chou, *A New Illustrated History of Taiwan*, trans. Carole Plackitt and Tim Casey (Taipei, Taiwan: SMC Publishing Inc., 2020), 302.

36 Chou, *A New Illustrated History of Taiwan*, 302.

37 Ibid.

experienced reciprocal assimilation as they were exposed to and learned more about Korean and Taiwanese culture, language, and daily life—both from secondhand sources such as textbooks and from these individuals moving to the metropole. Language imbued in Japanese education regarding Korean assimilation, for example, included statements that the annexation of Korea “will ensure forever the peace of East Asia,” stating that the annexation was in the interest of “solidifying the foundation of peace.”³⁸ The actions of the Japanese Empire were therefore presented to Japanese youth as benevolent. Indeed, there were pushes for ethnic Japanese to understand and even learn the Korean language and culture to become closer knit with their colonial brothers. Schools created for the instruction of the Korean language known as *kōshūkai* (class or short course) such as Kikukawa Keiun emphasized the importance of reciprocal assimilation in early 1910 in Tokyo, stating that “regarding 15,000,000 new brothers [i.e. Koreans], we cannot expect to guide them, become close to them and assimilate them as a new ‘Yamato Race (Japanese)’ without understanding the [Korean] language.”³⁹ Such sentiments illustrate the degree to which some Japanese understood—at least to some extent—the harrowing aspects of colonial assimilation and sought to learn about their ‘brethren’ in return. Though the colonization of Korea and Taiwan (to a lesser extent) by Japan was, of course, brutal, coercive, and destructive to Korean lives and culture, aspects of reciprocal assimilation towards Japan displays how total empire also included and emphasized the prospect of Japanese assimilating (though to a lesser extent), to its colonial territories in order to create a cohesive, well-functioning imperial system.

The presence of information about Korean and Taiwanese annexation and assimilation in Japanese textbooks—or subsequent lack thereof—provides further context for the presence of reciprocal assimilation in (though it was not close to the same systematic scale as present in Korea and Taiwan), the metropole itself. The Japanese history textbook for an all-girls school in Ichikawa (市川), for example, includes the Taiwanese subjugation in relation to the development of Ryukyu and Sakhalin and even discusses the potential subjugation of Korea through prominent figures in the Iwakura mission

38 Yu-han Ma, “A Reactive Engineer: Japanese History Textbooks and the Construction of National Identity (1900–1926),” *UC Berkeley Undergraduate Journal* vol. 28 (2015): 72.

39 Kiyoe Minami, “Forgotten Reciprocity of Languages of the Colonizer and the Colonized: Korean Language Study of Japanese Colonial Agents,” BA thesis (Tokyo: International Christian University of Japan, 1996), 88–89.

such as Ito Hirobumi.⁴⁰ The presence of Taiwan and Korea-related content, however, was seemingly rare in available elementary and middle school history textbooks, as textbooks such as the Aomori (青森) published as late as 1935 included neither content on the colonial aspects of Japanese imperialism nor any mention of Taiwan or Korea, instead featuring information on early Japanese history, the emperor, and the Meiji Restoration.⁴¹ The absence of this content in some textbooks further reinforces that while reciprocal assimilation did play a role in the lives of ethnic Japanese both in Japanese colonies and in the metropole, it was not nearly as widespread or systematic in nature as the assimilatory policies implemented in Taiwan and Korea by the Japanese Empire. Indeed, aspects of reciprocal assimilation such as reactions of everyday ethnic Japanese workers and students were limited to personal interactions and—as Japanese education was concerned during the Japanese Imperial era—were not widely analyzed in Japanese mainland educational spaces. The influence that ethnic Korean and Taiwanese subjects had on ethnic Japanese and their varied reactions and interactions with one another, however, shaped and continues to impact relations between Taiwan, Korea, and Japan today.

Conclusion and Implications

The colonization of East Asian territories by the Japanese Empire such as Korea and Taiwan had a profound impact on the development of their respective cultures, languages, and political affairs (both domestic and international) that still impacts them today in 2022. The Japanese Empire's subjugation of these colonial territories took on a systematic approach—focusing particularly on assimilating colonial populations in order to create a larger, cohesive imperial sphere of influence that would supplement its economic, political, and military power. The education of these colonies, especially of younger generations through universal Japanese-sponsored or controlled primary schools, was one of if not the primary medium through which Japan sought to accomplish this assimilation. Implementing rigid curriculums grounded in the education of colonial subjects in Japanese, what was now their “national language” or *kokugo* (国語), Korean and Taiwanese children and young adults were expected to essentially become Japanese. Japanese Imperialism and its assimilatory policies also invariably impacted ethnic Japanese and elicited more than just support, but also a variety of

40 Ichikawa Genzō and Tonegawa Yosaku, *Kokushi kyōkasho, Koutō onna gakkō yō, shita* (Tokyo: kokkō-sha, 1903), 115.

41 Aomori ken kyōikukai hen, *Aomori ken seinen gakkō kyōkasho kan ichi* (Tokyo: Tonbunkan, 1935), 98–120.

reactions including opposition, sympathy towards the colonized, and protest. Indeed, examples of reciprocal assimilation through education such as by ethnic Korean and Taiwanese individuals flocking to the metropole for higher education elicited these various reactions from ethnic Japanese as they too grappled with becoming part of a wider Japanese Empire. The enrichment of Japanese language, culture, and education that came as a result of Japanese colonization (either indirectly from Japanese sources or directly from ethnic Koreans or Taiwanese) therefore had a simultaneous impact on ethnic Japanese, bringing about (albeit unequal) points of reciprocal assimilation as ethnic Japanese continually learned about, sympathized with, and even lived among those their country had colonized. The reactions of ethnic Japanese to their nation's policies and the culture, experiences, and lives of their imperial brethren are also telling as they illustrate the contrary impacts of imperialism and reiterate that Japanese were neither monolithic nor homogenous. Indeed, colonization has an adverse impact on the citizens of the colonizers not in agreement with their national and international policies.

The process of colonization in Taiwan and Korea was undoubtedly painful—so too was the process of decolonization after the fall of the Japanese Empire in 1945. Indeed, wounds caused by decades of oppression and intense pressure to assimilate ran deep, as older generations in Korea and even Taiwan today harbor resentment and animosity towards Japan. Such issues still echo in current international affairs as Korea-Japan relations remain tense over trade tariffs and rejected imports, forced labor of Korean citizens in Japan, and a growing diplomatic rift grounded in centuries of conflict.⁴² Issues over education in regards to assimilation and indoctrination also continue to exist to some extent, evidenced by the approval of the controversial *Fusosha* textbook by the Japanese Ministry of Education in 2005, as it contained militarist, revisionist, and reductive content that justified Japanese brutality and colonialism with the modernity it brought to the areas it colonized.⁴³ Though the textbook was never adopted by a school due to the general controversy and protests against *Fusosha*, the presence of militarist ideals in combination with the Japanese Ministry of Education approving the textbook brings to question the current state of Japanese memory and politics as it relates to

42 Editors of the BBC, "South Korea and Japan's feud explained," *BBC*, last modified on December 2, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49330531>.

43 *Fusosha*, Atarashii Rekishi Kyokasho (Tokyo: Fusosha, 2005) 24–25, 31; Ako Inuzuka, "Remembering Japanese Militarism Through the *Fusosha* Textbook: The Collective Memory of the Asian-Pacific War in Japan," *Communication Quarterly* vol. 61 (April 2013).

its colonial past. For many in Taiwan, Korea, and even Japan, the history of assimilation is not a part of the distant past. It is because of this that ordinary people, not just historians, must be aware of all aspects of their history. This includes not only the grimmer aspects of colonialism, assimilation, and war, but also the history of positive Japanese reception to their colonial brethren, the enrichment of Japanese culture, and the results of reciprocal assimilation as a whole.

Bibliography

- Aomori ken kyōikukai hen. *Aomori ken seinen gakkō kyōkasho kan ichi*. Tokyo: Tonbunkan, 1935.
- Arnold, Julean Herbert. *Education in Formosa*. Washington DC: US Government Publishing Office, 1908.
- Burt, Matthew. "Education Inequality in the Republic of Korea: Measurement and Causes." *BYU Sigma: Journal of Political and International Studies*, Vol. 24 (January 2006): 1–20.
- Chang, Yunshik. "Growth of Education in Korea 1910–1945." *Bulletin of the Population and Development Studies Center*, Vol. 4 (November 1975): 40–53.
- Ching, Leo T. S. *Becoming Japanese: Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation*. Berkely: University of California Press, 2001.
- Chou, Wan-yao. *A New Illustrated History of Taiwan*. Translated by Carole Plackitt and Tim Casey. Taipei, Taiwan: SMC Publishing Inc., 2020.
- Davison, Gary Marvin and Barbara E. Reed. *Culture and Customs of Taiwan*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press 1998.
- Editors of the BBC. "South Korea and Japan's feud explained." *BBC*. Last modified on December 2, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49330531>.
- Fong, Shiaw-Chian. "Hegemony and identity in the colonial experience of Taiwan, 1895–1945." In *Taiwan Under Japanese Colonial Rule 1895-1945: History, Culture, Memory*, Liao Ping-Hui and David Der-Wei Wang eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Fukuzawa Yukichi. "An Outline of a Theory of Civilization," in *Volume Two Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600 to 2000 Part Two: 1868 to 2000*, trans. Dilworth and Hurst (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 34–41.
- Fusosha, *Atarashii Rekishi Kyokasho*. Tokyo: Fusosha, 2005.
- Grajdanzev, A. J. "Formosa (Taiwan) Under Japanese Rule" *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Sep. 1942): 311–324.
- Ichikawa Genzō and Tonegawa Yosaku. *Kokushi kyōkasho, Koutō onna gakkō yō, shita*. Tokyo: kokkō-sha, 1903.
- Inuzuka, Ako. "Remembering Japanese Militarism Through the Fusosha Textbook: The Collective Memory of the Asian-Pacific War in Japan." *Communication Quarterly* vol. 61 (April 2013): 131–151.
- Kang, Hildi. *Under the Black Umbrella: Voices from Colonial Korea, 1910-1945*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005.
- Kim Ho-il. "Education." *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*. Accessed on March 23, 2022, http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Index?contents_id=E0005524.

- Ma, Yu-han. "A Reactive Engineer: Japanese History Textbooks and the Construction of National Identity (1900-1926)." *UC Berkeley Undergraduate Journal* vol. 28 (2015): 52-77.
- Minami, Kiyoe. "Forgotten Reciprocity of Languages of the Colonizer and the Colonized: Korean Language Study of Japanese Colonial Agents." BA thesis. Tokyo: International Christian University of Japan, 1996.
- Oh Seung-Cheol and Kim Ki-Seok. "The Increase of Educational Opportunity in Korea under the Japanese Occupation: For Whom the Bell Told?" *The Seoul National University Journal of Education Research*, Vol. 8 (1997): 84-95.
- Porter, Catherine. "Korea and Formosa as Colonies of Japan." *Far Eastern Survey*, 1936, Vol. 5, No. 9 (Apr. 22, 1936): 81-88.
- The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. "Meiji Restoration: Japanese history." *Britannica*. Accessed on March 3, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Meiji-Restoration>.
- Toby, Ronald. "Education in Korea under the Japanese: Attitudes and Manifestations." *Occasional Papers on Korea*, No. 1 (1974): 55-64.
- Tsurumi, Patricia. "Education and Assimilation in Taiwan under Japanese Rule, 1895-1945." *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 13 No. 4 (1979): 617-641.
- Tsurumi, E. Patricia. "Chapter 7. Colonial Education in Korea and Taiwan" In *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945* edited by Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie, 275-311. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691213873-011>
- Vacante, Russel Anthony. "Japanese colonial education in Korea, 1910-1945: An oral history." Ph.D. dissertation. Buffalo: State University of New York at Buffalo, 1987.
- Yi, Myonggu and William A. Douglas. "Korean Confucianism Today." *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 40 (April 1967): 43-59.