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The Lost Memories of Empire and the Korean Return from Manchuria, 1945-1950: Conceptualizing Manchuria in Modern Korean History*

Michael Kim

Manchuria remains a problematic region in modern Korean historiography. The intense interactions between the Korean peninsula and Manchuria before 1945 often become subsumed into nationalist narratives of anti-Japanese resistance and the suffering of impoverished Korean migrants. While recent Korean historiography on Manchuria has addressed a broader array of historical issues, there is still much more research necessary to understand fully the position of Manchuria in modern Korean history. This study examines the postliberation narratives of Korean returnees from Manchuria during the immediate liberation period and reconnects their collective experiences with some key events of Korea and Manchuria under the Japanese empire. Through a discussion of the large scale Korean migration and economic integration that took place within Manchuria before 1945, the need for a broader historical paradigm becomes apparent. Colonial era historians developed their own historiographical models to explain the interconnections between the two regions. While the colonial historiography need not be rehabilitated for such purposes, there is still a need to conceptualize Manchuria and Korea from a transnational historical framework that can better elucidate the deep interconnections between the two regions before 1945.

Keywords: Manchuria, Korean migration, Japanese Empire, Collective memory, Korean historiography

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Remarkable historical moments are not always stunning in scale and scope. Some quiet events elicit little fanfare yet may contain considerable historical significance. One such rarely noted incident took place when a gripping account of an ordinary Japanese housewife's escape from Manchuria and her harrowing trek through the Korean peninsula became a bestseller in the Republic of Korea in the Fall of 1949 and early 1950. Fujiwara Tei (b. 1918) had followed her husband, a meteorologist in the Japanese Army, to Manchuria in 1943. When World War II ended in August 1945, Fujiwara Tei and her young children began a treacherous journey back to Japan.¹ In 1949, she published her memoir, entitled *Nagareru hoshi wa ikite iru*, which became a major bestseller in postwar Japan.² Fujiwara's work was translated and published in Korea under the title *Naega nŏmŭn 38 sŏn* in November 1949.³ The book was a phenomenal success and sold out its entire first edition in just three days. Over the next seven months, the book sold 45,000 copies until sales were interrupted by the start of the Korean War in June 1950.⁴ While the success of this book quickly faded from the consciousness of postliberation Koreans, the fact that a narrative about a lone Japanese woman and her children received so much attention immediately after the collective trauma of Japanese colonization suggests the need for a broader historical analysis that can reveal the underlying significance of this seemingly inexplicable event.

A closer examination of the years between 1945 and 1950 may provide some tentative clues to the book's inexplicable popularity, for Fujiwara's tale was one of many heartbreaking stories of cross-border displacement recalled by both Koreans and Japanese in the aftermath of World War II. Koreans recalled their own border crossings in the publications of the period and joined the

1. Fujiwara had crossed over the border into Northern Korea when she heard news of Japan's defeat in the Pacific War. Her husband had escaped separately and joined her briefly in Northern Korea. But the North Koreans forced able-bodied Japanese men into work camps, and he became separated from her. He would later be repatriated through Siberia. Fujiwara endured a year of continuous hardships inside Northern Korea until she finally crossed over the 38th parallel with her three young children and boarded a ship bound for Japan in Pusan.

2. Fujiwara Tei, *Nagareru hoshi wa ikite iru* [The shooting stars live on] (Tōkyō: Hibiya Shuppansha, 1949).

3. Fujiwara Tei, *Nae ga nŏmŭn 38 sŏn* [The 38th parallel that I crossed], trans. Chŏng Kwanghyŏn (Seoul: Sudo munhwasa, 1949). An excerpt of the book was translated and published first in the journal *Minsŏng* the previous summer. The editor's note at the end of the excerpt explains Fujiwara's circumstances and notes "this piece of writing is too precious to view it only as a work by a Japanese." Fujiwara Tei, "38 sŏndo," trans. Chin Myŏngin, *Minsŏng* (August 1949), 69.

4. Yi Chunghan, et. al., *Uri ch'ulp'an 100 nyŏn* [One hundred years of our publications] (Seoul: Hyŏnamsa, 2001), 248.

chorus of Japanese voices that described the dangerous trek across similar paths.⁵ These historical memories of the Japanese empire's collapse have largely vanished among Koreans today, yet the numerous personal recollections published in 1945-1950 may reveal an underlying historical complexity of the Manchurian region that became subsumed with the establishment of two separate Korean regimes.

By themselves, the accounts of cross-border displacement may appear fragmented and inconsistent with the peninsula-based nationalist narratives of state formation that dominates the Republic of Korea after 1948. Yet, when the accounts are reconnected to the events that took place decades earlier during the colonial era, they can reveal some major features of the intense interaction that took place between Korea and Manchuria under the Japanese Empire. When Japanese imperialists expanded beyond the Korean peninsula, they crossed into the largely borderless terrain of the nomadic tribes that gave birth to numerous northern dynasties such as the Liao (907-1125), the Jin (115-1234) and Qing (1644-1911). Thus, for centuries, the region had been fluid in construction and multifaceted in its historical complexity. Indeed, countless numbers of people had crossed freely back and forth between Korea and Manchuria, but this flow, which had reached critical heights during the Japanese empire, suddenly halted in 1945 and left many on the wrong sides of newly delineated national borders. Manchuria suddenly became conceptually severed from the Korean peninsula, and the deep historical links between the two regions vanished nearly overnight during the massive population realignment that followed the collapse of the Japanese empire. The subsequent detachment of Manchuria from Korean history stands in sharp contrast to the

5. The positive reception of *Naega nŏmŏn 38 sŏn* stands in sharp contrast to the controversy surrounding another translated work about a Japanese woman's experiences from the same period, *Yoko iyagi*, trans. Yun Hyŏnju (P'aju: Munhak tongnae, 2005). Yoko Kawashima Watkins's fictional account of the chaos and confusion of liberated Korea in 1945, *So Far from the Bamboo Grove* (New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1986) was translated into Korean and initially generated little negative commentary. However, considerable outcry over the translation erupted once a Korean-American housewife launched a vigorous protest against her school district in 2006 to remove *So Far from the Bamboo Grove* from her daughter's school curriculum. One initial review of *Yoko iyagi* in March 2005 noted, "There are sections that will be difficult to read for Koreans because of the realistic descriptions of the antipathy and actions directed against the Japanese by Koreans immediately after liberation. Yet the story contains the pain suffered by an individual under the name of the people and the state, and it contains a powerful message for peace." *Yonhap News* (March 3, 2005). However, the Korean publisher of *Yoko iyagi* responded to the public outcry in 2006 by suspending the sale of the book on January 17, 2007. For more on the controversy see Carter Eckert, "A Matter of Context," in *Boston Globe* (December 16, 2006).

previous era, when the region had become gradually integrated into the Japanese colonial historiography due to the intensity of interactions throughout Northeast Asia under Japanese rule. Postliberation South Korean historiography has numerous difficulties in assessing the position of Manchuria, yet there is a need to understand the intricacies of Korea under the Japanese empire to critique the conceptual problems of omitting this region from the narratives of modern Korean history.

The task of reassessing an entire region's interaction with the Korean peninsula would be a major effort that no single historical study can achieve, but one starting point may be the narratives of cross-border displacement that poured out into the postliberation landscape. These Manchurian recollections may not fit easily into postliberation historical narratives, yet they do reveal important clues for understanding the ambiguous position of Koreans in Manchuria and the complexities of Korean migration within the context of a rapidly expanding Japanese empire. When these narratives are juxtaposed with some key historiographic issues concerning Korea and Manchuria during the colonial era, they unveil a need to establish a broader historical paradigm that can encompass both regions into a common historical framework. Therefore, a glimpse back into the narratives of cross-border displacement in the postliberation media space between 1945 and 1950, Manchuria's place in colonial Japanese historiography, and the historical context of Manchurian immigration in colonial Korea (1910-1945) can help unravel the incongruous Korean experiences in Manchuria and raise critical issues concerning the proper conceptual boundaries of modern Korean history.

Entangled Histories of Manchuria

Manchuria for Korean historians today remains a problematic entity that exists on the periphery of Korean historical consciousness. Only the ancient Koguryō period (37 BC-668 AD) remains firmly within the conceptual boundaries of Korean history, and the more recent period of intense interaction with Manchuria during the colonial era is largely absent from the public discourse of postliberation South Korean society. Therefore, any discussion of the relationship between Korea and Manchuria invariably raises the ephemeral nature of collective memory. As many observers have noted, the creation of collective memories is both a process of remembering and forgetting. Certain recollections of the past are retained by societies while others are jettisoned in the process of negotiating a common collective memory and identity.⁶ The

memories that are expressed in textbooks, media, state institutions, and “sites of memory” such as museums and memorials, can tell us much about a society, but so can the reminiscences that are lost in the contestation process. Without state institutions or private interests that actively promote the events of the past, many historical memories recede from the collective consciousness of a society. Although historical memories excluded from the dominant memory matrix may be difficult to “recover,” a look back at an earlier period may reveal “proto-memories” that were once actively articulated yet lost either through disinterest or selective recall by later generations. These fragments of the past may have failed to be woven into collective narratives, but they represent a wellspring of potential material for later generations to discard or recover for the purposes of historical reconstruction.

The collective memories of the Japanese empire and the Pacific War (1931-1945) have been shaped by the dominant narratives of an Allied victory, but many “localized, marginalized and often silent memories” still remain to be examined.⁷ There was a time under the Japanese empire when Manchuria was an active site for Korean historical experiences, even though this past has largely receded from the collective consciousness. Louise Young describes the Japanese media’s fascination with the promise of Manchuria in local politics, schools and the morning news in the 1930s.⁸ In a similar vein, Manchuria also increasingly dominated the colonial Korean media during the 1930s and 1940s.⁹ Today, however, narratives of cross-border displacement like Fujiwara’s poignant story remain largely forgotten, because the official histories of South Korea make only minor note of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and portray the region mostly as the site where Korean independence fighters had courageously resisted Japanese imperialism. As Kim Kyōngil and his coauthors note, “Until now research on Manchurian migration has primarily been about the independence movement, and, while the Manchurian resistance movement

6. Many studies of collective memory are informed by Maurice Halbwachs’ observation that all memories have a social framework. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1992). See also Jeffrey Olick, ed., *States of Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

7. T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama, “Introduction,” in T. Fujitani, et al., eds., *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 4.

8. Louise Young, *Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (New York: Columbia University, 1998).

9. For more on late colonial media representations of Manchuria, see Michael Kim, “The Aesthetics of Total Mobilization in the Visual Culture of Late Colonial Korea,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, nos. 3&4 (2007): 483-502.

may have been useful for forming nationalistic pride, efforts to construct a 'national history' based on a particular movement can lose broader historical interpretations."¹⁰ More recently, scholarship on Manchuria has focused on a broader range of issues than the independence movement. Hyun Ok Park explores how what she terms the "osmotic expansion" of Koreans was involved in the spread of Japanese imperialism into Manchuria and contemplates the significance of Korean agrarian communities in Manchuria funded by Japanese finance capital.¹¹ The historical circumstances that led Korean migrants to pioneer rice paddy production in Manchuria have also attracted considerable new attention.¹² While most Koreans in Manchuria were impoverished peasants struggling to make ends meet on the farms, recent research on those who moved to the cities, especially after the mid 1930s, reveals that some in fact participated in a wide variety of urban occupations.¹³ The key roles that the returnees from Manchuria played in postliberation South Korean politics and society has also attracted considerable interest because of high profile figures such as former President Park Chung Hee (1917-1979).¹⁴

The research trends on Manchuria have greatly expanded the range of academic inquiry, yet there remains a general ambiguity over the place of Manchuria in Korean history. The existing works tend to discuss the history of "Koreans in Manchuria," or Manchuria as a separate entity from Korea and generally do not conceptualize the interconnected histories of the two regions under a common framework. Furthermore, existing studies rarely probe the depths of the multifaceted dynamics between Koreans and Japanese within the context of Japan's imperialist expansion into Manchuria. Claims that ancient Korean history was tied to Manchuria do exist with historical controversies involving the Koguryŏ kingdom, yet there is little critical reflection on the interconnections between Manchuria and Korea before the collapse of the Japanese empire in 1945. This intellectual engagement is necessary, however,

10. Kim Kyŏngil et al., *Tongasia ū minjok isan kwa tosi: 20 segi chŏnban Manju ū Chosŏnin* [The separation of peoples and the city in East Asia: Koreans in Manchuria in the early twentieth century] (Seoul: Yŏksa pip'yŏngsa, 2004), 20.

11. Hyun Ok Park, *Two Dreams in One Bed: Empire, Social Life, and the Origins of the North Korean Revolution in Manchuria* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

12. Kim Yŏng, *Kŭmdae Manju pyŏnongsa paldal kwa iju Chosŏnin* [The development of rice farming in modern-day Manchuria and migratory Koreans] (Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 2004).

13. Kim Kyŏngil et al., *Tongasia ū minjok isan kwa tosi*, 18.

14. Han Sŏkchŏng, *Manjuguk kŏnguk ū chaehaesŏk: koeraekuk ū kukka hyokwa 1932-1936* [Reinterpretation of the establishment of Manchukuo: The effect of a puppet state 1932-1936] (Pusan: Donga University Press, 2007), 21.

because the vast northern boundary of Korea from ancient times until the colonial era was constantly open for reinterpretation and reimagination.¹⁵

The issue of how to view the histories of Korea and Manchuria became an important issue under the Japanese empire, because the political legitimization of the Japanese conquests required new historical imaginations that encompassed the two regions. The efforts to create a unified history of Manchuria and Korea can be seen as early as the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, when the first head of the South Manchuria Railroad Company, Gotō Shimpei (1857-1929), commissioned Shiratori Kurakichi (1865-1942) to head the *Mansen rekichi shiryōshitsu* or the Research Office for the History and Geography of Manchuria and Korea.¹⁶ During the subsequent decades, various Japanese colonial historians would link the histories of the two regions into the concept of *Mansenshi* 滿鮮史. For example, Inaba Iwakichi (1876-1940) argued that the Korean peninsula and Manchuria should be viewed as a single historical entity, but not all colonial historians supported this interpretation as scholars like Mishina Shōei (1902-1971) argued that the northern parts of Korea belonged to a separate Manchurian cultural sphere that was distinct from the south.¹⁷

The colonial historians may not have agreed upon whether or not Korea and Manchuria belonged to a single cultural and historical sphere, but their debates do raise questions about the current conceptual boundaries that divide the two regions. Which national history should incorporate the Manchurian region was an open question both before and during the Japanese occupation of the region. Chinese historians had rarely attempted to link the history of the region with Chinese historical narratives before the Manchurian incident in 1931, but their claims would continue to strengthen from that point onwards.¹⁸ The emergence of modern states that claimed sole historical

15. Debates over the relationship between Manchurian and Korean history can be found in the writings of Chosŏn period scholars who tried to incorporate the histories of Koguryŏ and Parhae into the framework of the history of the Chosŏn dynasty and distinguished their history as separate from the Chinese dynasties. For example, scholars like Chŏng Yagyong attempted to understand Koreans as the foremost of the many “Eastern Barbarians” or *tongi* of Manchuria who shared a common historical legacy. Hong Sŏnggu, “Manju yŏksa rŭl parabonŭn Han’gukchŏk sigak ŭi han mosaek” [An alternative Korean interpretation of the historiography of Manchuria], *Yŏksa wa tamnon* 55 (2010): 199.

16. Pak Chanhong, “Ilje ‘mansŏn sahak’ esŏ ŭi Koguryŏsa insik” [Koguryŏ history from the viewpoint of ‘Manchurian-Korean History’], *Pukpangsa nonch’ong* 8 (2007): 96.

17. Cho Insŏng et al., *Iljesigi Manjusa-Chosŏnsa insik* [Perception of Manchurian and Korean history in the Japanese colonial period] (Seoul: Tongbuga yŏksa chaedan, 2009).

18. Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*

ownership of Manchuria was largely a post-1945 phenomenon, for the political imaginaries that filled the late colonial period lacked a consensus on where those historical boundaries should be drawn. While Japanese colonial historians have been rightly criticized for fostering views on the purported stagnation of Korean history, the proposition that the histories of Manchuria and Korea should be linked into a single concept of *Mansenshi* may not be entirely disregarded as simply the product of Japanese imperialist propaganda. Influenced by Japanese colonial scholarship on the topic, Ch'oe Namsŏn (1890-1957) also viewed Manchuria as the cradle of Korean civilization and argued in his "*Purham munhwaron*" that the two regions comprised a single cultural sphere.¹⁹ Even nationalist Koreans like Sin Ch'aeho (1880-1936) also looked to Manchuria as an integral part of Korean history during this period and tried to recover an autonomous historical consciousness from the legacy of Koguryŏ.²⁰ Ironically, both Japanese and Korean historical narratives from the colonial period converged on legitimating Manchuria as a stage for Korean activity by conceptualizing the historical interconnectedness of the two regions.

The involvement of Koreans in Manchuria became a critical issue during the colonial period, because so many had migrated to the region. In a sense, the conceptual linkages established between Manchuria and Korea in the colonial historiography reflected a certain reality on the ground that could not be ignored. Korean migration may not fit properly into postliberation histories that separate Korea and Manchuria, but there is a need to understand the issue from a broader historical perspective that integrates both regions. Thus, a careful examination of Korean migration to the borderless frontier of Manchuria and the repatriation narratives may help clarify the historical position of Manchuria in modern Korean history and suggest some starting points for an alternative historical paradigm that encompasses both regions.

The Ambivalent Memories of Empire

The massive return from Manchuria that included displaced Japanese migrants like Fujiwara Tei was part of a population shift of epic proportions following

(Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 55-56.

19. Chizuko T. Allen, "Northeast Asia Centered around Korea: Ch'oe Namsŏn's View of History," *Journal of Asian Studies* 49, no. 4 (1990): 787-806.

20. Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires, 1895-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002): 233-236.

the collapse of the Japanese empire. Fujiwara traveled the same path as hundreds of thousands of Koreans who desperately struggled to return to the Korean peninsula from Manchuria. According to one census taken in 1940, approximately 1.4 million Koreans were in Manchuria, 1.2 million in Japan and 23.5 million in Korea, which means that more than 10% of the Korean population may have been residing in either Manchuria or Japan at the time.²¹ The numbers of Koreans flowing out of the Korean peninsula would continue to swell with the war mobilization, and, according to statistics from June 1945, 2,160,000 Koreans were in Manchuria on the eve of liberation and the total number of Koreans abroad may even have been as high as 5,000,000.²² While available statistics vary, as many as 1,000,000 Koreans may have returned from Manchuria and 1,400,000 returned from Japan.²³ The number of Japanese who had been scattered to various parts of the empire was also considerable. At the time of Japan's surrender, 3.2 million Japanese civilians and 3.7 million military personnel were outside of Japan, meaning that 6.9 million or nearly 9% of the Japanese population had left Japan during the war.²⁴ In effect, one of the most underappreciated aspects of the early twentieth century is the massive population movement across national borders that took place in Asia with the decline of the Russian and Qing empires and the subsequent ascendancy of the Japanese empire. The collapse of the Japanese empire in 1945 not only generated a reverse flow of migration, but it also left in its wake the problematic issue of determining the nationality of the migrants left behind.²⁵

21. Irene B. Taeuber and George W. Barclay, "Korea and Koreans in the Northeast Region," *Population Index* (October 1950), 281. Trewartha and Zelinsky estimate that by 1944, 11.6 percent of all Koreans resided outside of Korea. Glenn Trewartha and Wilbur Zelinsky, "Population Distribution and Change in Korea, 1925-1949," *The Geographic Review* 45 (January 1955), 14; cited in Bruce Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 54.

22. Hyŏn Kyuhwan, *Han'guk yuiminsa*, vol. 1 (Seoul: Ōmungak, 1967), 2. Some estimates put the number as high as 2.3 million Koreans in all of China and a total of 5 million outside of Korea as a result of the wartime mobilization. This suggests that almost 20 percent of Koreans were outside Korea in 1945. Kungmindae Han'gukhak yŏn'guso, *Kwihwan charyo ch'ongsŏ* 3 [Repatriation source collection 3] (Seoul: Yŏksa konggan, 2004), iii.

23. The total number of those who returned can only be estimated as the number of those who returned to North Korea is not known. Chang Sŏkhŭng, "Haebang hu kwihwan munje yŏn'gu ŭi sŏngkwa wa kwaje," [The results and issues in the research of the repatriation problem during the liberation period] *Han'guk kŏnhyŏndaesa yŏn'gu* 25 (2003): 11.

24. Lori Watt, "Imperial Remnants: The Repatriates in Postwar Japan," in *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Caroline Elkins and Susan Pederson (New York: Routledge, 2005), 245.

Thus, the simultaneous effort to repatriate millions of Koreans and Japanese back to their home countries was one of the most spectacular consequences of Japan's defeat in the Pacific War. The trauma of cross-border displacement and the untold personal tragedies during this repatriation process touched the lives of millions of Koreans and Japanese.²⁶ Within this larger movement of Koreans and Japanese flowing in different directions, there was even a group of Japanese and Koreans who briefly traveled a similar path. Official South Korean records state that 317,000 Koreans had returned to the Republic of Korea from Manchuria, while an unknown number returned to North Korea.²⁷ About 900,000 Japanese were repatriated from Southern Korea and about 590,000 had been south of the thirty-eighth parallel in August 1945, which may mean that perhaps as many as 300,000 or more Japanese had entered Southern Korea from Northern Korea and Manchuria.²⁸ Thus, while the actual number of Koreans and Japanese who shared this journey is difficult to determine, the statistics leave little doubt that thousands of Koreans and Japanese had fled war-torn Manchuria, traveled through Northern Korea, and finally crossed over the thirty-eighth parallel into Southern Korea.

What may be particularly worth noting is that the collective memories generated by this cross-border displacement met different fates in Japan and the Republic of Korea. The Japanese recollections of Manchuria mostly subsided soon after the war until they came back in the 1970s during the height of the *jibunshi* boom that encouraged ordinary Japanese to publish their "self-histories."²⁹ A common theme among these Japanese recollections was

25. Araragi Shinzō, "Introduction," in Araragi Shinzō, ed., *Nihon teikoku o meguru jinkō idō no kokusai shakaigaku* = *Migration and Repatriation: The Rise and Fall of the Japanese Empire* (Tokyo: Fuji shuppan, 2008), xii.

26. In a sense, the entire repatriation process would take decades to resolve itself, and some of the most notable chapters include the 90,000 "*zainichi*" Koreans (who were originally mostly from southern Korea or the Cheju Islands) who chose to "repatriate" to North Korea between 1958 and 1984. Koreans who remained in Japan after 1945 had a choice of Korean citizenship because they were denied Japanese citizenship. Many *zainichi* Koreans, who were originally from Cheju or the southern Korean provinces chose North Korean over South Korean citizenship. Over 90,000 then "repatriated" to a part of Korea where they had never been because of a confluence of Japanese domestic politics and Cold War maneuvering. In a sense, this event was one of the chapters of Japan's "Korea Problem," which reflected Japanese society's struggle with Korean migrants throughout the colonial period. Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Exodus to North Korea: Shadows from Japan's Cold War* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007).

27. Irene B. Taeuber and George W. Barclay, "Korea and Koreans in the Northeast Region," 290.

28. Ibid., 290. The total number of Japanese in all of Korea in 1940 was 707,000.

the terrible hardship endured by the Japanese migrants to Manchuria during their return to Japan. Many of the settlers who left after 1932 were impoverished farmers, and their recollections of suffering are extremely vivid even if as Mariko Tamanoi has noted, “the peasant settlers became what they themselves called victims only after 1945.”³⁰ In contrast, Koreans showed little interest in reviving their memories of Manchuria or the journey back home. Manchuria appears as the backdrop of some fictional works and films, but the history of the mass migration of Koreans in this region is largely absent from the postliberation publications and media.³¹

The gradual integration of Korea and Manchuria under the Japanese empire would ultimately establish conflicting and contradictory circumstances for the Koreans who migrated to this vast frontier. The border between the kingdoms of the Korean peninsula and Manchuria had shifted numerous times over the centuries, and ironically, the Japanese would become involved in establishing the first modern borders to this region with the Kando Convention of 1909 and later with the establishment of the Manchukuo state in 1932. However, the Japanese had a vested interest in maintaining a porous northern boundary to expand their influence and later incorporate the region for its wartime mobilization and economic integration.³² The ambiguity of the Korean border with Manchuria can best seen in Kando, where Japanese ceded administrative authority to the Qing, but maintained their claims over the Korean residents. Under these largely porous conditions, Koreans would spread to nearly every corner of Manchuria.

The movement of Koreans north had initially began in the late nineteenth century when the Qing Dynasty lifted its immigration prohibition to

29. See Carol Gluck, “The Past in the Present,” in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 64-95; Gerald Figal, “How to *Jibunshi*: Making and Marketing Self-Histories of Shōwa among the Masses in Postwar Japan,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 55 (1996): 902-33.

30. Mariko Asano Tamanoi, “A Road to ‘A Redeemed Mankind’: The Politics of Memory among the Former Japanese Peasant Settlers in Manchuria,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* (Winter 2000): 165.

31. The popular memories of the Manchurian experience did emerge through a genre of action films produced in postliberation South Korea in the 1960s. See Jinsu Ahn, “Manju aeksyŏn yŏnghwa ūi mohohan minjokchuŭi” [The ambiguous nationalism reflected in the Manchurian action films], *Manju yŏn’gu* 8 (2008): 199-229.

32. Kobayashi Hideo notes how the entire Japanese empire can be described as a total war system that had integrated the entire region under one currency into a war production mode. Kobayashi Hideo, *Teikoku Nihon to sōryokusen taisei* [Imperial Japan and the total war system] (Tokyo: Yūshisha, 2004).

Manchuria to counter Russian expansion. The Koreans arrived alongside countless other newly-arrived Chinese, Russian and Japanese migrants during one of the largest population transfers in world history.³³ Koreans were simply one of many different ethnic groups that sought a new life in the region and even the vast majority of the Chinese population was new to the region. The author Pak Yŏngjun (1911-1976) recalled in 1946 that the most surprising aspect of his Manchuria experience was that wherever there was water and arable land in a remote region, he would find Koreans that had somehow heard about that location and brought their families to work the land. However, it would be the bitter fate of Korean peasants that, “the land that they had cultivated from the wasteland with their blood and tears be seized from them, and they were chased away.”³⁴ Once the Japanese established Manchukuo, Pak Yŏngjun decried that all of the best lands had been taken away, and the Koreans became the semi-slaves of Japanese landlords.

However, the memories of Manchuria were not all of suffering. Some returnees recalled Manchuria as a land where one could consume to one's heart content, if one only had the economic means. One account remarks: “Right until August 15, Manchuria was a place rich in resources so that if you had money you could eat till you were full. In places like the market [in Changchun] valuable products that you could never imagine were piled high and people moved in waves like packs of pigs.”³⁵ Koreans who returned to Seoul even expressed disappointment at the drab condition of the city. One returnee noted on his first night back, “I had thought that neon-lights would strain one's eyes in Seoul, but the streets were dark. I walked to the intersection at daylight and thought how could it look so shabby and decrepit?”³⁶ The Japanese had spent vast resources in developing Manchurian cities like

33. When the Manchus conquered China in the seventeenth century, an estimated one million Manchus and two million Chinese inhabited Manchuria. While inevitably some limited migration did take place, an early form of the passport system was instituted to keep the Chinese out of the Manchu homelands. The Chosŏn Dynasty also forbade Koreans from moving to Manchuria from the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries. An estimated 16 to 20 million had migrated to Manchuria by the time of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-05. This figure would reach 43.2 million according to Manchukuo statistics in 1943. Koreans formed the second largest group while the Japanese were the third largest ethnic group in Manchuria. “Manchuria as a Demographic Frontier,” *Population Index* (October 1945): 260-274.

34. Pak Yŏngjun, “Manju ch'eryu p'allyŏnki, kuryok kwa kaegan” [Eight years in Manchuria, humiliation and reclamation], *Simsedae*, no. 1 (March 1946): 101.

35. Kim Sŏkch'ang, “Manju t'alch'ul ki” [Escape from Manchuria], *Noksipcha*, no. 1 (January 1946): 38.

36. So I, “P'inanmin yŏlch'a ki” [Refugee train], *Simsedae*, no. 1 (March 1946): 117.

Changchun into showcases for their empire.³⁷ The grandiose buildings and experiments in modern urban planning created dynamic cities filled with the bustle of multiple ethnic groups from throughout Northeast Asia. For Koreans who had become accustomed to living in the expansive and modern cities of Manchuria, life in Seoul may have indeed paled in comparison.

Despite the crowded and chaotic situation of Seoul immediately after liberation, the returnees to Korea were quite relieved to have made the dangerous trip back home. Several recollections published between 1945 and 1950 describe the hardships encountered during their journey. The Koreans who boarded trains back to Korea were terrified of encountering Russian soldiers and bandits along the way. Just as disturbing were the struggles with other frantic Korean refugees who tried to force their way onto the trains at every stop. One recollection described a scene witnessed on the ride back: “They slept outdoors in the Manchurian cold waiting for the refugee train, and when our train stopped they would desperately jump on without asking. Who’s not a Korean? Who is not a refugee? You must let everyone board!”³⁸ Those who were able to board the trains were the fortunate ones, for some Koreans had to walk much of the way back with whatever possessions they could carry. The vast distances that had to be covered across the Asian continent required a single-minded determination, for as one observer noted:

No matter what direction you looked, the sky and the earth never seemed to part ways, and we walked all night and day, yet there was only the endless horizon. We struggled against that insurmountable horizon, but still we stayed up all night and walked for five days to barely reach Xi’an because of our iron will to return to Korea.³⁹

The march through war-torn Manchuria was filled with bandits and marauding Russian soldiers, but just as dangerous was the constant struggle against nature. One account describes being caught in a sudden storm near Changchun, “The road became increasingly muddy until in the end the muddy water reached our knees. It was a major flood. We were swept away by the water several times and huddled together exhausted in the open field without a person in sight.”⁴⁰ The numerous accounts of the treacherous journey back

37. For more on the transformation of Changchun under the Japanese Empire, see Qinghua Guo, “Changchun: unfinished capital planning of Manzhouguo, 1932-42,” *Urban History* 31 (2004): 100-117.

38. *Ibid.*, 114.

39. Kim Sökch’ang, “Manju t’alch’ul ki,” 41.

express the despair of refugees who had abandoned much of their possessions and staggered back penniless to Korea. During the Korean War, the word *p'inan* (避難), which means “to take refuge,” was used to describe the escape from the advance of North Korean soldiers during the Korean War. Koreans today associate the word with the trauma of the Korean War. However, to the Koreans living in the immediate postliberation period, *p'inan* described the trauma of the cross-border displacement and the suffering of countless individuals who made the harrowing trek back home after the end of World War II and the collapse of the Japanese Empire.

The postliberation narratives that describe the hardships encountered in the return to Korea are interspersed with condemnations of Japanese atrocities committed in Manchuria. Yet despite the animosity against the Japanese, their defeat in the Pacific War would create a contradictory situation for Koreans in Manchuria. Pak Yŏngjun arguably gave the best description of the paradoxical significance of Japanese rule in Manchuria for the Korean residents. He had been conscripted to work in the mountains for two months without any contact with the outside world when he saw a Soviet aircraft flying overhead. He was only allowed to return home on August 17, after he heard about liberation:

On the way down we heard about Japan's defeat so we let out a meaningful sigh. However we could not help but feel a new rising sense of anxiety. The concern was about how the Chinese would treat the Koreans in the absence of Japanese power. This was because we were Koreans who had been called the “second Japanese” and were resented as a race.⁴¹

Pak and his fellow workers traveled back to their families while avoiding large gatherings of Chinese. He was told by a close Chinese friend to get rid of all of his Japanese belongings. Yet when he returned home, he discovered, “All of the books at home were in Japanese, and all I had to wear was the uniform of the Concordia Association (*Hyŏphwabok*),” and he noted with irony, “Liberation from Japan was without question a welcome event, yet the anxiety that followed did not subside at all.”⁴² The sudden defeat made it clear that Koreans in Manchuria had lived under the administration of the Japanese

40. Chŏn Hongjun, “P'inanja ŭi sugi” [Notes by a refugee], *Kaebyŏk*, no.73, (January 1946), 143.

41. Pak Yŏngjun, “Manju esŏ majŭn 8.15” [Liberation encountered from Manchuria], *Saeŏn minbo* 3, no. 17 (August 1949), 34.

42. *Ibid.*, 34.

Empire, and the power vacuum in the region became the source of sudden tension for Koreans far away from their homeland.

The desire for vengeance against years of mistreatment by the Japanese had emboldened the local population, and there was considerable fear that the violence directed against the Japanese would also affect the Koreans. One account describes the panic that the Koreans felt whenever large groups of Manchurians passed by:

The frightening gaze of the Manchurians was a cold stare that hinted that their patience would only last a few more days. How much insulting treatment had they received from Japanese Imperialists for the past twelve years? We could not feel at ease when we saw them aggressively kicking stones and swelling with bravado now that their day of vengeance had finally arrived.⁴³

The animosity towards Japanese and Koreans broke out into violence on the streets of Changchun according to another account of liberation published in December 1945. Elements of the Japanese Army near Changchun had mutinied when news of Japan's surrender broke in August 1945. During the chaos that then ensued, mobs spontaneously formed and threatened the civilian population: "When night came, they spread out and entered the streets where the Chinese within the city gathered, and they incited the blind masses to attack the homes of Japanese and Koreans to seek vengeance for their long-suppressed anger."⁴⁴ According to this account, the violence against Koreans continued for several days until the Nationalist Chinese Government launched an information campaign that Koreans should not be harmed under any circumstance. Thanks to the announcements, the violence against the Koreans reportedly subsided in Changchun but not before an environment of terror formed in the confusion that followed liberation.

The enmity towards Koreans may not have been present in every part of Manchuria, but numerous accounts clearly suggest that Koreans faced tension with the local population upon the collapse of the Japanese empire. Such accounts may lead to further questions about the position of Koreans in Manchurian society. The Japanese had advocated the "cooperation of the five races (*Ojok hyŏphwa*)" in Manchuria. Mass organizations like the Concordia Association purported to create a multicultural society in Manchuria. However, it was always clear that the Japanese were at the top of the many ethnic groups

43. Kim Sŏkch'ang, "Manju t'alch'ul ki," 39.

44. Wang Myŏng, "Sin'gyŏng esŏ ŭi t'aegukki," [The Korean flag in Sin'gyŏng], *Paengmin* (December 1945), 26.

represented among the ethnicities of Manchukuo.⁴⁵ Koreans were able to assimilate particularly well into Japanese culture, and the official policy of *naisen ittai* in colonial Korea had argued that the Koreans and Japanese were the same race. As Pak Yŏngjun explained in another of his Manchurian recollections, “The flattering claim that Koreans were citizens of Japan only created misunderstandings among the Chinese.”⁴⁶ The Japanese rhetoric of including Koreans as members of the Japanese empire was the source of considerable friction in Manchuria ever since the annexation of Korea.⁴⁷ Han Sŏkchŏng notes that, while Koreans may have been viewed as “middlemen” or “second-ranked citizens” in relation to the Japanese, the majority of impoverished peasants struggled to make a living while being the frequent targets of roaming bandits.⁴⁸ Han further adds that the media representations of Koreans in Manchurian newspapers frequently reported crimes committed by Koreans and wrote about even petty crimes in a sensationalized fashion.

Such ethnic antagonism had clearly simmered for decades between the Korean and Chinese populations, and they also appear in the repatriation narratives. Pak Yŏngjun acknowledged problems with the way that the Korean viewed the Chinese, for he noted, “We did not treat them like humans at all, because we thought their level of culture was too low.”⁴⁹ Pak’s statement suggests that the racial hierarchy created under Japanese rule had been internalized by Koreans who understood their relationship with the Chinese under a hierarchical framework. The racial animosities and frustrations that had built up over the years were expressed inside one train as it pulled away from Changchun headed back to Korea:

45. Duara notes that the Concordia Association had expressed multiethnic ideals but ultimately became a fascist mass party for wartime mobilization purposes. Within the multiethnic rhetoric the notion of consanguineous descent groups identified the Japanese as uniquely superior. Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian*, 77.

46. Pak Yŏngjun, “Manju ch’eryu p’allyŏn ki, kuryok kwa kaegan,” 100.

47. Chu Sŏnghwa, “Chungguk Chosŏnin ijusa” [History of the Migration of Chinese Koreans], *Han’guk haksul chŏngbo* (2007), 173; Barbara Brooks notes that claims of extraterritoriality of Koreans allowed some to engage in illicit trade such as opium before 1931. Yet despite claims that the Japanese authorities protected Koreans, they were not able to deal with the violence directed against Koreans in the region. Barbara Brooks, “Peopling in the Japanese Empire: Koreans in Manchuria and the Rhetoric of Inclusion,” in Sharon Minichiello, ed. *Japan’s Competing Modernities: Issues in Culture and Democracy 1900-1930* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998), 34-35.

48. Han Sŏkchŏng, *Manjuguk kŏnguk ūi chaehaesŏk*, 179-190.

49. Ibid., 100.

We are leaving! We are leaving! Someone said goodbye to Changchun. The intolerable land of the northern barbarians. The yellow teeth. The gloomy clothing. How terrifying. How disgusting. How relieved – these are the only words that I heard inside. In truth, the coolies of the northeast are a frightening people.⁵⁰

The memories of the terror-filled days avoiding the sights of the local population and the racism expressed by the Koreans on the return journey reflected the remnants of considerable ethnic strife and tensions in Manchuria.

The sudden collapse of the Japanese Empire placed Koreans in a precarious position; newspaper accounts from the 1945 period describe how the Chinese did not always distinguish the Koreans from the Japanese. On October 1946, the *Chosŏn ilbo* reported that Koreans were being treated like members of a defeated nation by the Nationalist Chinese government, and a law had just been promulgated that ordered the seizure of all land belonging to Koreans and Japanese, with ownership to be determined at a later time.⁵¹ The article reported that Koreans on the farms had their entire harvest seized, and those living in the cities had their property confiscated. The newspaper claimed that the average Chinese thought seizing Korean property was justified, which put the Koreans in a perilous situation. The *Tonga ilbo* described the situation of the returning Koreans in the following way:

If you listen to the experiences of the refugees who have returned recently, for countless overseas compatriots the joy of our national liberation lasted only for a moment. Many lives were regretfully sacrificed due to the second and third war calamities that arose with the advance of the Soviet Army, the Eight Route Army, and the Central Army. They are holding on to their lives. Yet the basis for their livelihoods that they had built up only after indescribable hardships were completely taken away in an instant and many are now wandering the streets.⁵²

The dream of land ownership and economic opportunity that Korean migrants sought in Manchuria ended in a disastrous nightmare, as many returned penniless and without their possessions in the aftermath of the war. Those who

50. So I, “P’inanmin yŏlch’agi,” 114.

51. *Chosŏn ilbo* (October 18, 1946). The fate of Koreans who stayed behind in Manchuria often depended on whether or not they lived in areas controlled by Nationalists or Communist Chinese forces. In Nationalist controlled areas, Koreans were often treated like the Japanese and had their properties seized, while in Communist controlled areas they were viewed as allies in the struggle against the Chinese Nationalists and received redistributed land just like poor Chinese peasants. Kungmindae Han’gukhak yŏn’guso, *Kwihwan charyo ch’ongsŏ* 3, iii.

52. *Tonga ilbo* (September 7, 1946).

stayed behind faced an uncertain future caught up in the middle of a civil war between rival Chinese governments.⁵³ The paradoxical nature of the Korean migrant to Manchuria was that while many of them did suffer extreme hardships during the colonial period, some of their most traumatic moments began with Japan's defeat.

The various postliberation narratives presented here cannot possibly contain all of the collective narratives of Korean returnees, and they are not intended to be a representative group. The recollections expressed immediately after Liberation are on the whole fraught with all of the contradictions one might expect from the diverse human encounters within the vast frontier of Manchuria. The recollections of personal hardships under desperate conditions that followed the end of World War II and the terrible fears of violent reprisals could have no clear role in the construction of collective identities in postliberation Korea. Thus, such traumatic memories inevitably faded from the collective recollections of Koreans today, and their Manchurian experiences became lost in an indeterminate space beyond the postcolonial nation's borders. However, within these return narratives are highly suggestive elements that invite further historical inquiry. The association of Koreans with Japanese imperialism, their ambiguous status in Manchuria and the ethnic tensions between Koreans and the local population cannot be explained as mere confusion on the part of the local Manchurian population during the chaos of Japan's defeat. The discourse of racial harmony in Manchuria obfuscated a far more complex hierarchical order and the ambiguous position of Koreans within the region before 1945 clearly invites further inquiry. What may seem out of context and jarring upon first glance can be steeped with significance once the various historical issues of Korean migration to Manchuria are brought to the fore. Koreans were deeply involved in Manchuria as a consequence of the historically porous border and Japanese empire's expansion. Hence, the ambiguity found in the return narratives may be viewed as products of an intense interaction that took place over many decades. Therefore, there is now a need to examine the broader issue of Korean migration under the Japanese empire and reconnect the narratives of Manchurian returnees to their proper historical context.

53. Return rates in the Kando area were lower at about 150,000 or 25% of the Korean population, while in other parts of Manchuria, as many as 50% of the Koreans decided to repatriate. Kim Kyöngil et al., *Tongasia üi minjok isan kwa tosi*, 350.

Excavating the Lost Colonial Experiences of Manchuria

A look back into colonial Korea and Manchuria quickly uncovers a particular fascination among Koreans with the Northern Frontier as maps and images of Manchuria drew attention to this space to be defended and as a site for Korean migration. As the poet Pak P'aryang (1905-1988) declared in the introduction to *Pando sahwa wa nakt'o Manju*, a collection of essays on Manchuria and Korea:

Manchuria and Korea are in the same line and category when viewed from the perspective of cultural history. Needless to say Korea's cultural traditions have developed from ancient times through the political connections to Koguryō which once boasted a broad territory north and south of the Yalu River. Within the bloom of Korean culture lies the continuous smell of Manchurian soil. How can we understand the rise and development of Korean culture without this connection?⁵⁴

The comprehensive set of essays penned by many leading Korean figures like Ch'oe Namsŏn on Manchuria and Korea published in *Pando sahwa wa nakt'o Manju* made clear the inextricable links between the history and culture of the two regions. Such examples of Korean writers expressing the cultural and historical ties between Korea and the Manchurian region are not difficult to find in the late colonial period.

The imaginaries of Korea's inextricable links with Manchuria would grow as more Koreans migrated to the region. At the start of the colonial period in 1910, about 200,000 Koreans were in Manchuria; the number of migrants would increase rapidly thereafter, even though the Japanese involvement in this process before the 1930s can be characterized more as passive rather than active engagement.⁵⁵ The largest number of Koreans resided in Kando, just north of the disputed Korean border with Qing China, where the population was 80,000 and formed 80% of the total population according to the figures of the Resident General of Korea.⁵⁶ The reasons for migrating to Manchuria were varied. Some Koreans wanted to escape Japanese domination and

54. Sanin Chŏngt'ae, *Pando sahwa wa nakt'o Manju* [The history of the Korean peninsula and the Manchurian paradise] (Singyŏng: Mansŏn hakhaesa, 1943), 19.

55. Kim Kihun, "Ilcheha 'Manjuguk'ŭi imin chŏngch'aek yŏngu siron" [An analysis of policy research on immigration policy of Japanese 'Manchukuo'], *Asia munhwa* 18 (2002): 46-47.

56. Ch'oe Changgŭn, "Ilche ŭi kando chŏngch'aek e kwanhan sŏngkyŏk kyumyŏng" [A study on the characteristics of the Kando policy under the Japanese Empire], *Irŏ ilmunhak* 43 (2010): 360.

engaged in active resistance movements; other Koreans sought economic opportunity and escape from the poverty of rural life.

While repressive colonial policies contributed to the exodus of Koreans, there were also far more complex dynamics behind the Manchurian migration. During the first two decades of Japanese rule, the Korean population increased approximately 1.5 times, but the cities did not grow fast enough to absorb the excess population.⁵⁷ The commercialization of Korean agriculture, investment of finance capital, and the concentration of land into large holdings ultimately led to a rationalization of farm production and the firing of tenants by absentee landlords.⁵⁸ The rural poverty in the countryside also led many Koreans to cross over to Japan, where they formed the bulk of the day-laborer market throughout the colonial period.⁵⁹ Throughout the entire colonial period, Korean migrant laborers traveled back and forth between Japan and Korea, leading to persistent efforts to restrict the flow of Koreans to Japan.⁶⁰ While the colonial authorities made concerted attempts to inhibit Korean movement to Japan, the same was not true with colonial Korea's border with the Manchurian frontier, which rapidly became a major outlet for the Korean population overflow. The Governor General of Korea's solution to the population problem in the 1930s was to encourage Korean migration north, and it even organized a mass official migration of Koreans to Manchuria,

57. Hashiya Hiroshi, *Ilbon chegukchui, singminji tosi rül kōnsōl bada* [Japanese imperialism: The building of the colonial city], trans. Kim Chejōng (Seoul: Motive Book, 2005), 58.

58. For more on the emergence of large-scale agricultural holdings and farm rationalization during the colonial period see Hong Sung-Chan, "The Emergence of New Types of Landlords in the Occupation Period," in Pang Kie-chung and Michael D. Shin, eds., *Landlords, Peasants and Intellectuals in Modern Korea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 175-205. The rapid rise of tenant disputes during the 1920s and 1930s was in part a reflection of the colonial agrarian transformation. The deterioration of the world markets and the plummeting of agricultural earnings in the 1920s and 1930s ultimately forced the colonial government to deal with the rural crisis by implementing various rural revitalization schemes. Gi-Wook Shin and Dohyun Han, "Colonial Corporatism: The Rural Revitalization Campaign, 1932-1940" in Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, eds., *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 70-96.

59. Ken Kawashima, *The Proletarian Gamble: Korean Workers in Interwar Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). The labor shortage in Japan during the economic boom of WWI had initially brought many Koreans to Japan but their unwelcomed presence would lead to the massacre of thousands after the Kanto Earthquake in 1923.

60. As Araragi Shinzō notes, the borders between Japan proper and its colonial possessions were technically open but in reality controlled by a strict system of "inner" or *naichi* and "outer" or *gaiji* registration. The movement of people from the colonies to Japan was not free for it was under constant management. Araragi Shinzō, "Introduction," in Araragi Shinzō, ed., *Nihonteikoku o meguru jinkō idō no kokusai shakaigaku*, xii, footnote 1.

where an estimated 720,000 Korean immigrants moved between 1932 and 1940.⁶¹ Large-scale migration had taken place even without any official Japanese encouragements. The rapid advances in the transportation infrastructure made travel to Manchuria far easier, and Chinese landlords initially welcomed Korean tenants because of their ability to farm and reclaim paddy lands better than local Chinese populations. Koreans not only introduced paddy farming to Manchuria, but they would also continue to dominate rice production to the extent where some sources in 1939 claimed that Koreans cultivated 85% of paddy fields in Manchuria.⁶² However, as the narratives of returning Koreans from Manchuria suggest, the rapid increases in the Korean population would create numerous ethnic tensions. The successful paddy farming of Koreans created a dilemma for the Chinese Northeast government, as it vacillated between policies intended to prevent Korean migration and policies for utilizing them as rice growers.⁶³ Nationality laws designed to prevent Japanese ownership of land also prevented Korean ownership of land in the 1910s and 1920s, and so Koreans often worked out arrangements with Chinese landlords to register land for them or worked under exploitative tenancy terms. Numerous ethnic conflicts then emerged throughout the 1920s when Chinese landlords engaged in land disputes with Korean farmers or attempted to remove Korean tenants forcibly after previously unproductive lands were reclaimed into lucrative paddy lands.

The ethnic tensions that Koreans encountered in Manchuria were an inevitable consequence of migrating to a land where millions of recent immigrants competed for limited lands and resources. The ethnic strife between Koreans and the local Chinese population occasionally erupted into violent events like the *Wanpaoshan* incident in 1931,⁶⁴ a land dispute between Chinese

61. Suk-Jung Han, "Those Who Imitated the Colonizers: The Legacy of the Discipline State from Manchukuo to South Korea," in Mariko Asano Tamanoi, ed., *Crossed Histories* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 179.

62. Hyun Ok Park notes the difficulty in determining the exact extent of Korean involvement in rice production, and it was certainly not the only crop that Koreans produced. However, they were strongly identified with rice production in the eyes of both Japanese authorities and the local Chinese. Hyun Ok Park, *Two Dreams in One Bed*, 91-92. While estimates vary as to the extent of paddy lands under Korean cultivation, a monthly report of the Chosen Industrial Bank in April 1940 shows that 56% of the paddy production of Manchukuo was produced by Koreans. *Shokugin chōsa geppō* [Monthly report of the Chosen Industrial Bank] (1940-4), 75. According to this report Koreans produced 244,523 out of 437,760 tons of annual paddy field production in Manchukuo.

63. Hyun Ok Park, *Two Dreams in One Bed*, 43.

and Koreans that contributed to the pretext for the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Ethnic riots broke out in Korea when news of the dispute spread through colonial Korea's media. The Chinese living in Manchuria blamed the Koreans as the agents of Japanese imperialism, because of their extraterritoriality status as Japanese citizens.⁶⁵ The Chinese tended to view the migration of Koreans in a negative light as an advanced sign of the Japanese empire's expansion.⁶⁶ While the Japanese violently suppressed the *futei senjin* 不逞鮮人, recalcitrant Koreans engaging in anti-Japanese resistance, they also claimed to protect the "good Korean farmers" or *sennō* 鮮農 as their own imperial subjects.

At the heart of these ethnic disputes involving Koreans in Manchuria was a fundamental ambiguity regarding their nationality and their rightful status in a region without a modern nation-state capable of administering all of its citizens. In this regard, the existing national borders had little meaning prior to 1945, because no modern nation-state with the capacity to register all of the citizens claimed this region as its own territory. Indeed, the narratives of returning Koreans often refer to their ambiguous status in Manchuria, which was greatly complicated by the Japanese occupation of Korea. Koreans who lived in Kando, for example, suddenly found themselves in a "foreign" country when the Japanese negotiated the Kando Convention in 1909 and relinquished the Chosŏn dynasty's historical claims to the region. The Koreans there were pressured to naturalize as subjects of the Qing dynasty under the condition that they wear Manchu clothing and hairstyles. This naturalization became more

64. The Wanpaoshan incident erupted on July 1, 1931, near Changchun, Manchuria, when a group of migrant Koreans leased land from a Chinese landlord and began to dig an irrigation ditch. Local Chinese farmers protested and Japanese consular police fired rifles to disperse the crowd. Nobody was injured, but the incident was mistakenly reported in Korea as a bloody clash between Korean and Chinese farmers. Reaction to the sensationalized newspaper accounts led to a series of anti-Chinese riots throughout Korea. Accounts vary, but as many as 100 Chinese were killed and over 500 were wounded throughout colonial Korea. Pak Yŏng-sŏk, *Manbosan sakŏn yŏn'gu: Ilche taeryuk ch'imnyak chŏngch'aek ū irhwan ūrosŏ* (Seoul: Asea munwhasa, 1978).

65. The occupation of Korea by the Japanese meant that Koreans became subjects of the Japanese empire and had extraterritoriality rights in China due to Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War and the strengthening of Japanese privileges after the Twenty-one Demands of 1915. Through various imperialist aggressions, the Japanese created a system of diplomatic consuls and consular police and rights for their citizens to lease land and reside in areas outside of the treaty ports in Manchuria. These institutions designed to have jurisdiction over Japanese nationals in Manchuria then provided the means to claim sovereignty over the migrant Korean population. For more on the extraterritoriality of Koreans in Manchuria see Barbara Brooks, "Peopling in the Japanese Empire: Koreans in Manchuria and the Rhetoric of Inclusion."

66. Kim Kyŏngil et al., *Tongasia ū minjok isan kwa tosi*, 38.

than an issue of one's national identity, as the Qing government made it a prerequisite for land ownership.⁶⁷ However, those who refused to assimilate into Manchu culture were denied the right to change their citizenship and could not register their property. The Japanese complicated the situation of Koreans by refusing to recognize the nationality changes of Koreans in any form.⁶⁸ Instead, the Japanese administrated Koreans in Kando as Japanese citizens through its consulate offices and maintained legal authority over them. These kinds of conflicting claims of sovereignty over Koreans were not easy to resolve, since they also involved property rights and legal authority.

However, the issue of Koreans in Manchuria was much more complex than the overlapping claims of sovereignty over them, because considerable numbers had no recognized nationality in the modern sense. Many Koreans living in Manchuria were never officially registered in Qing China, the Northeast Chinese state, nor in colonial Korea. Therefore, they were not legally recognized entities, because they had migrated to a frontier region before the creation of a modern government with the capacity to conduct a comprehensive census. The Japanese went to considerable lengths to register Koreans in colonial Korea, but significant variations existed even among colonial registries as a complete count of the population was never achieved.⁶⁹ The number of unregistered Koreans in Manchuria was estimated at approximately 600,000 out of 1.3 million by 1941.⁷⁰ Most of them had either declined or were denied

67. Hyun Ok Park, *Two Dreams in One Bed*, 28.

68. Koreans had difficulty in obtaining citizenship because the official Japanese colonial policy of refusing to recognize changes in citizenship by Koreans. Barbara Brooks, "Peopling in the Japanese Empire: Koreans in Manchuria and the Rhetoric of Inclusion," 33.

69. Depending on which method employed, periodic census counts by colonial officials and police or voluntary registrations, the population statistics varied considerably. For more on colonial population statistics and their variability, see Pak Myŏnggyu and Sŏ Hoch'ŏl, *Singminji kwŏllyŏk kwa t'onggye* [Colonial power and statistics]. (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2003), 61-121. Even within colonial Korea there was the problem of a free floating Korean population that did not have a legal registration and various laws and regulations controlled the registration and revision of Korean census registries. For example, in 1933 there were 5,972 Koreans who acquired new registrations and 18,970 who requested changes in their census records. Colonial officials estimated that hundreds of thousands of Koreans in Korea remained unregistered. The process of registration was not a simple matter as some Koreans had multiple registrations or were improperly registered. A legal court judgment was necessary to allow Koreans in Korea to create a new registry, but those Koreans who migrated out before the colonial period were allowed to have a simplified legal process if they could prove that they had registered with a local government in Manchuria before 1910. Masunaga Shōichi, "Zaiman senjin no shūseki mondaini tsuite" [On the census registration problem of Koreans in Manchuria], *Chōsen kōron* (March 1935): 3-5.

70. Yun Sanghŭi, "Zaiman Chōsenjin no shūseki mondai" [The problem of census registration

registration with Qing China and the Northeast Chinese government. Or in some cases, they could not establish proper registration back in Korea. By the establishment of the Manchukuo state in 1932, only 65,333 Koreans had registered with the previous Northeast Chinese state, with the majority or 53,699 of them in Kando.⁷¹ Koreans maintained their extraterritorial status in Manchukuo until 1936, when all Japanese and Koreans residents were required to naturalize. However, Koreans had to prove that they had registration in colonial Korea, otherwise they could not register with the Manchukuo government and be eligible to own property. The registration had the additional implication that the unregistered Koreans could not be conscripted for labor or military duty by either Manchukuo or the colonial Korean state.⁷² Thus, a significant proportion of Koreans in Manchuria remained “un-nationalized” all the way to the end of the colonial period.

The ambiguities of the border between the two regions also manifest themselves in the economic realm, for numerous projects of the colonial Korean government traversed the established boundaries. Japanese imperial authorities established a number of financing schemes to settle both Japanese and Korean farmers to Manchuria in the 1930s, and several agricultural communities were created throughout the region as a result. The colonial Korean government played a key role in financing this collective migration of Koreans to Manchuria.⁷³ From 1937 to 1941, the total number of households settled under various forms of collective arrangements totaled 31,275 or 226,240 people.⁷⁴ Previous to the collective farms established in the late 1930s,

for Koreans in Manchuria] *Ch'unchu* (Sep. 1940), 106.

71. Chang Paeksan, “Manshū ni saishū suru Chōsenjin tōhō no seikatsu jōtai” [The living conditions of Koreans residing in Manchuria], *Chōsen oyobi Manshū* (May 1932), 83.

72. Mizuta Naohisa “Shōwa jūrokunendo Chōsen sōtokufu yosan ni oite” [The 1941 budget of the Governor General of Korea], *Chōsen zaimu* (November 1941), 7.

73. For more on the collective settlements see Hyun Ok Park, *Two Dreams in One Bed*. Hyun Ok Park argues that the settlers were given “fictive lands.” While some Korean settlers did receive loans to buy plots of land and farm equipment, many labored for years only to lose all of their possessions in the confusion that followed the collapse of the Japanese empire. The strict terms of the financing deals also meant that Koreans under contract could not leave their plots due to their debt obligations and were effectively tied to their land. Regardless of how one views the terms of the collective agricultural communities, the financing for the scheme partly came from the colonial government in Korea. For example, the Governor General of Korea supplied 325,000 yen in 1941 or half the amount to resettle 10,000 households of approximately 50,000 Koreans. Mizuta Naohisa “Shōwa jūrokunendo Chōsen sōtokufu yosan ni oite,” 6.

74. Son Ch'unil, *Manjuguk ū chaeman Hanin e taehan t'oji chōngch'aek yŏn'gu* [A study of the Manchukuo policy on land rights of Koreans in Manchuria] (Seoul: Paeksan charyowŏn, 1999), 181. Cited in Hyun Ok Park, *Two Dreams in One Bed*, 145.

the Government General of Korea had utilized the plight of Korean refugees to propagandize its welfare programs in the region. The construction of five 'safety villages' in Manchuria funded by the colonial Korean government was designed to provide refuge to approximately 12,000 destitute Korean farmers devastated by the chaos that followed the Manchurian Incident in 1931. The resettlement of these Koreans who sought shelter from marauding bandits and relief from the war in Manchuria was touted repeatedly as one of the major successes of the colonial state.⁷⁵ The consequence for Korean migrants to Manchuria, however, was the general impression that they were the beneficiaries of Japanese colonial policies, even if the vast majority of impoverished Korean farmers in the region received no such financial support. Indeed, most Korean migrants had arrived in Manchuria long before these population resettlement policies were implemented in the 1930s, but by the end of the colonial period the link between Korean migration and Japanese expansion was firmly established in the minds of many in the region.

The colonial Korean government's involvement with financing Korean migration to Manchuria was a concrete manifestation of colonial slogans such as *Sŏn-Man illyŏ* 鮮滿一如, which was articulated by Governor General Minami Jiro (1936-1942) at the start of his term. As the former commander of the Kwangtung Army and ambassador to Manchukuo, Minami frequently emphasized the meaninglessness of the borders between the two regions. He aimed to move control of the border to the Korean colonial government, further link the transportation networks, eliminate tariffs, make migration easier, and jointly develop electrification projects along the Yalu River.⁷⁶ Official colonial publications during his term emphasized the decline of "border consciousness" between Korea and Manchuria.⁷⁷ The completion of the massive *Sup'ung* Dam along the Yalu River in 1941 was a joint effort by Manchukuo and the colonial Korean state, and Minami emphasized in a colony-wide radio broadcast that the project was a concrete realization of *Sŏn-*

75. Chōsen sōtokufu, *Chōsen jijō* [Conditions of Korea] (Keijō, 1943), 302-303.

76. The concept of *Sŏn-Man illyŏ* did not necessarily receive a warm reception from the Manchukuo side. Minami's pronouncements encountered some criticism from the Manchurian authorities as an infringement of Manchukuo's sovereignty. Satoyoshi Motoki, "Senman ichinyo o kyokkai suru nakare," *Chōsen kōron* (July 1938), 2; As Duara points out, there were forces working towards autonomy in Manchukuo's power structure but they were largely subordinated to the needs of Japan's war machine. Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian*, 77.

77. "Senman kokkyō ishiki no kaishō" [The dissolution of border consciousness between Korea and Manchuria], *Yakushin jidai* (February 1937), 3.

Man illyō.⁷⁸ The extension of Manchuria as a site for economic activity was not limited to the colonial government, for even Korean businessmen like Kim Yōnsu would establish a factory and invest in various companies in Manchuria.⁷⁹ The trade between the two regions would grow to 80% of colonial Korean exports and the removal of tariffs in 1944 would be yet another concrete example of the considerable regional economic integration that had advanced during the late colonial period.⁸⁰

Thus, the Koreans who migrated to Manchuria before 1945 had entered what had once been a historically borderless frontier that was rapidly being integrated into a single regional order through the projection of Japanese imperial power. Colonial slogans such as *Mansenshi* and *Sŏn-Man illyō* reflected a certain reality in that the intensity of interactions between the two zones, which existed throughout the known historical period, had accelerated greatly with the expansion of the Japanese empire. However, when Koreans crossed over the porous Manchurian border, they experienced a fundamental ambiguity in their status, for they either entered as citizens of the Japanese empire or did not exist as legal entities at all due to a lack of official registration in either Korea or Manchuria. Thus, the hostility expressed towards Koreans found in the return narratives from Manchuria suggests the presence of a multitude of issues that stem from the indefinite status of Koreans who were both colonized subjects and constituent members of the Japanese empire. Without question, most Koreans who migrated to Manchuria were impoverished farmers who barely made a subsistence living, and their inclusion in the Japanese empire had little bearing on their daily lives. Yet the historical context of their migration to Manchuria involved them in unavoidable tensions and economic competition with the local populations that sometimes associated Koreans with the Japanese empire. Ultimately, the history of this Korean Manchurian migration and the rapid regional integration that took place prior to 1945 will need to be written from the perspective of a trans-national regional history that can adequately capture all of the complex human interactions along this vast frontier.

78. "Shisei kinenbi ni saishi sōtoku zenkoku he hōsōsu" [The Governor General's national broadcast to commemorate the establishment of the colonial government], *Chōsen* (October 1941), 50.

79. Carter Eckert, *Offspring of Empire: The Koch'ang Kims and the Colonial Origins of Korean Capitalism, 1876-1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 177-181.

80. Song Kyujin, "Ilcheha 'sŏnman kwangye'wa 'sŏnman ilyōron' [The relationship of Manchuria and Korean and 'sŏnman ilyōron' under the Japanese Empire]," *Han'guksa yŏn'gu* (2009): 146-246.

Conclusion

The return narratives of Koreans from Manchuria demonstrate that history cannot be narrated only from the perspective of postcolonial nation states, for the events that took place before the establishment of fixed national borders cannot be contained within the specific geographic regions. Manchuria and Korea went through a historical period where the borders between the two regions were either non-existent or did not have the same rigid meanings as today. While colonial notions of *Mansenshi* 滿鮮史 need not be rehabilitated for such purposes, there may be some benefit in considering the proposition that the two regions were once inextricably linked in their two histories. Rather than colonial historiographic models, the more relevant perspective may be a transnational or regional view that resists confining histories into predefined national receptacles. Imperial histories, in particular, are by their nature transnational in scope. The conceptual boundaries of Korean history under Japanese occupation must be expanded beyond the peninsula, because Korea did not exist as a separate national entity. There was only the colony of Korea, which was an integral part of a larger imperial structure that spanned across a broad geographic area. Korean history after 1948 may be arguably contained into a geographic region that is limited to the Korean peninsula, but the history that predated the establishment of the Republic of Korea and the Korean Democratic People's Republic can only be viewed from a broader transnational perspective that integrates the regional histories of Manchuria, Japan and Korea under a common rubric. The borders between different parts of the Japanese empire often lacked rigidity, and the entangled histories that resulted often span far beyond the national boundaries established after 1945. From the same perspective that there can be no separate Korean history under the Japanese empire, one may also argue that there is also not a Japanese history or a Manchurian history that can be isolated and disengaged from the rest of the empire. The human tragedy that took place in the repatriation process after 1945 ultimately signified the end of this transnational moment in Japanese imperial history and the sudden emergence of national histories that demanded postcolonial ethnic reshufflings and the return of peoples to their purported "origins," even if many of the migrants had left their homelands decades before or had been born into different parts of Northeast Asia.

While it may take considerable more historical discussion to explicate a viable transnational model for connecting the entangled histories of Manchuria and Korea, the collective memories from the close interaction between the two

regions may provide an important reservoir for another, albeit idealistic, purpose. The collective trauma of cross-border displacement necessitated by a previously undifferentiated imperial space becoming suddenly subdivided into national spaces was shared by large numbers of Koreans and Japanese in 1945. The translator of Fujiwara's book began his preface with a confession of his "foolhardiness and ignorance" for having the audacity to translate a Japanese book in post-liberation Korea. He went on to note that the conclusion of the war in August 1945 had ended the atrocities of the Japanese in East Asia and triggered the start of an unprecedented movement of people. Among the records generated by this great movement, he was particularly moved by Fujiwara Tei's story because: "The vivid impressions of the extreme travel fatigue from fleeing the wicked armies, the perseverance of maternal love amidst the suffering, and the continuous baseness and hatred of the human rabble encountered in the dead-end streets made me suddenly forget that it was written by a Japanese."⁸¹ The story of a Japanese woman's struggle to return home in the devastation at empire's end allowed for the suspension of the translator's national identity and enabled him to recognize the humanity of someone considered the enemy. The fact that tens of thousands of Korean readers in the aftermath of World War II found this story of a Japanese woman to be so compelling suggests the existence of a complex historical dynamic in the immediate postliberation era that transcended the boundaries of the Korean peninsula.

Despite the torrid sales pace before the Korean War, the book attracted hardly any demand when 3,000 copies of the fifteenth edition were again reprinted in 1964.⁸² *Naega nŏmŭn 38 sŏn* may have initially been a bestseller, but there was almost no further interest in the book after the war disrupted its sale. Today, Fujiwara Tei remains a mostly unknown figure in Korean publishing history. The popularity of her work remains somewhat of a mystery to the few critics that have taken notice of the unusual volume of its past sales.⁸³ Some contemporaneous critics also lamented the popularity of a book written by a Japanese woman; a newspaper editorial published in the *Hansŏng ilbo* on April 1950 decried, "It is an insult to our print culture that a memoir of a Japanese woman crossing over the thirty-eighth parallel has already

81. Fujiwara Tei, *Naega nŏmŭn 38 sŏn*, 2.

82. Yang Pyŏng, *Pesit'ŭ sellŏ iyagi* [Bestseller stories] (Seoul: Tosŏ ch'ulp'an usŏk, 1985), 52-55.

83. One scholar of Korean publishing remarked, "The fact that the only bestseller [of the period] that tells of the tragedy [of the 38th parallel] was written by a Japanese woman is yet another disheartening aspect alongside the division of the peninsula." Yi Chunghan et al., *Uri ch'ulp'an 100 nyŏn* [One hundred years of our publications] (Seoul: Hyŏnamsa, 2001), 248.

published its sixth edition.”⁸⁴ The success of Fujiwara’s book in Korea triggered considerable controversy, but the tragic story of her escape from Manchuria and desperate struggle to cross the thirty-eighth parallel resonated powerfully among Korean readers in 1950.

The translator’s preface to Fujiwara Tei’s book further explains that the same Pak Yŏngjun who wrote about his Manchurian experiences in numerous postliberation journals broke into tears twice when he read passages from the translation.⁸⁵ Thus, while the memories of Manchuria had entirely different fates in the two nations, there was a brief moment in 1949-50 when reading audiences in both Japan and South Korea could wholeheartedly identify with the plight of a Japanese woman described in *Nagareru hoshi wa ikite iru* and give birth to the first simultaneous bestseller in the two post-1945 nations. The entangled history of human displacement at empire’s end may have no role in the construction of postcolonial national histories, but the memories from this period may potentially provide a common reservoir for the creation of a transnational East Asian history that resists nationalization. But such a tantalizing possibility had appeared only briefly during the immediate postliberation years when the memories were still fresh in the minds of those who experienced a common travail. The challenge for historians today may be to recover these individual historical experiences buried beneath the nationalist narratives of state formation to forge transnational histories that can successfully capture the full complexities of human experiences and establish a shared basis for mutual identification.

84. *Hansŏng ilbo* (2 April 1950). The success of *Naega nŏmŭn 38 sŏn* and other Japanese works stirred up anti-Japanese passions and contributed to a clamor for the passage of a law banning the sale of Japanese translations in the spring of 1950. *Chayu sinmun* (6 April 1950).

85. Fujiwara Tei, *Naega nŏmŭn 38 sŏn*, 3.