

*Beyond Comparison:
Japan and Its Colonial Empire in Trans-imperial Relations*

Scholars have long discussed the characteristics of Japanese colonialism by comparing it with the colonialisms of other empires. The results, however, have been far from productive, often ending up reinforcing stereotypical assumptions about the so-called ‘national characteristics’ of the colonialisms thus compared. In this panel, instead of using comparison as a tool of our own, we foreground it as an object of historical research in its own right, highlighting how both the colonizer and colonized across different empires used it for their own purposes. Through transcending comparison in this way, our ultimate goal is to situate Japanese colonialism in trans-imperial relations, examining how ideologies, practices, and people circulated between the Japanese and the British, French, Dutch, and German empires.

Akiyoshi Nishiyama’s paper will demonstrate how the Japanese administrators and scholars in charge of colonial rule overseas used comparison as a tool of imperial rule. By focusing on the shifting intellectual trajectory of a Korean scholar of English literature, Sejung Ahn’s paper will show how comparison mattered to colonized subjects as well. Chizuru Namba’s paper on Indo-China will tell us how comparison was deployed not just by Japan but also by its rival, France. The paper by Aaron Peters on the collaboration between the anti-British activities of some Indians and Japanese ‘pan-Asianists’ will serve to further complicate the picture of trans-imperial relations. Finally, Makoto Yoshida’s paper on the entry of Taiwanese into the Dutch East Indies will show how politically charged the trans-imperial movement of colonized subjects could become.

* The panel is chaired by Satoshi Mizutani. Takashi Fujitani and Hadine Heé join the panel as discussants.

‘Between Border Regions and Oversea Colonies
—the German Empire as a Model for Imperial Japan on the Eve of the First World War?’

Akiyoshi Nishiyama

In the last third of the 19th century, it was important for Japan as a ‘late-comer’ to catch up with the ‘civilized’ nations in Western Europe. In order to collect information about these countries, the Japanese government invited scholars therefrom, whilst in turn sending many students and administrators thereto. At the turn of the century, when Japan not only consolidated itself as a modern nation-state but also became a colonial empire, the range of its interests in comparative learning expanded accordingly. Since then, Japanese scholars and administrators grew interested in how European nations as colonizing powers ruled other societies.

Particularly interesting in this context is the fact that their attention was not confined to colonial possessions overseas: they were also interested in border regions—regions that were geographically adjacent to colonizing nations. It was partly because of this that Germany proved to be of special interest. The German Empire, itself established in as late as 1871, emerged as a significant object of comparison. It was notable because of its border regions such as Alsace-Lorraine and Prussian Poland. Based on an historical analysis of the activities of Japanese colonial administrators in Taiwan and Korea as well as the writings of those Japanese scholars who were involved in colonial affairs, this paper will discuss what place the German experience with border regions occupied within the Japanese politics of colonial comparison. It will also pay attention to the influence of German policy-makers, whose behaviors encouraged Japan’s comparative efforts in some ways but hindered them in others.

‘The Irish Question in Colonial Korea’

Sejung Ahn

In this paper, I would like to examine what can be called as the "Irish question" in colonial Korea, a strange upsurge of interests in the political condition of Ireland from the 20s to the 30s, which was replaced as referencing to Scotland a decade later. Indeed, a stark contrast between Ireland and Scotland in the making of the British Union made a good reference point, for colonized and colonizer alike, to understand similar predicament in colonial Korea, particularly with regard to the degree of assimilation, despite undeniable colonial hierarchies. In what context, from the outset, political turbulence faraway in Ireland generated acute interests in colonial Korea? And why it had to yield to Scotland a decade later? I am interested in looking at this shift of standpoint beginning from the mid-30s when colonial Korea was confronted with the institutional implementation of the wholesale assimilation. Particularly, through a reading of intellectual discourses presented by Choe Jae Suh, a representative thinker in colonial Korea who not only pioneered the scholarly genre of literary criticism but also provided theoretical framework on the formation of national literature, I aim to foreground its theoretical implication, which can be traced back to the eighteenth century's moral theories presented by Adam Smith and Edmund Burke respectively. In so doing, I will point out a significantly analogous relation as to why Choe deliberated on the oxymoronic question of how colonial literature can define its own identity while simultaneously contributing to "co-prosperity" among different cultures in his compromising attempt to forge a national literature.

‘French colonization and Japanese occupation in Indochina during World War II’

Chizuru Namba

This study considers the intersections and mutual influence of the French and Japanese colonization in Indochina during World War II. In September 1940, Japan stationed forces in Indochina, and under French colonial control, was able to take advantage of France’s weakened military presence after its defeat to Germany. At this point, Indochina became the only Japanese-occupied Southeast Asian country in which a western suzerainty remained. From Japan’s occupation until the Japanese coup on March 9, 1945, during which the Japanese military removed the French suzerainty by force, Japan and France jointly ruled Indochina as occupier and colonizer, respectively, while avoiding major conflicts.

The two countries, forced to coexist, were always aware of each other and necessarily engaged in a complicated and unstable relationship. For example, faced with a Japanese appeal to the Vietnamese based on “Asian commonality and solidarity,” French colonial authorities reconsidered their previous policy; they began to allow each nation within the Federation of Indochina to practice their own cultures and traditions, in an attempt to prejudice local residents against the Japanese model of a pan-Asian identity. Japan also constantly struggled with France’s presence in Indochina. Their activities—including cultural events, attempted pro-Japanese propaganda, and other programs—were frequently limited by French intervention, often in the name of “collaboration.” Furthermore, Japan desired to be taken seriously by the French and to be considered a “first rate” nation, not only in military prowess but also in terms of culture; thus, when implementing cultural policies, they often sought to target two completely different groups—the French and the Vietnamese.

'Entangled Alliances: Mobilizing the Discourse of Civilization and the Politics of Comparison in
Japan and the Indian diaspora, 1931-1937'

Aaron Peters

With the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 and the 1931 Manchurian Incident, Japan sought to protect and expand its imperial interests in Asia and beyond by appealing to the language of self-determination and Pan-Asianism. At the same time, Indian nationalists in Japan such as Rash Behari Bose, A.M Sahay, and others viewed the creation of Manchukuo in 1932 as evidence of Japanese sincerity towards Asian nationalism, as well as a model of development that India and Asia should follow. These invocations were used to critique socialist trends within the mainstream Indian nationalist movement, particularly the positions and policies of the Indian National Congress and its support for Guomindang government in China.

This paper will highlight and analyze the relationship between Japan, India, and the Indian merchant diaspora in East Asia from 1931 to 1937. During this period, the discourse of a common Asian civilization as mediated through a politics of comparison was mobilized by Japanese leaders, activists, and scholars as well as Indian nationalists in Japan within their own national/transnational projects. This paper will explicate the imperial entanglements between these projects even while such projects pursued ostensibly different agendas. In addition, this paper will also draw attention to the ways in which both Japanese leaders and Indian nationalists aligned with Pan-Asianist ideology sought to mobilize the financial and moral support of the Indian merchant diaspora in East Asia, contextualizing such overtures within the imperial competition for markets in the wake of the Great Depression.

‘Proving ‘Japaneseness’: passport control and the problem of identification in the Dutch East Indies’

Makoto Yoshida

Taking the case of the movement of people from the Japanese Empire to the Dutch East Indies during 1899-1918, this paper will explore the relationship between passport control and identification under trans-imperial circumstances. It will pay special attention to the question of the movement of Taiwanese persons, who since 1895 had been a colonial subject of the Japanese Empire as a result of China’s loss in the Sino-Japanese War. How did the colonial distinction within the Japanese empire come to affect the categories of colonial rule in the Dutch Empire?

In the Indies, ‘Europeans’ were given the right to move freely. In contrast, ‘natives’ (inlanders), including its Chinese inhabitants, found their movements severely restricted by the colonial state. Though they were racially non-European, the Japanese——a colonizing people in their own right——were designated by a law passed in 1899 as ‘European’ and thus were given the right of free movement *de juri*. The problem for the Dutch authorities was that those who came from the Japanese Empire included non-Japanese people like Taiwanese. Their worry was that, because Japanese and Chinese people were racially indistinguishable, the latter might try to pass as ‘Japanese’ by entering the Indies via the Japanese Empire and thereby acquire the legal status of ‘European’. The paper will show how this concern urged both the Japanese Foreign Ministry and the Dutch authorities into introducing a certificate of nationality that had to be submitted in addition to the passport.