Published on *Reviews in History* (http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews)

Exporting Japan: Politics of Emigration to Latin America

Review Number:
857
Publish date:
Sunday, 31 January, 2010
Author:
Toake Endoh
ISBN:
9780252034022
Date of Publication:
2009
Price:
£34.00
Pages:
280pp.
Publisher:
University of Illinois Press
Place of Publication:
Chicago, IL
Reviewer:
Jonathan Mackintosh

Exporting Japan examines the domestic politics and foreign policy concerns shaping Japanese expansion into Latin America through immigration and settlement in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Its focus on the ideas, debates, actors, and institutions that eventually lead to the establishment of a dynamic cultural presence and diverse set of communities introduces and develops an alternative perspective in the study of the ?Japanese diaspora? and one of its most populous migrations. Wide-ranging archival investigation, which includes diplomatic texts, local and national government documents, and a variety of materials from Japanese as well as Latin and North American collections, enable Endoh to challenge assumptions concerning historical patterns of Japanese migration, and the state?s attempts to direct and exploit these. In fact, the implantation of a Japanese presence in Latin America ? Endoh challengingly identifies it as colonial ? was often ill-conceived, haphazardly co-ordinated if lavishly funded, and hastily executed, much to the detriment of the 300,000 some migrant-settlers who made the cross-equatorial journey. It is this negligence on the part of the Japanese state that Endoh seeks to explain, which is all the more problematic given the great resources and systematic efforts that were put towards the recruitment, financing, training, transport, and resettlement of the so-called *kokusaku imin* (immigrants as a strategic national policy; p. 2) who made up this strategy of ?colonial development? to spearhead ?Japan?s expansionist overtures? (p. 8).

Endoh develops and employs a ?state-centred? approach that explores, on the one hand, the policy-setting

role of central government including ministerial bureaucracies and the diplomatic service, as well as a variety of quasi-private emigration-related enterprises, and on the other hand, the implementation of migration policies by prefectural, municipal, and village administrations. Through close attention paid to state actors ? politicians, intellectuals, interest groups ? this approach is calibrated to examining the multitude of often conflicting institutional relationships, policy debates, and public discourses that together formed and informed the state?s emigration apparatus. It helps to account for why decisions taken often belied political-economic logic and migrant-settler welfare. Overall, it allows her to evaluate contradictory interpretations of Japanese Latin-American emigration that range from a ?monumental achievement of Japan?s international advance? to the ?dumping? and ?abandonment? of its socially marginal people (p. 2).

The first of three sections surveys main events and developments in the historical origins and patterns of Japanese migration to Latin America. The two chapters making up this section respectively deal with the ?first wave? of migration corresponding with the turn of the century to the Second World War and the ?second wave? of the post-war period. The selection of national case histories that each chapter presents highlights a profound diversity of experiences that were shaped by highly differing combinations of local political concerns, business and host-state industrial and strategic interests, and the attitudes of and decisions taken by migrant-settler and indigenous individuals. Common to the two ?waves? of migration was the adversity and hardship that Japanese faced almost universally, often with success but usually with minimal support from the Japanese state which, for its part, prioritised macro-political objectives of national stability and international influence over the micro socio-economics of migrant-settler communities (p. 156). In fact, in the absence frequently of either Japanese or host state concern, the histories of the migrant-settlements were often tragic ones; and Endoh?s survey records a litany of tribulation and disaster: slave-like conditions in the early 20th-century Peruvian and Brazilian plantations; mass anti-Japanese racist hate campaigns in Lima and forced wartime eviction from Sao Paolo; U.S. sponsored and Peruvian-backed kidnappings at the beginning of the Pacific War; the internecine and deadly violence between Brazilian Japanese who did not believe that Japan had surrendered to the Allies and those who did; Japanese who were placed at the disputed borders of the Dominican Republic ostensibly to open up this area?s agricultural potential but who in reality became ?human shields? against marauding Haitians; the ill-fated Uruma colony in Bolivia whose inhabitants all died from a mysterious fever; and the provision not of the advanced (if expensive) machinery necessary to clear the Amazonian jungles, but machetes. This colonial history of South and Central America is little known and Endoh?s survey will provide readers unfamiliar with a useful overview.

The context of migration that Section 1 sets with its focus on the conditions of settlement is critically driven. Here, the theoretical impetus of Massey *et al.*?s important study on international migration is evident.(1) Interrogating the neo-classical model that explains human movement in terms of individuals? rational decisions to seek wealth and jobs in more economically advanced destinations, Endoh observes that Japanese expansion in Latin America counter-intuitively took the form of ?downward migration? (p. 19). That is, unlike earlier migrations to Hawaii and North America, employment prospects were poor and, moreover, income differentials between sender ? an economically powerful Japan ? and hosts ? developing and unstable peripheral states ? belied any hope of ?get rich quick? (*ikkaku senkin*, p. 3). ?Downward migration? was also distinguished by another characteristic that contradicted earlier Japanese settlement patterns, many of which were urban-centred. In Latin America, Japanese became ?accidental pioneers? (p. 108) who opened up, settled, and developed this area?s isolated and dangerous hinterlands. In the decades leading to the Second World War, this movement away from the cities especially in Brazil if less so in Peru, was one way for the Japanese government, businesses, and migrant-settlers to negotiate opposing political forces of an expansionist Japan, on one side, and the racist exclusionary politics of host states, on the other. In the post-war period, Asian exclusion was replaced by a half-hearted welcome on the part of host states which, with Japanese government support, were keen to use Japanese settlers to open up their frontier regions. Yet, the basic pattern of ?downward migration? and the shunting of Japanese to peripheral areas continued.

Unlike the earlier ?liberal? phase of Japanese migration, which was facilitated in the late 1800s and early 1900s by private companies, Latin American emigration was ?state-led? and managed, especially from the

1920s onwards. Section two examines why and how the Japanese government came to regard Latin American settlement as a ?national strategy?. Chapter three charts how social and political discourse concerning migration evolved in response to an intensifying sense of demographic crisis ? overpopulation and food scarcity ? following the First World War, a perception that was exacerbated by the growing proletariat and other interest groups who were increasingly susceptible to radicalisation. While some liberal grandees like ?kuma Shigenobu argued that the free flow of people would reflect a modern, civilized Japan, governments from the late 1910s onwards expanded the case for migration, viewing it as a kind of social welfare policy that might enable the poor to escape poverty and in the process, alleviate population pressures. To this end, as Endoh describes in detail, the Home and Foreign Ministries developed an impressive machinery under the auspices of a new Colonial Ministry which mobilised resources and oversaw migration and settlement policy. Private enterprise was also encouraged to invest on a large-scale in the hopes of securing business influence in Latin America. This concerted effort effected what Endoh identifies as the ?Golden Age of Latin American Emigration? when the outflow of migrant-settlers swelled to over 180,000 in the 1920s and 1930s, an increase of three times from the preceding two decades (pp. 76?7).

If Latin American emigration was proposed as one way to address demographic problems and social tensions in the pre-war era, it took on the exaggerated quality of a ?silver bullet? (p. 83) in the two decades of Japan?s postwar reconstruction and recovery. Then, millions of soldiers and northeast Asian colonialists returned to spark a baby boom against a backdrop of acute economic uncertainty and social instability. Despite the Allied Occupation (1945?52) prohibition on Japanese movement outside of Japan, interest groups lobbied the Japanese government to resume emigration and with some success. When sovereignty was restored in 1952, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs quickly launched a new emigration section that, like its Colonial Ministry predecessor, was charged with identifying migration targets, establishing the necessary structures, procedures, and financing to facilitate mass emigration to Latin America, and co-ordinating affiliated agencies that, for their part, oversaw day-to-day operations at a local level. Despite a ?fast track, high impact? policy to recruit and settle as many individuals as possible (p. 91), the state?s ?quixotic? targets to transplant nearly 600,000 people between 1953 and 1963 (pp. 91?2) were far from met with only some 80,000 moving to Latin America between 1952 and 1970 (p. 36). To account for this lackluster result, Endoh cites the fast-changing social and economic situation which saw Japan re-emerge as a major global power and which, in turn, afforded new opportunities at home for wealth creation, jobs, and social infrastructure: ?whereas large-scale outmigration was prohibited when Japan needed it most badly (i.e., during the occupation period), the structural necessity for migration dissipated by the time of the policy?s implementation? (p. 97).

While demographic pressure was a very real concern in the decades preceding and following the Second World War, Endoh interprets this pressure as emblematic of greater social fears and political concerns. Defining ?overpopulation? not in terms of how many were too many but instead identifying who in the view of the state was deemed ?superfluous? (p. 101), she argues that Latin American emigration was regarded as a ?political decompressor?; it was a safety valve that might reduce the disruptive force exerted by society?s most problematic groups and ideas by literally getting rid of some of them. Chapters five and six build this argument by focusing closely on social and political conditions in southwest Japan (Okinawa, Ky?sh?, western Honsh?), which sent 50 per cent of all Japan?s migrant-settlers destined for Latin American. While standard accounts have attributed this conspicuous number to poverty and ostensible patterns of migration distinctive to the southwest (2), Endoh develops a compelling local reading of major national events like the pre-war Rice Riots of 1918 and the post-war anti-U.S.-Japan Security Treaty Movement of 1960, in addition to labour unrest across the period especially in the industrial centres of Fukuoka and Hiroshima. Observing that low skilled labour, landless peasant, and *burakumin* (?outcasts?) (3) activity was especially vociferous and radical in this region, Endoh argues that emigration was of increasing importance to national and local governments preoccupied with social stability and order: ?As part of the spectrum of accommodative politics seeking to emasculate the social opposition and restore political equilibrium, the emigration policy was employed as another instrument of political decompression? (p. 139).(4)

Endoh critically asserts that emigration policy must be understood as ?exclusionary?. Although it was not coercive, migration was ?quasi-forced?, since migrant-settlers were often provided with partial, sometimes erroneous information about conditions that would greet them and false promises of eventual land ownership. This was not purposefully deceptive (p. 95), but the poor research conducted by emigration authorities, incomplete negotiations carried about between states, and the overwhelming pressure simply to move as many people as possible meant that individuals could not make rational, informed decisions. In any event, the fact that migrant-settlers ostensibly went of their own volition allowed the state to mobilise its settlers ?inclusively? as ?co-ethnic? representatives of Japan?s colonial expansion and prestige abroad (p. 170). In chapter seven, Endoh returns our attention to migrant-settler communities to observe how the state and business profited, for example, by breaking U.S. domination of Brazilian soybeans, diversifying trade partners and import sources, advancing horticultural engineering, and securing a Japanese sphere of economic and trade influence in Latin America. To maintain affiliation with the Japanese homeland, migrant-settlers were subjected to moral education, which in the pre-war era, inculcated emperor-centred patriotism, and following the war, a sense of mission or ?ethnic responsibility? of the ?most advanced coloured race? to liberate Latin America through development that came as a result of Japan?s post-war pacifist commitment (pp. 192, 194).

In contrast to many recent historical and ethnic studies of Japan?s Latin American emigration, for example, Masterson and Funada-Classen (5) or many of the essays in the collections of Adachi (6) and Hirabayashi *et.al.* (7), Endoh?s history firmly highlights the emigration-side of the narrative to important effect. The profound sense of cultural separation as ?home? diverged from ?host? and the traumatic personal conflict that so frequently threads through Japanese immigrant stories underscores *Exporting Japan* to be sure (e.g. p. 184). Yet, as the ?state-centred approach? highlights, the often ?convoluted? and always ?evolving? ?hybrid model of state-led migration? (pp. 78, 197) that facilitated Japan?s Latin American project, needs to be understood as inextricably embedded within Japanese nation-building and modernisation. In order to enervate the forces of social unrest and eradicate radicalism, the state committed itself to ?systematic mass relocation overseas? (p. 7) on a massive scale. While the discourse on ?overpopulation? and the case of the southwest reveal the insecurity of succeeding governments and state actors throughout the early-to-middle decades of the 20th century, the easy historical periodisation of a liberal Taish? period (1912?26), a reactionary prewar Sh?wa (1926?45), and a democratised post-war period is avoided. Instead, social engineering aspirations to uplift the nation?s lower classes out of poverty through emigration and the prospect of property ownership are approached as one side of a coin whose flipside includes the repressive impulse to tame the proletariat, tenants, and outcastes into conformity through propaganda and police coercion.

Theories explaining state motivations in terms of *shakai fuan* ? ?social uncertainty or instability? (p. 77) ? are insufficient, and as part of one of this book?s most challenging arguments, Endoh identifies a positive impetus, namely, nation-building through the projection of Japanese influence globally. Understandably, the formal empire in Korea, Taiwan, Manchuria, and later, southeast Asia dominates understandings of pre-war Japanese imperialism. As Japan?s Latin American project suggests, however, the endeavor to carve out spheres of influence economically, culturally, and politically ? an informal empire ? never came to an end. Even as the use of the non-interventionist principles of so-called Shidehara diplomacy (8) to assert Japan?s authority in China were undermined by the incursions of its military and then war in the 1930s, a similar combination of diplomacy, economic activity, and recognition of national sovereignty informed the Japanese presence in Latin America. Colonies were established, but they were mutually agreed ? if uneasily at times ? at the inter-state level, which markedly differed from the situation in east Asia: Hokkaido, Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria were incorporated militarily; their colonisation was strategically informed; and existing populations were legally relegated onto lower levels of Japan?s racial hierarchy to sometimes atrocious effect.

It remains unclear to what extent this east Asian experience may have been influential at the level of policy debate and discourse, and in particular, the public consciousness of empire ? formal *and* informal ? that the state tried to effect and steer; more of this later. But, *Exporting Japan* offers a challenging prospect, namely,

Japanese imperialism and colonialism were limited neither to the eastern Pacific nor to military activity: ?pre-World War II Japan considered its emigration policy towards Latin America as an integral part of its colonization enterprise ? This transnational undertaking, which an expansionist Japan was already pursuing in its sphere of influence in Asia, manifested itself most rigorously in Brazil in the case of South America? (p. 175). Moreover, its trans-continental focus was instrumental to the globalisation of Japanese and international market activity and ambition: ?In tandem with Japan?s imperialist thrust into ? [Asia]? in the 1920s, [*zaibatsu*, ?conglomerates?] transferred repatriated capital to Latin America as an extension of their business globalization strategy? (p. 75).

In the wake of the Korean and Cold Wars, Japan was positioned in America?s global order as the capitalist ?workshop of Asia? (9), and a similar pattern reemerged of ?transnational resource strategy conjoined with Latin American emigration? (p. 177). Once again, Japan sat at a trans-Pacific nexus including, on one side, a revived ?Pan-Asian market? (10) and Japan?s Latin American colonial enterprises. If the history of the Japanese formal empire characterises the 20th century in terms of disjuncture between the pre-war and post-war periods, the history of informal empire which Endoh begins to describe is one of continuity. Whether it took the form of glorifying the *kokutai* (Japan?s emperor-centred moral polity) or promoting peace through development, the state?s ambition to ?reproduce a perfect Japan in the Americas? (p. 6) was racially motivated: ?In a nutshell, Japan took on its Latin American project as a way to exalt its national prestige and racial superiority in the international area, specifically vis-à-vis the United States and Europe ? Japan?s expanded statehood was directed at the greater West, via its weakest part, Latin America? (p. 195).

The challenge of developing a new perspective from which to approach Latin American emigration across the 20th century, and the Japanese diaspora more generally is a tall order. It is largely achieved though some issues remain unexplored except at a general level. The narrow definition of state and state-actors is useful when exploring how discourses like ?overpopulation? and Japanese state expansion were articulated, and how they translated into policy. That propaganda, for instance, was woefully at odds with the reality of conditions in the so-called *shintenchi* (new paradise) of Latin America is a problem that Endoh?s ?state-centred approach? is suited to exploring. By emphasizing a top-down state-to-populace direction of influence, however, an important voice remains largely unheard, namely, the potential migrant-settlers in Japan themselves. How was Latin America imagined, which is to ask, how did groups and individuals across the nation receive and interact with propaganda, ads, newspapers, journals, and later, electronic media that featured emigration, and ultimately, the state that was exhorting people to go? How did Latin America fit in people?s overall ideology concerning a quickly expanding empire, and how did it help formulate an ethic of humanitarian responsibility for the developing non-West after the war? These questions require close cultural reading and analysis and they do fall out of the parameters of this research. But given the period under closest scrutiny here, the Taish? era to the 1960s when a near universally literate society also became an increasingly democratic, mass-mediated and consumer oriented one, what might the expansion of the definition of the ?state? imply when media and popular participation are figured in as key state-actors?

Similarly, the close reading of the proletariat, peasantry, and *burakumin* compellingly illustrates how ?politically decompressing? policies of exclusion were localised and applied in the case of the southwest. But, it remains unclear to what extent the southwest is viable as a conceptual unit that can not only be applied to Latin American emigration but to Japanese migration and settlement more broadly. For example, although Okinawa?s distinctive history and the radical activism of certain districts and groups in northern Ky?sh? and Inland Sea Honsh? are conspicuous, I suspect that the southwest may be further differentiated, divergent as the social settings of its component areas are, and different as its regional histories are particularly between the pre- and post-war periods. And, while a compelling case for understanding the origins of Latin American emigration is certainly argued by focusing on this region in the longer term, the picture is not clear until those other areas that sent the other 50 per cent of migrants are considered, especially northeastern prefectures like Niigata, Fukushima, and Hokkaido. To her credit, Endoh does identify some of these issues. Although these questions may be exceptions to the general patterns that Endoh identifies, they do suggest how the study that this book has opened up may now be expanded upon.

Turning to diasporic history and post-colonial theory, I find the identification of Japan?s Latin American

activities and presence as colonial to lack critical definition. Not that the systematic development and execution of Japan?s Latin American emigration policies can neutrally be labelled, for instance, as *ij?* or ?migration and settlement?, a post-war term whose euphemistic quality was directed at expunging any connotation of pre-war imperialism. Endoh deftly navigates varying and competing semantic conceptions of Japanese expansion. Rather, because the Latin American history of colonisation is multi-layered, and the migrant-settler experience underscores *Exporting Japan*, a theorisation of indigenous-settler relations and core-periphery relationships may help to articulate more precisely the complexity of Japan?s colonial advance into Latin America. This is especially relevant when we consider that Japan?s postwar period saw its post-colonial situation double-up as a neo-colonial American one. I?m thinking, for example, of the concept of ?settler colonies? advanced by Johnston and Lawson (11) and productively applied by Fujikane and Okamura (12) in the context of Hawaii whose Asian settlers were also colonizers, complicit with American colonialism, and whose entrance for the indigenous Hawaiian population may be identified as invasive.

Relative to other migrations in the Japanese diaspora, the numbers of people emigrating to Latin America before and after the war were smaller, which is not to say less significant as Endoh convincingly demonstrates. This well-researched history broadens the study of Japan?s Latin American emigration, and by identifying the Japanese presence in Central and South America as a colonial project, Endoh makes an important contribution to our understanding of Japan?s nation-building and state expansion.

Notes

1. Douglas A. Massey, Joaquin Arango, Graeme Hugo, Ali Kouaouci, Adela Pellegrino, and J. Edward Taylor, *Worlds in Motion: Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millenium* (Oxford, 2005).Back to (1)
2. Endoh points to structural indicators which suggest that the northeast was in fact poorer, yet played a smaller part in Latin American emigration. She convincingly argues that earlier movements of southwesterners to Hawaii and North America ? co-ordinated by private companies ? fundamentally differed from the state-led mass migration to Latin America.Back to (2)
3. A marginal social group descended from pre-modern Japanese outcaste communities. Despite being granted legal equality in 1871, political, institutional, and social discrimination persisted.Back to (3)
4. In an interesting aside, Endoh observes that the authorities of the United States Occupation of Okinawa turned similarly to emigration to reduce islander resistance to American policies. The resulting ?Okinawan diaspora? resulted in a large presence in Brazil, Argentina, and Bolivia, but one which was sometimes completely separated from Japanese groups.Back to (4)
5. Daniel M. Masterson and Sayaka Funada-Classes, *The Japanese in Latin America* (Urbana and Chicago, 2004).Back to (5)
6. *Japanese Diasporas: Unsung Pasts, Conflicting Presents, and Uncertain* Futures, ed. Adachi Nobuko (London, 2006).Back to (6)
7. *New Worlds, New Lives: Globalization and People of Japanese Descent in the Americas and from Latin America in Japan*, ed. Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, Akemi Kikumura-Yano, and James A. Hirabayashi (Stanford, 2002).Back to (7)
8. Named after Shidehara Kij?ro, foreign minister from 1924?7 and 1929?31, foreign policy during his tenure was identified with the principles of nonintervention and the exertion of Japanese influence through economic and diplomatic means within the context of an advancing globalised market system. Back to (8)
9. Paul J. Bailey, *Postwar Japan: 1945 to the Present* (Oxford, 1996), p. 54.Back to (9)
10. Koshiro Yukiko, *Trans-Pacific Racisms and the U.S. Occupation of Japan* (New York, 1999), p. 140. Back to (10)
11. Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson, ?Settler colonies?, in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta (Oxford, 2000), pp. 360?76.Back to (11)
12. Candace Fujikane, ?Introduction: Asian settler colonialism in the U.S. colony of Hawai?i?, in *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawaii*, ed.

Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura (Honolulu, 2008), pp. 1?42.Back to (12)

Other reviews:
muse 1
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/enterprise_and_society/summary/v011/11.3.yamanaka.html [2]
muse 2
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/jjs/summary/v036/36.2.tsuda.html [3]

Source URL: http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/857

Links:
[1] http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/4472
[2] http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/enterprise_and_society/summary/v011/11.3.yamanaka.html
[3] http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/jjs/summary/v036/36.2.tsuda.html