Hiroko Matsuda, *Liminality of the Japanese Empire: Border Crossings from Okinawa to Colonial Taiwan*

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019. 205 pages. 11 illustrations. Hardcover, $68.00; paperback, $28.00. ISBN: 9780824867560 (hardcover), 9780824867577 (paperback).

Taiwan was an early territorial acquisition for what eventually would materialize as a Japanese empire. It was second only to the annexation of Okinawa. The island of Taiwan was a Japanese colonial possession in the years between 1895 and 1945. The Ryukyu Kingdom (Okinawa) succumbed to imperial Japan in 1879, fusing with the Meiji nation-state as a Japanese prefecture. Geographically, the Ryukyu chain stretches up toward the eastern coast of Taiwan. The island of Yonaguni, which comes out in close-up in Matsuda's book, is situated just 111 kilometers off of the coast of Taiwan.

Liminality of the Japanese Empire draws a historical retrospect with elements familiar to ethnographic writing: colonial experience through life histories and an overarching interethnic context. Moreover, it dispenses with the all-too-familiar study of a generic Okinawa in favor of a view that foregrounds the southern region of the archipelago (i.e., the Yaeyamas). Here, Ishigaki City flourishes as a transit hub within an imperial order demanding movement of people and goods between Japan and Taiwan.

An entrenched Han Chinese elite would have been sufficient for Taiwan to figure as a civilized entity within the expanding colonial order. But the presence of an indigenous population across swaths of mountainous terrain would make a reason good enough for the Japanese to stay on as pacifiers and civilizers. There is one implication to draw if—from the title word of "border"—we shift the attention toward the word "boundary." The latter term, according to the author, indicates "discursive limits." The historical case of Taiwan under the Japanese spells out an example of dual *ethnic* liminalities: Japanese from the Inner Territory (of mainland Japan) vis-à-vis Japanese from Okinawa Prefecture, Han Chinese vis-à-vis indigenous Austronesian-speaking Taiwanese. With this ethnic interface as the backdrop, Okinawans arriving in Taiwan recognize a need to acculturate themselves *as Japanese*.

Interestingly, the author notes that in another diasporic setting, the Davao district of Mindanao, Philippines, Okinawan abaca industry laborers suffered from discriminatory attitudes as "the other Japanese." The relation to the host population plays out somewhat differently now in the context of Taiwanese society. In Taiwan, "[the

Okinawans] were active agents in reproducing the boundary between Japanese and Taiwanese" (76).

In the book's cast of contrastive lifeways, Taiwan upholds a draw, as a land of opportunity and urban lifestyles. Young people from the Ryukyu Islands arrive in Taiwan with hopes of pursuing specialist careers, such as police officers, railway employees, postal officials, telephone operators, and medical workers. The book indicates that emigration to Taiwan came about via family and friends networking (not via a scheme for colonial settlement), and that a tendency toward job switching facilitated career advancement.

Matsuda also mentions home address and name switching, from Okinawa to Japan proper, as instrumental in that regard—toward ultimate acceptance as Japanese. An early argument in the book is that the Taiwan setting shows that there was no fixation of status within the imperial order. Individual oral accounts seem to indicate that social advancement was possible and that boundaries were open for crossings. Okinawan youths received education opportunities they otherwise would not have enjoyed. In colonial Taiwan, education was the primary instrument for active assimilation (i.e., for becoming Japanese).

Now, as imperial subjects, Okinawans and Han Taiwanese intermixed in jobs and daily life, such as in marketplaces, where it happened that the Taiwanese seller enjoyed the advantage of being a better practitioner of standard Japanese than the customer. (Incidentally, this reviewer conducted interviews in two Taiwanese aboriginal communities during the late 1970s and early 1980s, communicating with locals and Han Chinese officials solely in Japanese.)

Arguably, the book's most telling example of a perceptual disconnect between Okinawan and mainstream Japanese ways is that of female hand tattooing. In the majority-minority contact at close quarters of urban colonial settings (many Okinawan women worked as domestic helpers), the display of hand tattoos met with adamant disapproval. It may have invigorated a trope of Okinawans as the aboriginal Japanese. Although not mentioned in the book, female tattooing was already a boundary-marking diacritic of indigeneity in Taiwan. The censure might even cast light on what the author describes as a process of "creolization," causing Okinawan cultural traits to vanish across two or three generations.

A double identity negation seems to be at play here: as *not* aboriginal and as *not* Chinese Taiwanese. The reader learns that the colonial power imparities pertain to "customs and manners based on the premise that Japanese were superior to Taiwanese" (59). Oral histories quoted in the book illustrate the case.

By foregrounding the southern cluster of islands, the Yeayamas, in Japan's interface with the outside world, the book makes the reader acquainted with a not often recognized contiguity, geographical and social, with a larger Asian domain. At the outset, there is no clear-cut vision of a homeland of Okinawa; migrants carry with them just the multiple and disparate strands of island identity attachments. In Taiwan, however—through the makeup of a regional association—such belongings blend into a more pan-Okinawan expression of aesthetic style, mutual support, and an element of anti-assimilation. With some unease expressed about the inclusiveness of the category of "Okinawa," associations also materialize around the lesser identity marker of "Yaeyama."

In Taiwan, Okinawans suffer from an initial handicap of not being Japanese enough. Thus, in order to advance themselves socially and educationally, they emulate the

linguistic and behavioral forms of the Japanese colonial elite. But as returnees to Okinawa after the end of World War II, they are not accepted as fully Okinawan either. Again, they are different.

An apposite book frontispiece shows a man in a fishing vessel against the silhouette of a dim, mountainous, Taiwan Island. Such delineation of Japan and the outside world in geographical tandem may not match well with an image of Japan as uniquely shut off as the exemplary "island-nation," mono-ethnic in essence. *Liminality of the Japanese Empire* challenges such assumptions.

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