

# Remembering 1930s Korea in Post-Colonial Japan

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## 〈Abstract〉

This paper focuses on memories of the colonial period, as they were reconstructed and retold in Japan after 1945. Starting in the late 1950s, a number of Japanese bureaucrats and other high-level officials from the colonial administration were interviewed about their experiences in Korea in the 1930s. These interviews reveal a kind of nostalgic paternalism that carried over into the postwar period. The tone and content of these interviews are replicated in many ways in individual memoirs of the colonial period written by ordinary Japanese citizens who lived in Korea in the 1930s. However, these individual memoirs are also often time party apologetic and partly a humanistic call to action as they bring attention to the postwar continuities of discrimination against Koreans and the unequal status of ethnic Koreans in Japan. These memoirs also reveal the ways that former colonialists from different generations saw themselves as uniquely suited to understand the complexities and postwar

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legacies of the colonial period.

**Key words** : assimilation, memoire, postcolonial, humanism, imperialism,  
Resident Koreans

## 1. Introduction

In the field of postwar Japanese history, some scholars identify August 15, 1945 as a stark breaking point, while others tend to emphasize the continuities before and after this symbolically laden date.<sup>1)</sup> No matter whether it is commemorated as a day of defeat or a day of liberation, as it is in other places in Asia outside of Japan, these commemorations and labels bring our attention to the end of something. The end of war. The end of colonial rule. The end of empire. With the collapse of empire came monumental shifts in the demographic landscape, as close to ten percent of the Japanese population faced the prospect of repatriation (Watt 2). In Korea, over half a million Japanese, ranging from military personnel and government officials to engineers and shopkeepers, made their way back to Japan, or in the case of children, went to the main islands of Japan (or, *naichi*) for the first time in their lives.<sup>2)</sup>

The Japanese civilians and others who lived in Korea in the 1930s and 1940s were leaving a place that had been under Japanese control as a formal

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1) These questions were also raised at a conference hosted by Sophia University's Institute of Comparative Cultures in Tokyo in 2009, called "Revisiting 'Postwar Japan as History': A Twenty Year Check-up on the State of the Field."

2) See Watt 25. For a concise summary of recent scholarship on relations between the Japanese metropole (*naichi*) and colonial territories (*gaichi*), see Henry 640-41, particularly his discussion of these "*mutually constitutive* relationships" (emphasis in original, 640).

colony since 1910. In the final decade or so, a central element of Japanese rule was a policy of assimilation that had far-reaching effects both politically and socially. Ordinary Japanese citizens who were working and making a life for themselves in Korea during this period directly experienced life under such a regime, albeit from a privileged perspective. Although they were not directly targeted by such assimilationist policies in terms of having to change their names or speak a foreign language, they were an integral part of a society that was structured by such controls. With Japan's defeat in August 1945, these policies were abolished as the Japanese empire in Asia was gradually dismantled. As hundreds of thousands of Japanese made their way to Japan after 1945, they took these lived experiences and memories of this period of assimilation back with them to Japan as part of their colonial legacy. While there was a clear break after 1945 for these repatriates in terms of geographic dislocation, they were still bound to the idea of Korea as a place that was part of their own personal life history.

Starting in the 1950s, a number of Japanese bureaucrats and other high-level officials from the colonial administration in Korea were interviewed by a group of university students about their experiences there in the 1930s and early 1940s. The students were primarily interested in examining primary source documents from this period, many of which had been brought back to Japan by these former officials and were being made available to them for research purposes. In part, these officials used this opportunity to respond to negative appraisals of Japan's colonial record in Korea, primarily those voiced in the early postwar period by Japanese leftists who were critical of Japanese imperialism and militarism more generally, as well as by ethnic Koreans who had experienced the trauma of colonial rule firsthand (Dennehy 128). The majority of these interviews focused on particularly controversial topics and policies carried out by the colonial administrators, including the name change

policy and other related types of legislation instituted in the 1930s and early 1940s.<sup>3)</sup> While these interviews provide information about the state-led institutionalization of assimilationist policies in colonial Korea, they also reveal a certain mindset among this sector of the Japanese government.<sup>4)</sup> It is one informed by a kind of nostalgic paternalism that carried over into the postwar era. These former officials constantly stress that they had good intentions in Korea, even when they do acknowledge that many “terrible things” did happen as well (Hirayama 1-5).

The tone and content of these interviews are replicated in many ways in a number of individual memoirs by ordinary Japanese citizens who published their autobiographical stories in later decades. The two autobiographies chosen for examination here are written by men whose experiences are quite different in many ways. Yet both self-identify as ordinary Japanese citizens whose stories are meant to appeal to an equally ordinary Japanese readership (Honda, 1974; Matsuo, 2002). Honda Yasuharu lived in 1930s Korea as a child, and went on to write professionally as a journalist in Japan as an adult. Matsuo Shigeru, on the other hand, worked in colonial Korea as an adult and wrote his memoirs a few decades after the publication of Honda’s account. They present a range of experiences from the bustling capital in Honda’s case to the more remote areas of the Korean countryside in Matsuo’s case. In this way, they give us a fuller understanding of the geographic scope and regional variations

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3) Miyata Setsuko was a central figure in carrying out these interviews. See also Miyata specifically regarding the policy to make Koreans imperial subjects (*keōminka*). Later studies of such issues include Kim Il-myong.

4) They are akin to the empirical histories discussed by Paul Carter which he notes privilege the intentions of the historical actors and have as their “... focus facts which, in a sense, come after the event. The primary object is not to understand or interpret: it is to legitimate... Hence, imperial history’s *defensive* appeal to the logic of cause and effect: by its nature, such a logic demonstrates the emergence of order from chaos.” Emphasis in original. See Carter 375-76.

of everyday experiences throughout the colony. Furthermore, both accounts are laden with anecdotal evidence and are readily accessible to the general reader, intentionally unencumbered by footnotes to scholarly works and official documentation.<sup>5)</sup> In contrast to the rather formal setting of the interviews mentioned above, these personal accounts are meant to provide Japanese readers with a narrative of life in colonial Korea based on the day to day experiences of the authors. A close examination of these eyewitness accounts provides us with a new understanding of assimilation in the colonial period, one informed not just by the official policy that was put in place by the state.<sup>6)</sup> Rather, this paper will focus on assimilation as a *lived experience* that started in the colonial period but also extended into the postwar period, beyond the imaginary breaking point of August 15<sup>th</sup>. Taken together, these texts are part of a discursive construction of 1930s Korea and the modern Japanese empire more broadly.<sup>7)</sup>

Many autobiographies set in colonial Korea illustrate the cultural effects of the assimilation policy and are grounded primarily in the material conditions of daily life in Keijo and other mostly urban and industrial settings. These memoirs are rife with references to the everyday objects that are representative of that time in their life, everything from a lacquer needle box used by a young student in sewing class, to the ice candy hawked by street vendors in the colonial capital, Keijo.<sup>8)</sup> In addition, these autobiographical narratives are

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5) These contrast sharply with accounts by former officials like Morita Yoshio (1979) who were keen to compile, edit, and make accessible official documentation of Japan's colonial encounters.

6) Regarding the execution of state power and various government policies, a useful Korean and Japanese-language bibliography and concise historiography of the colonial bureaucracy can be found in Matsuda 23-41.

7) Such discursive constructions can be seen as a "body of language practice," as conceptualized by Michel Foucault. See Tosh 196. For an examination of earlier discursive constructions of the Korean Other, with a focus on Japanese class differences, see Lee.

8) See Kamisaka 3-4. The setting for this particular reference to the sewing box was wartime Nara, an ancient capital city that Kamisaka was reminded of when she went

replete with rich descriptions of the physical, bodily sensations associated with life in colonial Korea, the sights, sounds and smells that were part of their daily interactions with their Korean neighbors and others before 1945. What these narratives reveal is an ongoing, fluid process of cultural mixing and separation oftentimes tinged with nostalgic sentimentality.<sup>9)</sup> These individuals' stories are also sometimes partly apologetic and partly a call to action, as they bring attention to the postwar continuities of discrimination against Koreans and the unequal status of ethnic Koreans residing in Japan (*zainichi Kankoku Chōsenjin*).<sup>10)</sup>

## 2. Childhood Memories of Keijo

The text by Honda Yasuharu, born in Seoul in 1933, called *The Korean Inside Me* can be characterized as his attempt to provide a humanistic approach to the problems of Japan's colonial past and postcolonial present. On one level Honda's account is driven by a desire to eradicate the vestiges of a colonial hierarchy grounded in Japanese discriminatory attitudes and practices toward Koreans, especially ethnic Korean residents in postwar Japan (89). Despite his concern for ethnic Koreans who face discrimination in the workplace and elsewhere in postwar Japanese society, he acknowledges that his appeal for an historically informed mutual understanding of the past is an uphill battle, as

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to Gyeongju.

9) This understanding of cultural mixing is informed by Graham Huggan's discussion of decolonization, when he states, "The hybrid forms of Caribbean and other post-colonial cultures merely accentuate the transitional status of all cultures..." (407).

10) These issues are historicized in Pak Chon-myon. See especially chapter five by Suh Kun-shik on "The historical formation of Resident Koreans in Japan." An earlier attempt to bring attention to the problems associated with Korea and ordinary Japanese citizens' "national consciousness" (*kokuminminshiki*) is Hatada.

revealed in statements like “I know most Japanese people are ‘Korean haters’ (*Chōsenjin-girai’ dearu...*)” (189). Furthermore, he goes to great lengths to explain the prewar roots of most Japanese people’s ignorance and misunderstanding of problems related to Korea, with a nod to the exceptional interest in these issues, mostly among Japan’s “leftwing”(*sayoku*) (23).

For Honda, his contacts with Koreans as a child were monitored closely by his mother, whom he describes as fundamentally different in her attitudes toward Korea as a first generation colonist (33). He is quick to point out that his mother never thought of herself as a “racist” (*sabetsusubugisha*), but at the same time, for her it was a given that there was a “definite gap in ‘ethnic disposition’ (*minzokunoshinbitsu*)” among Japanese and Koreans (32). To his mother, the Japanese disposition was one characterized by an inherently superior body, mind, and spirit. Honda recalls how this sense of superiority, or “consciousness of a chosen people” (*senminishiki*) was characterized by ideas like “Japanese people don’t lie” “Japanese people don’t do dirty things,” and “Japanese people don’t do bad things” (163). This hierarchial ranking was firmly grounded in notions of hygiene which Honda internalized at a young age and continued to feel years later as an adult when he visited the Republic of Korea. He recalls how the stench of human waste at low tide near a restaurant in south Korea made him unconsciously plug his nose and lose his appetite as it was “too smelly to eat” (182). He describes this moment as a reversion to his childhood, a time when he was scolded by his mother for asking to eat Korean candy.

On one level, Honda expresses gratitude to his mother for teaching him about hygiene and he associates her admonitions about food and disease with one of his elementary school science textbooks which explained things like dysentery in further graphic detail. He has a distinct memory of the “confusing thoughts” (*fukuzatsu na omoi*) that arose when he could picture various diseases

spreading throughout his body after reading his textbook. Moreover, this fear of contagion, which Honda attributes primarily to his mother, was “deeply rooted” in the minds of all his siblings as well.<sup>11)</sup> Yet, on another level, in his reminiscences about his childhood, he feels conflicted that his mother’s stance was so strident and had such a lasting effect in terms of the negative associations between Koreans and contagion. One way to understand this dynamic is to look at the notion of “danger-beliefs” as discussed by Mary Douglas in her book, *Purity and Danger* (3). As she argues, “Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment... In chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea” (2).

For first and second generation colonists like Honda’s mother and her children, the hierarchial order of colonial society was maintained in part by the inculcation of such “danger-beliefs” at the most basic level. Honda recalls how he pestered his mother incessantly to buy candy from street vendors despite knowing she forbade such treats. Until one day, she shut him up with the following outburst: “If you want to eat it that badly, go one time to see where Korean candy is made. They put their spit on both hands and stretch it out, you know” (32). Such scoldings were reinforced by a litany of warnings Honda internalized at a very young age about Korean hygiene (or lack thereof in his mother’s eyes), such as “Koreans don’t wash their hands after they go to the toilet. Koreans blow their noses with their hands.<sup>12)</sup> Koreans use the same wash basin to wash their feet and rinse their mouth” (32). It is significant that such claims had to continually be reinforced through acts like his mother’s scoldings about dysentery, a manifestation of her attempt to create, maintain

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11) “... *warewarekyōdaiminezuyokuuetsukerareteita*...” See Honda 29.

12) That is, without a handkerchief, or “farmer’s blow.”

and constantly reproduce, as Douglas would say, the “ideal order of society... guarded by dangers which threaten transgressors” (3).

The generational differences between Honda and his parents are also revealed in the final words uttered by Honda’s father, “When I die, would you bury half my bones in Keijo?” (175). The younger Honda is highly critical of such sentiments and ultimately refuses to carry out his father’s wishes. He describes his father’s attachment to Korea as “the ‘love’ of an aggressor” and questions “how the victim’s national land (*kokudo*) would take it” if bits of his father’s bones were put right underneath it after his death (175). In an attempt to be more critical of the dynamics between Japanese and Koreans during the colonial period, Honda contrasts the attitude of first generation settlers like his parents with his own experiences, both before and after 1945. He notes that for 36 years, including the twelve and a half year period when he was there, “Basically, we were ‘uninvited visitors’” (34). In Honda’s case, he does not even feel like he really was in Korea (*Chōsen ni ita?*), but experienced life in the more narrow space of Keijo and the immediate environs of his Japanese neighborhood.

As noted above, Honda presents through his autobiography a humanistic account of the colonial period, starting with the portrayal of his own father. In relaying the story of his father’s wishes to have some of his bones buried in Korea, he explains that “as a human being” (*ningen toshite*), he does not bear his father any kind of grudge, nor does he “hate him” (*kirai dewa nai*) for what Honda clearly deems a grave offense toward the Korean people (176). Rather, it is from his position as a second-generation colonist that he provides an insight into the problematic nature of such a proposition. In pointing out these discrepancies among family members of different generations, Honda also blurs the line between Japanese and Koreans as two distinct groups pitted against each other as imperialist aggressor and colonized victim.

Honda’s humanistic approach can also be seen in his critique of evaluations

of Japanese imperialism in postwar Japan, particularly as they surfaced around the time of the Meiji centennial in 1968.<sup>13)</sup> At this time, conservatives in Japan used this 100-year anniversary as a way to glorify Japan's trajectory of industrial development and modernization. These celebratory accounts did not sit well with progressives and other Japanese who thought such versions of modern Japanese history glossed over the devastating and tragic elements of Japanese militarism and expansionism.<sup>14)</sup> It is in this context that Honda calls for the development of a "humane conscience and historical sensibility" among ordinary Japanese citizens.<sup>15)</sup> As Honda sees it, the main problem is apathy and ignorance. He notes that most Japanese are not even conscious of the existence of Korea, never mind the complexities of its historical relationship with Japan. He characterizes Korea as "irrelevant" in the minds of most Japanese. Furthermore, he argues that Japanese people's historical consciousness regarding Korea has remained for the most part unchanged since the age of imperialism, thus the need to develop a more critically informed historical sensibility in the postwar period.

For example, Honda points out that one of the contemporary legacies of Japanese imperialism is the continued "violation of human rights" (*jinken shingai*) suffered by 600,000 ethnic Koreans on a daily basis in postwar Japan (201). His aim is not just to inform his readers of this situation, but to call them to action by making it an issue that belongs to all of "us" (*wareware*) Japanese. In contrast to Honda's account of life in colonial Korea where he and his parents

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13) Other critical accounts of Japanese imperialism from the same general time period include Ueda and Fujishima. See especially the chapter, pages from 190 to 257, on the problem of Resident Koreans' human rights. An historiographical overview of postwar Japanese scholarship, historical perspectives and methodology around that time can be found in Nagahara.

14) See the special issue of *Rekishi-gaku Kenkyū* (Nov. 1967) devoted to a critique of the centennial

15) "*ningenteki ryōshin mo rekishi kankaku.*" See Honda 193.

were blameless for their actions, the postcolonial legacies bring with them a particular responsibility to recognize the historical continuities of an ethnic hierarchy. For Honda, the issue of personal responsibility lies in telling his own story and linking it to contemporary social issues. These continuities can be found both in official policies of marginalization, as well as discriminatory attitudes that have become ingrained even further in postwar Japanese society. In Honda's account of "the Korean inside" him, there is a seamless transition between his experiences in colonial Korea as a child and the sensibilities that led to his involvement in issues related to the rights of ethnic Koreans.

In Honda's discussion of contemporary issues, he includes a number of anecdotes about various Resident ethnic Korean friends and acquaintances and their personal experiences of hardship and struggle. In this way, he includes their own voices and perspectives on the legacies of the colonial period and related issues of assimilation. In one case, he cites a Mr. Kim who also points out the "continued violation of basic human rights" in postwar Japanese society even among those Koreans who choose to naturalize according to the regulations of the postwar immigration system (60). As with his own family, Honda notes the generational differences among Resident Koreans and the increased distance between younger ethnic Koreans and Korea itself. As one Ms. T. explains, some younger Resident Koreans have only attended Japanese schools, only speak Japanese and only have Japanese friends. But for Ms. T. the problem with this kind of assimilation is the attitude that many Japanese have towards such Koreans. She derides Japanese who say things like "you speak Japanese so well, don't you?" or "I can't tell at all from your face. I thought you could only be Japanese" (134). For her, such comments indicated that Koreans were seen as not inherently equal to Japanese but had somehow shown themselves to be as good as Japanese people by speaking and passing as if they were actually Japanese. Compared to ordinary Japanese like Honda,

Resident Koreans like Ms. T. were subject to this kind of “inhumane road” in postwar Japanese society.<sup>16)</sup>

However, Honda does not portray Resident Koreans as helpless victims. Rather, he quotes a Korean acquaintance who is adamant that it is the responsibility of the Koreans themselves to fight against ethnic discrimination. In the process, he also introduces his readers to some of the divisions within the Korean community regarding those who promote naturalization (*kika*) as one option of legal status in the postwar period. Here too, the emphasis is on the ability of Koreans to fulfill the basic desire “to live as a human being” in an inherently discriminatory system of second-class citizenship for Koreans (143). It is in this context that Honda makes the connection between human rights for Koreans and the extension of basic civil rights. His hope is that if Japanese understand the difficulties and complexities of colonial Korea’s historical trajectory, then they will be more open to ideas and institutional changes of that could bring more genuine equality.

As stated above, memoirs like Honda’s are often times partly apologetic and partly a call to action in the face of contemporary problems like racial discrimination against ethnic Koreans in postwar Japan. In Honda’s case, he never actually blames his parents for anything but rather characterizes their perspective as somewhat inevitable, given their own precarious claims to superiority over the local Korean population. As Honda became more familiar with institutionalized racism against Koreans in the postwar period, he decided to share his personal story in part as a way to examine Japanese-Korean relations from a longer term historical perspective stretching back before 1945. As a child in the 1930s, he does not blame himself for actions carried out in the name of the Japanese nation and empire. But he does try to make

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16) “*ningemashii michi ja nai.*” See Honda 135.

amends for the past by bringing attention to the postcolonial legacies of contempt and discord, especially at the everyday level of neighborhood and workplace interactions among Japanese and Koreans.<sup>17)</sup> Honda does not dwell on terms like “war responsibility” (*sensō sekinin*) or address in any great detail the issue of a Japanese apology or financial compensation for colonial rule.<sup>18)</sup> His main concern is the lack of empathy and the “mistaken view of history among us Japanese”<sup>19)</sup> regarding Japan’s record in Korea before 1945. He points out that this was illustrated most starkly in the statements made by Japanese official during negotiations to normalize diplomatic relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea in the 1960s (33). These comments reflected the attitude of Japanese politicians and other government officials who deemed Japanese rule “benevolent” and somehow beneficial for Koreans.

### 3. Industrial “Contributions”

A similar attitude can be found in the autobiographical account by Matsuo Shigeru, *What I Did on the Korean Peninsula: 1928-1946*.<sup>20)</sup> Matsuo first went

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17) In particular, Honda explains in great detail the case of employment discrimination by Hitachi against Pak Chonsok in the 1970s (91-100). It is in this context that Honda explicitly uses the term “assimilation” (*dōka*) and makes reference to the name change policy of the colonial period. More recent studies of these issues can be found in Oguma (especially 87, 104, and 235) and Mizuno who includes a discussion of Korean names as well as State Shinto.

18) Honda does say at one point, however, that most ordinary Japanese do not feel they have anything to apologize for, since “imperialists and the military” were deemed responsible for the nation’s actions before 1945 (16).

19) “*Wareware Nihonjin no ayamatta shikan...*” (Honda 23).

20) By the time Matsuo published his story in 2002, the public discourse in Japan regarding its imperial record had shifted tremendously, in the wake of the internationalization of the so-called “textbook controversies” and a number of reactionary attempts by Japanese conservatives and others to present a more sanitized, celebratory version of Japanese expansionism. See Murao and Nishio. More critical perspectives on Japanese

to Korea at age 18 and stayed until he was 36, during which time he married and had four children. At age 24, he was sent back to Japan temporarily to find a wife and ended up marrying the eldest daughter of a farmer in his hometown region of Saga prefecture. Tsurue was fairly well educated and is described as “healthy round faced girl” with a serious (*majime*) demeanor which made her well suited for the challenges of life in colonial Korea, according to her husband (54). Throughout Matsuo’s account, he makes numerous references to the challenges of the climate on the peninsula. After their honeymoon in the southern Japanese cities of Hakata and Kurume, the couple arrived in the port of Pusan, where Tsurue shivered as she uttered her first words in Korea, “It’s cold. It’s cold” (56).

Matsuo had been adopted by his uncle’s family and worked on a variety of construction projects during his 18 years in Korea. Even though he came from a farming background, he explains that at his uncle’s behest, he pursued further education and a career in business, starting with a job selling sundries in the navy port of Sasebo. The element of his class background is important because it distinguishes Matsuo from the more elite families of modern Japan, those associated with the huge conglomerates (*zaibatsu*) like Mitsui and their close ties to high-level Japanese politics as well. Part of this narrative is the heroic element of class mobility and achievement through disciplined individual effort. Matsuo’s path to Korea is described as resulting from the economic downturn of the mid to late 1920s in Japan and the military cutbacks that followed World War One. As Matsuo reflects on the difficulties of adjusting to life in Korea, he notes that the lack of opportunity in Sasebo and the greater likelihood of success in the colonial economy were key factors that drove him to persevere all those years. In Matsuo’s description of his background, while he sets himself up as

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imperialism can be found in Asada and Takasaki.

a victim of adverse circumstance in some ways, there is ultimately a positive emphasis on the progressive trajectory that led him to Korea.

He explains that he wrote this book so that he could reveal the “actual conditions” (*jittai*) of the colonial era construction industry, which included projects such as reservoir building, tunnel digging and road paving. The reader is immediately struck by the sense of pride Matsuo takes in his personal record in Korea, and by extension, the national pride that he touts in telling his story. He even bemoans the fact that the abrupt end of the war in 1945 cut short a large-scale agricultural development project in north Korea which he claims, had it been completed, could have prevented the current famine conditions north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Such remarks reflect the perspective of Japanese civilians and government officials alike in the postwar period who claim, either explicitly or by implication, that Korea would be better off and less politically chaotic had it remained under Japanese influence.<sup>21)</sup>

In Matsuo’s case, he is directly challenging the notion that construction projects were fundamentally problematic developments carried out by the Japanese as a way to strengthen Japanese militarism.<sup>22)</sup> Instead, he presents a trajectory of development that is celebrated for the cooperation and understanding Matsuo says he and his fellow employees got from Koreans once work on these projects began in their hometowns (105). These kinds of positive sentiments are found in his descriptions of his interactions with Korean workers. He traveled extensively throughout the peninsula for his job and this

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21) Such views parallel those of Niall Ferguson and his evaluation of the “good” British empire which he sees as a model of efficient administration and promoter of progressive thought, in light of contemporary conflicts in the Middle East.

22) Matsuo, 2. In this way, he also challenges the notion that Japan followed a trajectory from democracy to fascism, as argued by those like Yoshimi, and others who have explored the issue of “war responsibility” (*senjō sekinin*) at all levels of society (e.g. Fujiwara and Arai). Earlier analyses of Japanese fascism include Fujita.

gave him a sense of what life was like in more remote areas where the Japanese presence was sometimes limited to the school principal and one government official. In these locations, Matsuo claims a sense of solidarity with the local population and presents his lifestyle as equivalent in the sense that he too was just trying to provide for his family and make a living. In this way, the context of his work and family life is completely depoliticized in his mind. It is part of a strategy to disassociate the memories of his contributions to technological developments in Korea from later military expansionism, especially into northeast China.

These developments are treated as distinct from the later violence of Japanese militarism which is completely elided in Matsuo's account. The void of physical violence is a stunning silence in both Matsuo and Honda's accounts of the colonial period. Instead, Matsuo includes examples of expressions of gratitude extended to him by Koreans who lived in areas affected by the construction projects he managed. He says that he was even asked to "please go have a drink together" by some of the people in local areas (50). In sharp contrast to a stark dichotomy of Japanese aggressors and Korean victims, Matsuo's account of life in colonial Korea includes such examples of mutual celebration and revelry in a job well done. He cites Korean individuals who say things like "This will help us from now on. Thank you very much" (50). Matsuo notes that elderly Koreans were particularly happy with projects like paved roads that allowed them to get to their destinations more quickly. Although these Korean people are never named or described in a way that indicates Matsuo had a personal relationship with them, he attributes such sentiments to them through this kind of testimony. He uses quotes to offset the words of one elderly Korean who effused, "Because the bridge was built, now I can walk straight there" (50). These quotes are proffered by Matsuo as direct evidence of his contributions to Korean development and transition

to the modern, industrial age. For him, these words are proof that part of Japan's legacy in Korea was appreciated for its rational, efficient nature and contribution to the ease of everyday life. He even goes so far as to say that with age, he feels like it was his "mission" (*shimeikan*) to do things like contribute to the increase in rice production in Korea through the irrigation projects he worked on during those years (50).

Matsuo goes into great detail in his descriptions of the projects he worked on throughout Korea. In particular, he gives lengthy explanations of the natural landscape, especially the challenges that were presented in the face of large-scale projects like bridge construction. For example, he gives the exact measurements of the width of the rivers and notes how sometimes there were obstructions that necessitated the construction of pillars so that the water would flow properly. He is keen to show how he was part of a process of controlling the natural environment and making a new built environment, with its precise quantified measurement, such as how many tons of concrete were used, etc. Matsuo gives elaborate explanations of the various challenges the Japanese anticipated, such as the amount of water and speed of water flow in the rivers spanned by the bridges they were building. These descriptions as well have a heroic tone to them, with numerous anecdotes of technological adaptation and success in controlling natural forces like rainfall and temperature.

He gives specific examples of dam construction and innovations like a tiered system to deal with sudden rushes of water. In Matsuo's accounting of this history, it was an elaborate, complex process but not one that was intended to promote militaristic expansion. Instead, central to this narrative is the speed associated with the pace of construction. He explains how he was always hurrying from one site to the next and never had time to stick around for the completion ceremonies. Part of his rush was the requirement to mobilize hundreds of employees in each location before construction could begin. These

scenes of Matsuo bustling from site to site are in stark contrast to the tragic narratives of the forced mobilization of Korean laborers in the last decade of colonial rule.<sup>23)</sup> Matsuo's trajectory of development is more akin to the celebratory narratives of the Meiji centennial associated with conservatives of the 1960s mentioned earlier.

Not only is the violence of Japanese imperialism elided in Matsuo's account, but so are any significant signs of resistance by the Koreans themselves to Japanese rule. In fact, he states that he himself never witnessed any signs of resistance, even in cases when ceremonies associated with building projects included Shinto rituals.<sup>24)</sup> Although Matsuo does not address the issue directly, his portrayal of a compliant Korean populace is key in his retelling the history of this period. In particular, it is a version meant to challenge narratives of the colonial period that single out State Shinto as the ideological heart of a series of brutal, humiliating assimilationist policies targeting the Korean people. He does not go so far as to say that there were no cases of resistance, just that he did not witness any significance cases where he worked.

In contrast to a narrative centered on the resistance struggles of the Korean people, throughout Matsuo's memoirs, there is a constant refrain of praise for the hard work ethic of the Korean workers as employees of a Japanese company. He does note that some workers would "talk back" but for the most part, he focuses on the positive interactions he had with them. Despite the fact that the colonial economy was agriculturally based, Matsuo singles out for special praise those Koreans who had higher technical aspirations (103). He makes several references to the "simple" tasks carried out by many Korean workers such as hauling dirt and describes various cases where "locals who

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23) See also Utsumi's discussion of Korean conscripts.

24) Matsuo, 50. For an extensive examination of various cases of resistance and other "anti-Japanese struggles for liberation" see especially Kajimura.

were unfamiliar” with certain technologies made mistakes in operating the machinery (32, 48). Such accounts are consistent with the assumed trajectory of development mentioned above, which Matsuo sees as converging with the development of the Korean labor force under the direction of Japanese management. In this sense, Matsuo’s daily lived experiences of cultural mixing and separation were grounded in this particular teleology, “naturally” culminating in the technological accomplishments of large-scale projects like the ones he worked on in the 1930s.

Matsuo punctuates his narrative with many of the most conventional, symbolic markers of the colonial period such as the 1910 annexation and the 1919 independence movement. However, he interjects that “of course” he did not know about such political developments, thus distinguishing his personal experiences from those events mentioned “in history books” (9). Despite the author’s attempts to separate these two realms in cases like this, there are also times when his career path is inextricably tied to the higher level political and economic decisions made by Japanese colonial administrators. For instance, he mentions reforms like the land survey and plan to increase rice production that were carried out in the first decade or so of the colonial period and presumably laid the groundwork for later changes to the Korean landscape when he lived and worked there. This is the way he contextualizes his pursuit of lucrative opportunities in the construction industry in the 1930s.<sup>25)</sup> Other loaded references include his discussion of the consumption of white rice and other mixed grains by Koreans. Here we see evidence of the same trajectory of development discussed above, but this time grounded in everyday objects like the box lunches brought to the construction sites by Korean workers. Matsuo acknowledges that for many Koreans life was “rather difficult”

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25) Note the contrast between Matsuo’s account and studies of the “rural crisis” of the 1920s discussed by Park 133-34.

(*nakanaka kurushikatta*) but those with any means were apparently able to eat a “proper” (*chanto*) meal of white rice (20).

The choice of such words as “proper” reflects a hierarchy of social practices and customs that is similar in many ways to that found in the account offered by Honda regarding his childhood in Keijo. As noted above, in Honda's case, he was raised with a sense of the chaos of local conditions and notions imparted by his mother of how to restore and maintain order through the exclusion of taboo objects like food prepared by Koreans. Similar notions of chaos and order are found in Matsuo's memoirs, but in his case, he introduces this dichotomy in a fundamentally unproblematic way. For instance, he describes how a “veteran farmer” relative of his from Japan came to Korea at one point and introduced Japanese methods of orderly, evenly spaced rice seedling planting, in contrast to the “haphazard” (*mechakucha*) Korean ways (57). In the description of his home, Matsuo highlights the Japanese renovations that were made, such as the addition of sliding doors and a tatami mat room. An essential element of this domestic space was the Japanese bath, in contrast to Korean homes and his understanding of bathing practices which he says consisted of washing from a basin in cold weather and bathing outside in the river in the warmer months (71).

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper presents a preliminary examination of memoirs of ordinary Japanese citizens like Honda and Matsuo and suggests that we can understand the process of assimilation in the colonial period in a number of different, nuanced ways based on their personal accounts. Most importantly, both authors emphasize the problems with a simplistic dichotomy of Japanese aggression and Korean victimization that often characterizes portrayals of 1930s Korea.

More broadly, their stories can also be situated within the larger postwar Japanese discourse of individual responsibility for events and trends that occurred before 1945. In their own ways, Honda and Matsuo both address questions such as “What really happened during the 1930s?”, “What are we ordinary Japanese people responsible for?” and “What is the legacy of that period in the postwar era?” In their attempts to answer those questions they both invoke the voices of ordinary Koreans as part of their narratives. In Honda’s case, he highlights the testimonies of Resident Koreans in particular and in Matsuo’s case, the reader is usually presented with the words of unnamed Korean villagers and workers he encountered while on the job.

While I have alluded to some of the generational differences, further observations will no doubt reveal a more complex understanding of these exchanges, both during the 1930s and beyond. In addition, in post-1945 Japan, we can see how these memories are a part of larger societal evaluations of the colonial era and wartime responsibility more generally. In this way, Honda and Matsuo's narratives intersect with some of the most central historiographical questions in the postwar period, namely “What do we Japanese know about our past?” and “How should we evaluate it?”<sup>26</sup>) Just as imperial-era relationships between the metropole and the colonial territories were mutually constructed, so too do these memoirs create, reproduce, and challenge existing understandings of 1930s Korea, as found in more meticulously documented versions of this period such school textbooks and other “authoritative” narratives like the ones compiled and circulated by former colonial officials.

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26) For a review of the scholarship on the so-called “Korea problem,” see Schmid.

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<국문초록>

## 전후 일본에서 1930년대 조선을 기억하며

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본고는 일본에서 1945년 이후 재구성되고 새로이 논의된, 식민지기에 대한 기억에 초점을 둔다. 1950년대 후반기를 기점으로 하여 식민지정부의 일본 관료와 고위공무원의 다수를 대상으로 1930년대 한국에서의 경험에 대한 설문을 시작하였으며, 이러한 인터뷰를 통해 전후시기에 이르기까지 일종의 과거의 향수에 젖은 온정주의가 드러남을 발견할 수 있었다. 이와 같은 인터뷰의 어조와 내용은 1930년대에 한국에 거주했던 평범한 일본인이 집필한 개인적 회고록들에서도 반복되어 등장한다. 그럼에도 불구하고, 이러한 개인적 회고록들은 또한 전후에도 지속되고 있는 한국인에 대한 차별과 재일 한국인의 불평등한 지위에 대한 관심을 일으킴으로써 때로는 사죄하도록 때로는 인도적이 되도록 행동을 촉구하는 것이다. 이 회고록들은 또한 타세대의 이전 식민주의자들이 스스로를 식민지 시대의 복잡성과 전후 유물을 이해하는데 적합하다고 자부했던 방식을 폭로하는 역할을 한다.

**주제어** : 동화, 회고록, 포스트식민주의, 인도주의, 제국주의, 재일 한국인

논문접수일 : 6.30 / 심사기간 : 7.20~8.5 / 게재확정일 : 8.10