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Cover calligraphy  Yan Zhenqing 颜真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

BURAKU EMIGRATION IN THE MEIJI ERA— OTHER WAYS TO BECOME “JAPANESE”

Noah McCormack

Similar to the manner in which Edo江戸-period intellectuals talked of mobilizing outcasts to colonize Ezo蝦夷, Meiji明治 intellectuals, too, advocated the use of “new commoners” (shinheimin 新平民) for colonial purposes. Whereas Edo planners implicitly envisaged the use of force to achieve their aims, their Meiji-era counterparts attempted to appeal rather to the patriotism of “new commoners” to realize theirs. This paper reviews Edo-period colonial plans involving outcasts, and goes on to examine the Meiji-era practice of buraku部落 emigration, focusing upon the manner in which emigration tended to institute buraku emigrants as “national citizens” (kokumin 国民).

Introduction—Early Colonial Plans

Propelled by social, political and economic changes associated with the expanding world economy, large-scale human migrations became commonplace in Japan during the so-called modern era (1868-1945). The fact that overseas travel had been forbidden in the Edo period underscores the novelty of this phenomenon. Concerned about Christianity’s subversive potential, encouraged by Dutch traders seeking to shut out competition, and desiring to prevent southwestern domains from enriching themselves through trade, the Bakufu closely regulated foreign contacts. In 1617, it banned Spanish shipping, in 1635, it banned Japanese subjects from traveling abroad as well.

1 “Outcast” is a term of convenience that encompasses a number of Edo-period (1596-1867) social stations. This brief note does no justice to the complexity of their situation, but for the purposes of this piece, suffice it to say that certain leatherworking kawata カワタ, 皮多, pejoratively known as eta 極多 (literally “very polluted”), along with considerable numbers of binin 非人 (literally “not-humans”) who often engaged in leather-goods production and magico-religious rites, were considered to be afflicted by pollution (kogare 礑れ), and thus to be unclean (fujō 不浄) as a result of their hereditary occupations. Legal regulations made their status obvious; outcasts were often shunned or denigrated. The Meiji (1868–1912) government granted outcasts commoner status in 1871, but deep-rooted prejudices saw especially kawata and also some binin become known as “former eta” (moto eta 元極多) and “former binin” (moto binin 元非人). The catch-all term “new commoner” (shinheimin) quickly replaced these expressions and prevailed until the turn of the century. During that time a widespread tendency to ascribe modern “failings” such as “lack of hygiene,” “ignorance,” “foreign origins” and so on to “new commoners” gave a new rationale to customary prejudices. The resulting amalgam of new and old prejudices was distilled into the term tokushu buraku特殊部落, 特種部落, or “special settlement,” where those perceived to be former outcasts, or to be descended from them, were imagined to reside. Despite questions about the appropriateness of the term burakumin 部落民 (literally “hamlet people”) which is derived from tokushu buraku, the lack of readily recognizable alternatives results in its continued use as another term of convenience.

Map 1

Aō Toki 青生東図
"Nihon kokugun sōzu"
as returning from abroad, and in 1639, it banned Portuguese shipping and restricted Dutch and Chinese shipping and trade to the port of Nagasaki 長崎. To ensure the continuity of economic production and the maintenance of social order, the authorities restricted mobility within Japan too.

Exceptionally, some members of the ruling classes promoted the mobilization of a part of the population for colonial ends. Edo-period advocates of Japanese colonial expansion argued for the “settlement” of the northern island of Ezo, today known as Hokkaido 北海道. Stimulated by reports about colonial activities by other countries, as well as by economic considerations, they called for the state to take over and settle the entire island, and to complete the slow and piecemeal process of invasion commenced centuries earlier.

During the early part of the Tenpō 天保 period (1716–36), Namikawa Tenmin 並河天民 made one of the first proposals for the Bakufu to colonize Ezo. A student of the eminent Confucianist Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁斎, and the son of a Yamashiro 山城 (Shiga 滋賀)-province rice trader, Tenmin probably gleaned his knowledge of the Ezo region from merchants. For not only did Matsumae 松前-domain (the Bakufu’s toehold on Hokkaido) traders pass through the area on their way to Osaka 大阪, which was then the trading capital of Japan, Yamashiro merchants based in Ōtsu 大津 were also emerging as a major force in the Ezo trade around that time. Although Tenmin’s proposal had no immediate practical impact, it probably stimulated a later, more influential work by a Nagasaki doctor and administrator named Kudō Heisuke 工藤平助, given that Kudō Heisuke was the adopted son of Namikawa Tenmin’s elder brother Takean 太庵.

In 1783, noting Russian trading interest in the Ezo area (which had been apparent to Matsumae-domain officials since at least the late 1760s), and learning of the prevalence of clandestine trade with the Russians from the Matsumae Magistrate of Finances, Kudō Heisuke wrote an essay in which he argued that the Bakufu would derive great profits from taking over Ezo. Concretely, Kudō suggested that legalizing trade with the Russians and developing the island’s undoubted mineral resources would fill state coffers.

Through the good offices of acquaintances, he managed to have this work brought to the notice of Tanuma Okitsuugu 田沼意次, then chief retainer of the Shōgun, Tokugawa Ieharu 徳川家治. State finances were in a parlous condition, and Tanuma, who favoured a relatively flexible interpretation of the policy of seclusion, constantly sought new ways to increase revenue and improve the economic situation. Attracted by the suggestion that colonizing Ezo would be economically advantageous, he ordered a team of officials to survey the area. They subsequently reported that Hokkaido, contrary to the claims of Matsumae officials, was well suited to the production of rice and

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5 Miyajima Toshimitsu, *Ainu minzoku to nihon no rekishi* [The history of the Ainu people and Japan] (Tokyo: Sanichi Shobō, 1996), pp.61–3. The Kamakura government sent criminals to Ezo from the end of the twelfth century; scattered warriors, fisher­people and traders ventured north from the thirteenth century onwards; group invasions commenced around the mid-fifteenth century.


13 Sekine Tokuo, *Tanuma no kaikaku—Edo jidai saidai no keizai kaikaku* [Tanuma’s reforms—the most significant economic reforms of the Edo period] (Tokyo: Ikukōsha, 1999), pp.96–7.
grains. This led Tanuma to decide in favour of colonization.\textsuperscript{13} Officials went on to formulate a plan to send some 70,000 \textit{eta} under the command of the Danzaemon 弹左衛門, the Edo outcast lord, to colonize Ezo. This plan was submitted to the Bakufu's Council of Elders (Rōjū 老中) in 1786, but after the illness and subsequent death of the Shōgun that year, Tanuma was forced to retire, and the plan came to nothing.\textsuperscript{14} It remains noteworthy, however,\footnote{Takakura Shinichirō, \textit{Hokkaidō takushoku shi} [History of Hokkaido's development] (Sapporo: Hakuyō Shoin, 1947), pp.33–6.}
Members of the ruling class probably thought of using kawata or eta in their colonial expansion schemes because they perceived such people to be best suited to colonial mobilization. A considerable proportion of them were well organized under a powerful boss, the Danzaemon. Many customarily undertook policing and paramilitary duties. They were also relatively few in number: around two or three percent of the population, and given their low social status, they were more or less expendable. Such factors enabled the rulers to regard them as better suited than any other segment of the population to mass relocation and use in colonial expansion.

These initial plans to mobilize outcasts for settling Ezo did not come to fruition. Instead, ”programs of settlement and subsidization for the Ainu [アイヌ] through the provision of clothing, food, metal, and road construction were carried out in the hope of solidifying Japanese control and erecting barriers to Russian infiltration.” During the first half of the nineteenth century, Ezo basically remained a defensive buffer zone imagined to be protecting the north of the main Japanese islands.

Nonetheless, scholars continued to formulate plans for colonizing Ezo. Their proposals gained in influence during the nineteenth century, especially as increased relations with Western countries fostered a sense, most notably among the literate classes, that the acquisition of a colonial empire would greatly assist the cause of continued Japanese independence.

In the 1840s, the Confucian scholar and scientist Hoashi Banri (1778–1852) made a well-known call for the state to mobilize outcasts for colonial purposes. Writing in the context of the increasing Western presence in the “Asian” region, Banri recommended transferring minor daimiates to Karafuto 極東 (Sakhalin) and the Kurile Islands to help protect the country from Russian incursion. Further, he proposed relocating eta to Ezo in order both to improve Japanese domestic order, and to strengthen Japan’s international position. According to Banri, eta were the “descendants of a type of barbarian” who had formerly inhabited Japan’s northern reaches. That is, he almost certainly believed this outcast group to be of Ezo (Ainu) descent, and was in a way calling for eta to be repatriated. He claimed that they had criminal tendencies and saw this to be a major problem, since they (as well as binin) were often entrusted with policing duties. To remedy that situation,
and simultaneously to develop and protect Japan's northern frontier, he recommended that the government assemble and ritually cleanse outcasts, grant them commoner status, and transport them to Ezo.17

The first detailed program concerning outcast mobilization for colonial purposes since the late eighteenth century, Hoashi Banri's ideas achieved considerable exposure. One of his students, Yokoi Hōzan 横井豊山 (1814–55), quickly adopted Hoashi's proposals, and in all probability intended to put them into practice. The son of a Confucianist medical doctor, Yokoi demonstrated a keen interest in the areas to the north of Japan, and voyaged to the island of Karafuto/Sakhalin, as well as to Matsumae domain on the island of Ezo. In a text published in 1855, Yokoi echoed Hoashi Banri's main points, proposing to ritually cleanse the eta, and thereafter to send them to Ezo to protect Japan's northern reaches.18 The Bakufu employed Yokoi to implement measures for developing Ezo that very year, and presumably he planned to mobilize outcasts towards that end. But he died suddenly, evidently without managing to achieve any concrete results.19

The notion of using outcasts for colonial purposes became steadily more influential during the last years of the Edo period. In 1867, the Nativist scholar Yano Harumichi 矢野玄道 proposed that the eta be relocated to Ezo, as well as to the islands of Sado 佐渡, Yakushima 屋久島, Izu Ōshima 伊豆大島, and the Ogasawara 小笠原諸島 (Bonin islands) in order to protect Japan from foreign incursion.20 Yano's report was sent to the leading court noble, Iwakura Tomomi, 岩倉具視 and it was subsequently touched upon the issue of eta relocation in a report he wrote in 1868 for the new Meiji government. He recommended gathering criminals and other undesirable people such as eta, who found it “hard to mingle with ordinary people,” and to send them to Ezo to engage in development projects.21

Soon afterwards in 1869, delegates presented similar arguments at the Kōgisho 公議所 (Public Deliberation Place), a new body made up of domainal representatives. These delegates consisted mainly of progressive military class men, and some amongst them displayed considerable interest in the outcast issue. From the perspective of state needs such as increasing tax revenues (since few outcasts were untaxed), and uniting the people, almost all who spoke upon the subject agreed that outcast emancipation was necessary. A few also expressed the notion that human beings ought fundamentally to be equal, at least in legal status.22 Hoashi Banri's son Ryūkichī was among the delegates, and he reiterated the argument his father had made some two decades earlier.23 Elsewhere, in 1871, Ōe Taku 大江卓 (Tenya天也, 1847–1921) presented a submission to the Civil Affairs Ministry in which he too proposed outcast emigration to Ezo as a solution to their social excommunication.24

The Edo and early Meiji plans for outcast emigration outlined above were concerned with furthering state interests. Members of the ruling classes and those aligned with them called for colonization based upon the considerations as state prestige, defence, domestic social order, and economic development.

24 Hoashi Ryūkichī, “Eta wo heijin to shi, Ezochi ni utsusubeki no gi” [Proposal to make eta commoners and transport them to Ezo], in MBZ, vol 4, p.144.
The idea of mobilizing outcasts sprang from a perception of them as a group whose attributes meant they could readily be turned toward the realization of colonial ends. The implication was that outcasts would be more useful to the state “outside” the country than within it.

The ruling elite never quite succeeded in implementing their plans. That was probably fortunate for outcasts, in light of the fate of emigrants associated with the first official attempt to bring about mass emigration to Hokkaido. In 1869, the Meiji regime despatched thousands of poor and homeless people from Tokyo to the Shimosha 下総 plain in contemporary Chiba 千葉 prefecture, ostensibly in the interests of “maintaining order and rebuilding the economy.”26 That human movement had been one half of a two-part relocation operation. Authorities had also taken steps to bring about the emigration of other members of the Tokyo poor to Hokkaido and Karafuto. But the too obviously unprepared state of emigrants forced government officials to reconsider, and to withdraw their support from that part of the scheme. The plan for northwards emigration went ahead independently nonetheless, and while a few emigrants returned to Tokyo the following year, it seems that the remainder came to an unhappy end.27

The Meiji government emancipated

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outcasts in 1871, and introduced legal equality amongst Japanese subjects in 1872. These measures naturally caused the kind of forced emigration that early colonial planners had envisaged to become impracticable. Schemes to make “former outcasts” migrate virtually disappeared during the remainder of the 1870s and the early 1880s.

Settling the Northern Frontier

One of the primary objectives of the Meiji regime was the colonization of Ezo. Taking the position that developing the land of Ezo, renamed Hokkaido in 1869, would require mass migration from the home islands, the government established a Development Bureau (Kaitakushi 開拓使) in 1869. In 1882, three short-lived prefectures (Sapporo 札幌, Hakodate 函館, and Nemuro 根室) would replace that body, and in 1886, a single unified Hokkaido prefecture would in turn supersede them. Charged with the colonial development of Ezo, these administrative authorities basically used similar means of attracting voluntary migrants: offers of assisted travel, living allowances upon arrival, and most importantly, the prospect of cheap or free land upon “successfully” developing one’s land allocations.28

Non-official bodies also promoted emigration to Hokkaido. East Honganji Temple 東本願寺, an influential Kyoto 京都 Buddhist institution of the Pure Land True Faith (Jōdō Shinshū 波土真宗) sect, pushed emigration in the early 1870s.29 Having previously been closely aligned with the Bakufu, it mobilized the priests of affiliated temples to encourage peasant migration in an attempt to curry favour with Meiji officials.30 During the 1880s and 1890s, numerous publications that promoted emigration appeared, while private migration agencies attempted to seduce people into emigrating with glowing accounts of life in the north.31 The commencement of the Russian trans-Siberian railroad project in the late 1880s also aroused state and media concern about the possibility of invasion from the northwest, and gave further impetus to such promotional activities.32

Many shizoku 土族 or former military class people, especially from domains that had sided with the Bakufu, as well as poorer people, availed themselves of these offers of land and other assistance, and emigrated.33 Visions of new horizons awaiting discovery, “development fever,” the notion that the northern frontier was a place of freedom and possibility, and the prospect of easily acquiring land all combined to lure settlers northwards.34

Some calls for emigration to Hokkaido specifically targeted “new commoners.” Concerned by the persistence of popular prejudices against them, intellectuals imagined that emigration would remedy their plight. An early recommendation of this tactic came in the spring of 1884. The Köchi 高知 prefecture-based Doyō Shinbun 土陽新聞, closely associated with the local Freedom and Popular Rights Movement (Jiyū minken undō 自由民権運動), published a lengthy essay that dealt with the question of “new commoners” by a man named Matsumoto Gorō 松本五郎. Matsumoto

32 Kairō Mineo, Bakuhansei kokka to Hokkaidō, pp.324–6.
33 Tanaka and Kuwabara, Hokkaidō kaitaku, pp.78–9. See also Miyajima Toshimitsu, Ainu minzoku to Nihon no rekishi, pp.149–50.
argued that relocation would be the best way of dealing with this group of impoverished and ostracized people, predicting that transportation to Hokkaido would reform their lowly ways and improve their circumstances. 35

Around the same time, “new commoners” expressed a degree of interest in emigrating too. In the summer of 1884, the Liberal Party’s Jiyū Shinbun 自由新聞 reported on the situation of the new commoners of the Mimasaka 美作 area of Okayama 岡山 prefecture. Some of the bloodiest anti-government uprisings of the early Meiji years had erupted in Mimasaka, and had involved murderous attacks upon local “new commoner” communities. “Even today, denigration of those people has not abated. They are still called eta, and are shunned. In dire straights … they have enquired about migrating en masse to Hokkaido.” 36 Given the lack of improvement in their relations with other commoners since the announcement of the emancipation decree, these “new commoners” clearly felt that emigration might be the best option in their attempts to better their lives.

All the same, emigration was a huge step to take. Reluctance to depart from hometowns and abandon friends and occupations seems to have been a common response to suggestions about emigrating to Hokkaido. On the first day of 1900, a newspaper report from Niigata 新潟 prefecture informed readers that despite an offer that would have enabled them to emigrate under very favourable conditions, local “new commoners” had displayed no interest in the idea. 37 From Kyoto, the local Hinode Shinbun 日出新聞 likewise reported that, “In the past, some proposed that they relocate to Hokkaido under favourable conditions, but they stubbornly refused to comply.” 38

Such reluctance appears to have weakened towards the end of the Meiji period. This was in part due to the longevity of prejudices against “new commoners,” as well as to the influence of Utopian visions of Hokkaido. As Hokkaido-bound emigrant numbers soared in the late 1880s and early 1890s, writers constructed Utopian representations of the northern frontier, establishing an image of Hokkaido in the popular imagination as a frontier land of liberty and possibility. This was not an entirely novel idea. During the Edo period, writers such as Andō Shōeki had portrayed Ainu society as a classless Utopia, and caused a number of peasants from the northeastern regions of Japan to migrate to Ezo. 39 In somewhat similar fashion, Meiji-period writers represented Hokkaido as a location where “new commoners” might find a home free from the prejudices that blighted their lives in the home islands.

The popular rakugo 落語 storyteller Sanyūtei Enchō 三遊亭圓朝 provides an early illustration of this Meiji-era trend. In 1886, the Yamato Shinbun 大和新聞 serialized one of his stories set during the Bakumatsu years that told of a love affair between a young binin man and the daughter of a successful merchant. Their relationship ends badly, but even worse, the woman is stigmatized as an outcast by virtue of her former association with the young binin man. After great hardships and at the story’s end, she meets a man of good family who believes in human equality, and they marry.
Because of her outcast associations, however, the residents of the village where the couple reside ostracize them, leading her husband to suggest to her, “let’s go to a new country together where we are unknown, clear and level the land and make it productive, work for the common good, teach and enlighten the ignorant…” With the advent of legal equality in the early Meiji years, the couple then departs for Hokkaido. 40 There was a long semi-sequel (in which different characters take centre-stage), but this story is notable for being one of the earliest representations of Hokkaido as a promised land where targets of prejudice would be free to develop to their full potential.

“Migrant Academy” (Imin Gakuen 移民学園), a short story by journalist and women’s rights advocate Shimizu Shikin 清水紫琴 (Toyoko 豊子, 1868–1933), reprised the basic themes of Enchō’s story. Published in 1899, Shikin’s tale featured a woman who learns that she is partly of eta descent. Upon informing her husband, a government minister, he resigns from his post in order to avoid any possibility of scandal. The couple leaves for Hokkaido, which is clearly a land free from such outmoded prejudices. There, they are to establish the “Migrant Academy” of the title, and devote themselves to the common good by educating the children of “new commoners.”41 Other writers such as Iwano Hōmei 岩野博鳴 (1873–1920) maintained this tradition of depicting Hokkaido as a free and tolerant land of hope for “new commoners.” In his “Fukumatsu the Axe” (Ono no Fukumatsu 斬るの福松) of 1917, Iwano recounted the trials of Fukumatsu, a wealthy and rebellious “new commoner” who was unable to marry his “ordinary” lover because her father deemed him to be “polluted.” He begs her to join him in flight to Hokkaido, where they might begin anew.42

Given that Utopian representations of Hokkaido were common, Ogasawara Masaru 小笠原克 has written that, “it is not hard to imagine that poor people from the home islands—ancestral tenant farmers and burakumin and so on—settled there.”43 Certainly many landless peasants made their way to Hokkaido during the Meiji years, and records indicate that during the 1910s, some groups of burakumin also made their way northwards. In addition to the factors outlined above, official and semi-official bodies played decisive roles in promoting and implementing group buraku emigration programs.

The precise actions of the government in this regard are unclear. Ian Neary suggests that “The second Katsura Cabinet in 1908 established a policy to encourage Burakumin to emigrate … but no funds were allocated for this purpose.”44 His comment refers to an article by Narusawa Eiju 成沢栄寿 in which Narusawa proposes that there had been an abortive government effort to bring about the dispersal or emigration of burakumin.45 In his overview of the Interior Ministry’s approach to buraku-related issues during the late Meiji and Taishō periods, Fujino Yutaka 藤野宏 writes that the ministry “enthusiastically promoted emigration of the buraku masses to Hokkaido,”46 while Kurokawa Midori 黒川みどり cautions that concrete promotional activities by the ministry consisted mainly of talk: “There is little evidence of [such plans] having been carried out.”47
Concrete central government action to promote buraku emigration appears in fact to have been limited to directives to prefectoral authorities. In 1912, the Interior Ministry official Tomeoka Kōsuke 留岡幸助 remarked that the Ministry had drawn up and distributed to the authorities of each prefecture a work entitled Guide to migrating to Hokkaido (Hokkaido ijū annai 北海道移住案内). According to Tomeoka, this text indicated particular buraku communities in which prefectoral officials were to promote the practice of emigration. 48

During the last years of the Meiji period, the Interior Ministry had instructed prefectoral officials all over the country to draft reports on the population, per capita income, crime rates, customs, and so on, of buraku communities in their jurisdictions. The resulting surveys thus appear to have been used to identify those parts of the population whose departure was to be encouraged. The timing of the publication that Tomeoka mentions suggests it was perhaps at the root of the perception that the Interior Ministry was beginning to formulate an emigration policy to deal with “new commoners,” as the Mie Shinbun 三重新聞 reported briefly in the summer of 1911. 49

In practice, prefectoral officials acted on occasion to facilitate buraku emigration. A series of letters from a young buraku emigrant in Hokkaido named Nakamura Teikichi 中村定吉 addressed to Hirota Masatoshi 広田正敏, a Nara 奈良-prefecture official, reveal that group emigration that had taken place in 1912 benefited from the assistance of prefectural authorities. According to Nakamura’s epistles, Hokkaido was a great improvement upon Nara, for apart from the fact that emigrants were allocated a considerable area of land over which they could acquire ownership through development and farming, established residents also warmly welcomed and aided them. 50

More commonly, emigration schemes involved the actions of semi-official organizations. Buraku reform associations such as the Nara-based Yamato Dōshikai 大和同志会 (Yamato Fellowship Association), established in 1912, and the more central Teikoku Kōdōkai 帝国公道会 (Imperial Justice Association) established in 1914, conducted a number of late Meiji and early Taishō group buraku emigration programs. Nara-prefecture politicians, bureaucrats and buraku elites comprised the membership of the former, while the latter, centered on Ōe Taku, included aristocrats, academics, social reformers and buraku elites. Although she downplays the number of emigrants, Kurokawa Midori suggests that these bodies were instrumental in bringing about buraku emigration to Hokkaido from Nara, Shiga, Aichi 愛知, Kyoto, Köchi and Tokushima 徳島 prefectures. 51

Concretely, Tanaka Toyočumi 田中豊文, a former schoolteacher and buraku reformer, indicated in an article published in the Yamato Dōshikai journal, Meiji no Hikari 明治之光 (The Meiji Beacon), 52 that the Teikoku Kōdōkai had drawn up plans to re-settle 2000 buraku households from the mainland in Hokkaido. The first group of around sixty people from Shiga

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52. This journal was published by Matsui Shōgorō 松井庄五郎 (1869–1931), a Nara-prefecture activist and wealthy businessman who had studied philosophy, agriculture and English. See “Matsui Shōgorō rirekisho” [Matsui Shōgorō’s curriculum vitae], 16 December 1920, in KBSS, vol.9, pp.150–1. Reflecting his interest in the potential of emigration, the journal regularly and prominently featured articles on the subject. See Kim Chionmi, “Chōsen dokuritsu, han sabetsu, han tennōsei” [Korean independence, anti-discrimination, anti-emperor system], Shisō 786 (December 1989): 90, 100, n.8. The first edition (1912) had a print-run of 500, the second of 700, and by the third, 1,500. Nonetheless, financial problems plagued the paper, forcing its closure in 1918.
53. Tanaka Toyočumi, “Hokkaidō ni dekita Ōmimura ni tsuki shokumin jökyō ippan” [The Ōmi village arisen in Hokkaido, and the general situation of colonization], Meiji no bikari, April 1916, pp.29–32.
prefecture had emigrated in 1913, he reported.53 A follow-up report some months later declared that, “The poor of yesterday are today’s landowners” and presented a rosy picture of life in Hokkaido. It included a message from emigrants to those yet to emigrate: “The women and children have forgotten about home and gossip excitedly about who will come next year [...]. Please tell migrants to come as soon as they can.”54

Groups from buraku communities also departed for Hokkaido from Kyoto prefecture. Ueda Seiichi 上田静一, a former teacher in the Kyoto buraku community of Yanagihara 柳原, led a group of emigrants to Hokkaido in early 1917. He reported the following year that, “the poor who are despised in the home islands are not treated at all differently” in the north.55 A number of commentators observed that there was a relative absence of social divisions in Hokkaido. The eminent ethnologist Kita Sadakichi 喜田貞吉 stated, “those who have migrated to Hokkaido are very rarely discriminated against,”56 and the Bureau of Public Order (Keihokyoku 警保局) concurred, finding in a national survey of burakumin in 1922 that there were no such people in Hokkaido.57

More than problems of ostracism and denigration, groups of migrants to Hokkaido reportedly found it hard to survive. Hardship forced all of the Kyoto emigrants associated with Ueda Seiichi’s venture to return home again. The fate of buraku emigrants from other prefectures is obscure. But in all likelihood, they faced the same difficulties as other ‘ordinary’ migrants to Hokkaido.

Reports on the general situation of poorer early twentieth-century migrants to Hokkaido indicate that there was little reality underlying the advertisements about free and fertile land, low taxation, and a better life.58 New arrivals found that the rich and influential had already appropriated all

54 “Zappō” [Miscellaneous news], Meiji no bikari, October 1916.
56 Kita Teikichi, “Tokushu buraku no jinkō zōshoku” [The population increase of special buraku], Minzoku to rekishi 2.1 (July 1919): 145.

Figure 1

the best land. “Their great expectations turn to ashes, and in despair, they are forced to become agricultural labourers on great estates.” Whatever the basis of the glowing reports about successful buraku emigration to Hokkaido, the alien nature of the environment, and especially the cold, together with high taxes, high prices, and limited economic opportunities, conceivably caused some to have second thoughts about emigration. For despite the prevalence of discrimination in the home islands, survival was rarely an issue.

**Southern Visions of Refuge and Empire**

The Nanyō 南洋 was in some ways the southern equivalent of Hokkaido: it too signified a land of freedom and opportunity in the popular imagination of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Literally the “southern ocean,” it has been described as “a geographical concept as nebulous as the ambitions directed toward it, but which, in the first years of the Meiji era, was generally defined as the tropical Pacific, particularly Micronesia.” Elite Japanese interest in the Southern Islands boomed in the third Meiji decade.

Apart from reflecting the influence of Edo-period visions of bountiful and untaxed islands lying to the south, Meiji-period interest in the Southern Islands also echoed Edo-period plans for southwards expansion. Now that the success of the colonization of Hokkaido seemed assured, the primary factor fueling interest in the Nanyō in the mid-Meiji years was the Japanese ruling classes’ desire for more colonial territory. Proponents of Japan’s southwards expansion stressed the area’s significance for national economic development and defence, and they also suggested that the Nanyō could be another depository for poorer Japanese from the home islands. In addition, by the late 1880s, a number of intellectuals had toured the area and published accounts of their voyages, thereby stimulating considerable public interest.

In the 1880s a range of plans emerged to extend the Japanese sphere of influence southwards by mobilizing people of low social status. A former high-ranking police bureaucrat, Yokō Tōsaku 横尾東作, devised one of the earliest such plans. He proposed to borrow land in the Philippines and there construct a new home for poor people, prostitutes, prisoners and desperate “new commoners” despised by society. Emigrants would farm, engage in mercantile activities, and ultimately contribute to Japanese economic development. Yokō saw an additional benefit in the fact that according to his calculations, his program would cost much less than maintaining the then Japanese prison population. Nothing came of this plan, but others quickly formulated similar schemes.

One of the best-known schemes involved two prominent figures associated with the nationalist Seikyōsha 政教社 association: Sugiura Shigetake 杉浦重剛 (1855–1924) and Fukumoto Nichinan 福本日南 (1857–1921). Southwards colonial expansion was a common preoccupation of Seikyōsha members. They pressed for a greater presence in the south to prevent

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66 Yokō instead went on to invest great amounts of money and effort into mostly disastrous maritime trade activities. See Mark R. Peattie, *Nanyō*, p. 22.
Western powers from gaining influence in regions neighboring Japan. With the aim of achieving the more ambitious aim of reducing Western influence in the region, some members also expressed a desire to “guide surrounding areas towards freedom and independence,” or to liberate colonized peoples from Western control. According to Henry Frei, proponents of this notion were making a veiled critique of Japanese state policy, for such expressions “sought to drive home the point that Japan, too, should throw off Western treaty-bondage and assert herself more.”67

Prominent Seikyōsha figures also demonstrated a keen interest in the circumstances of the lower social strata, and Sugiura Shigetake became the first among them to join these two interests in a short but well-known 1886 speech and later text that encouraged new commoners to emigrate southwards. Sugiura, a Buddhist scholar, scientist, and later instructor of the Shōwa emperor, was one of the more prominent intellectuals of the time. He criticized society’s treatment of “new commoners” on the grounds that causing them to

Map 3

Sugiura Shigetake, “Han Kai yumenomogatari” [Han Kai’s dream story], in MBZ, vol.21, pp.457-63. Originally a “lowly” restaurateur and butcher, Han Kai (Fan Kuai 樊哙, ? – 189 BCE) rose to become a general under Liu Bang 劉邦 (259–195 BCE), the founder of the Han dynasty. Presumably Sugiura wished to suggest that former ‘eta’ status could likewise be overcome by participation in colonial expansion.

69 “Han Kai yumenomogatari” [Han Kai’s dream story], Chugai Nippo, 10 November 1886, in KBSS, vol.3, p.552.

70 Okamoto Wataru, Tokushu buraku no kaiho [The liberation of special buraku] (Tokyo: Keiseisha, 1921), p.241. The lack of a response may also have had something to do with the difficult prose style used in the text.


72 Okamoto Wataru, Tokushu buraku no kaiho, p.266.


despair, prejudice and discrimination would prevent them from contributing to the country to their full potential. Observing that legal equality had proved ineffectual in changing popular customs, he argued that emigration to the Philippines was the answer to their plight. There, emigrants could take up arms to assist in the overthrow of oppressive Spanish colonial rulers, and also better themselves while simultaneously extending Japanese influence to the south. 

Following closely upon the heels of Yoko Tosaku, Sugiura was among the first to associate “new commoner” emigration and emancipation with Japanese southwards expansion. But more significantly, his plan marked the first occasion that élite purveyors of such ideas attempted to obtain the approbation of “new commoners.” Under the new legal regime of Meiji Japan, it was impossible to force a certain section of the population to emigrate. Within his text, Sugiura indicated that the Southern Islands were a Utopian place where victims of prejudice could freely build a new society. Such pleasant visions were obviously intended to arouse “new commoner” interest in emigration.

But there were other, less obvious dimensions to his speech. Aware that his plan was basically worthless without the interest of new commoners, Sugiura tried to influence them directly. According to a review of the speech in the Chugai Nippo 中外日報, Sugiura distributed several hundred copies of it, presumably in new commoner districts. He clearly expected something to come of this distribution, for later in an interview with the buraku liberation activist Okamoto Wataru 岡本弥, he complained that Okamoto was the first of his kind to respond to the article. “Already some decades have passed since I made public [that piece], but there has been no response at all from you buraku people.”

Another interview conducted by Okamoto Wataru with Fukumoto Nichinan confirms this. Fukumoto too, was prominent in the Seikyōsha movement, and clearly was close to Sugiura, having transcribed Sugiura’s 1886 speech. Fukumoto displayed a lifelong interest in foreign matters, voyaging through the Philippines during the third decade of the Meiji era, and later agitating against the French colonial regime in Indochina, as well as spending time in southern China and Taiwan. According to his own account, he and Sugiura together had aimed to form a new commoner army and occupy an island in the Nanyō, create a new Japanese territory, and contribute to the deliverance of burakumin and to the development of Japan. Fukumoto said that one of his southern voyages had in fact been to check if their plan was feasible. But they encountered so little interest among “new commoners” that they decided the task was impossible.

Also in 1886, the Yomiuri Shinbun 読売新聞 published two articles that appealed directly to “new commoners,” calling upon them to emigrate. Sugiura Shigetake in fact wrote for the Yomiuri between 1886 and 1888. This coincidence suggests that he may have written these two articles, or at least played some role in their publication. The articles argued that “new commoners” would be invaluable in the colonies because of their strong physiques and endurance (qualities attributed to ancestral meat-eating
practices). The author/s stated that “new commoners” were unable to develop to their full potential in Japan as a result of prejudices against them. In light of that situation, emigration was necessary for “social harmony,” and “for the country,” or more precisely for the full development of “new commoner”—and by extension “Japanese”—productive potential. By emigrating, “new commoners” would be able to “develop a new Japan” and raise the Japanese flag over a new colony. By allowing them to make clear their patriotic virtues, such acts would restore “new commoner” pride and also “demonstrate the might of our Japan.”

Yanase Keisuke 柳瀬政助 (1867-96) reprised this combination of southwards expansion and “new commoner” emancipation in his posthumously-published 1901 work, Extra-societal Society—Eta Hinin (Shakaigai no shakai—Eta hinin 社会外の社会—縄多非人). Yanase was born and raised in Kurume city 久留米市, Fukuoka 福岡 prefecture, in an area dotted with “new commoner” communities. After studying law at the institutions that today are known as Chūō University 中央大学 and Nihon University 日本大学, and becoming acquainted with people such as Sugiura Shigetake 三浦重成 and Ōe Taku, 他, he returned to his hometown as a schoolteacher in 1894. He remained only for a short time, however. With the establishment of Japanese colonial rule over Taiwan in 1895 as a result of the Sino-Japanese war, Yanase moved to Taiwan as a colonial bureaucrat, and he died there the following year of dysentery.

In his work on buraku issues, which was evidently finished just before his departure for Taiwan, he claimed that the contemporary reasons for discrimination against “new commoners” included their moral depravity, ignorance, and lack of manners. To treat those defects, Yanase prescribed the civilizing influences of education and religion. He proposed also that they relocate, and named Canada, the United States, Australia, Siberia and Hokkaido as suitable lands in which they might “make a new home.” Unsurprisingly, though, he dwelt in more detail upon the newly-acquired territory of Taiwan, deeming it to be a land where the Japanese race was destined to flourish. Declaring it to be Japan’s southern gateway, Yanase argued that “new commoner” villages ought to be relocated there to protect it. To achieve that aim, Yanase called upon the aid of eminent men, and also the state. Despite their faults, Yanase evidently considered “new commoners” sufficiently patriotic and reliable to be entrusted with the important function of establishing and manning Japanese colonial outposts.

It is unsure whether he took any direct action to realize this vision before his death. But the well-known labour-policy academic and social reformer Kuwada Kumazō 桑田熊蔵, who had been a close associate of Yanase (the two had conducted study tours of local buraku communities together during Yanase’s residence in Tokyo), is reported to have attempted to bring about “new commoner” emigration to Taiwan around that time. In 1911, Okada Chōei 岡田弔影 wrote in the journal Social Policy (Shakai seisaku 社会政策), “I remember that Kuwada Kumazō was a very keen scholar of the new commoner issue. After the Sino-Japanese war, he planned to send new
commoners of the home islands to Taiwan, which had come under our rule, and in developing that island, bring happiness to the lives of our miserable comrades." According to Okada, that plan had influential backing. But despite that, and although there was considerable emigration to Taiwan around that time (over 15,000 non-military Japanese resided in Taiwan by 1897, and 38,000 by 190079), it ultimately came to nothing.80

Similar appeals and plans for southwards buraku emigration continued to appear during the early twentieth century, with the journalist and pedagogue Nanbu Roan 南部隆彦 suggesting in 1902 that the best way to improve the situation of “new commoners” would be to educate them so as to be of use in present and future colonies such as Korea, China and the Southern Islands.81 Nanbu reaffirmed that position some decades later in an interview with Okamoto Wataru, repeating that emigration, whether to the Japanese colonies or elsewhere, was necessary to allow “new commoners” to make something of themselves.82

Between 1890 and 1910, general southwards emigration increased considerably, although figures are nothing like those for Hokkaidō. The proportion of “new commoners” among those emigrants is impossible to determine. Currently available details about the experiences of southwards-bound buraku emigrants are even scantier than in the case of Hokkaidō, and there appear to have been no systematic buraku emigration programs directed towards the Nanyō in the Meiji and Taishō 大正 periods.83

Nonetheless, Utopian visions of the south exerted considerable influence upon buraku communities in the late Meiji and Taishō eras. Sumii Sue’s 住井すさの saga, “The River with No Bridge” (Hashi no nai kawa 橋のない川), written mostly during the mid-twentieth century, contains a scene set in the early Taishō years where one of the characters says that the only effective way for buraku residents to escape prejudice is to migrate to the Nanyō.84 That portrayal is historically accurate. Itowaka Ryūko 伊藤川, a prominent figure in the Suiheisha 水平社 (Levelers’ Association)’s women’s section, recalled that her father, who died in 1906, had planned to bring about the emigration of buraku residents to the Nanyō, and had even commenced fund-raising efforts to that end.85

Among the few traces of southwards migration, brief oral history records reveal that a certain Nakamura Gunji 中村軍治 from the Shinshō 信州 (Nagano 長野 prefecture) buraku community of Takizawa 高沢 emigrated three times to the Philippines around the end of the Meiji period and during the Taishō period, each time returning in failure. Because the treatment of poor Japanese migrants was different from that of rich ones Gunji was furious, declaring that the Japanese Foreign Ministry was dishonourable and gave rise to a sense of betrayal by and anger towards the government. Shibata Michiko, Hisaibetsu buraku no denshō to seisaku 前田美智子, Hisaibetsu buraku no denshō to seisaku to [Seminar buraku mondai semina 埋没問題研究会] vo!.5, p.260.

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Table 3 Meiji and Early Taishō period Foreign Emigration Trends by Region

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<td>North America</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>901</td>
<td>20,450</td>
<td>116,723</td>
<td>146,929</td>
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Adapted from Gaimushō Ryōji Ijūbū, ed., Wagakoku no kaigai hatten. Ijū hyakunen no ayumi (The Overseas Expansion of Our Country—a Century of Emigration) (Tokyo: Gaimushō, 1971), vol.2, p.137 (figures exclude Taiwan). These are official figures and provide only a rough guide, as they do not cover migration to colonial territories, or the movement of prostitutes around Asia and the Pacific.

82 Okamoto Wataru, Tokushu buraku no kaihō, p.260.
83 Among the few traces of southwards migration, brief oral history records reveal that a certain Nakamura Gunji 中村軍治 from the Shinshō 信州 (Nagano 長野 prefecture) buraku community of Takizawa 高沢 emigrated three times to the Philippines around the end of the Meiji period and during the Taishō period, each time returning in failure. Because the treatment of poor Japanese migrants was different from that of rich ones Gunji was furious, declaring that the Japanese Foreign Ministry was dishonourable. Evidently emigration had been represented to him as a profitable and splendid affair, but his own experiences belied this and gave rise to a sense of betrayal by and anger towards the government. Shibata Michiko, Hisaibetsu buraku no denshō to seisaku 前田美智子, Hisaibetsu buraku no denshō to seisaku to [Seminar buraku mondai semina 埋没問題研究会] vo!.5, p.260.
Another such scheme surfaced around 1918 or 1919. Influenced by US president Woodrow Wilson’s advocacy of self-determination in the wake of World War I, members of an association known as the Swallow Club (Tsubamekai 燕会), including Saikō Mankichi 西光万吉 (1895–1970) and Sakamoto Seiichirō 阪本清一郎 (1892–1987), devised a plan to bring about buraku emigration to the then Dutch-controlled island of Celebes (now Sulawesi). Sakamoto, Saikō, and fifteen others prepared for that venture by studying geography, industry, economics and Malay. Upon arriving in Celebes, they planned to inflame anti-Dutch sentiment amongst residents, lead an independence movement, and then create an independent colonial state of their own.

As it turned out, they were unable to put that plan into practice because the Japanese government refused to grant them travel documents. Sakamoto was apparently told that the level of anti-Japanese sentiment in Celebes was such that the government could not allow their departure. Subsequently, central figures of the Swallow Club, including Komai Kisaku 駒井喜作 (1897–1945), Sakamoto Seiichirō and Saikō Mankichi, determined to work within Japan to change social attitudes, and played crucial roles in the formation of the Suiheisha movement that emerged in 1922.

Temporary Departures

Beginning in the late 1880s, officials and intellectuals began extolling the virtues of a form of emigration that, although not amenable to romantic representation, was often an effective way of improving the economic situation of poor people: overseas contract labour. For much of the first two Meiji decades, authorities had expressed reservations about permitting their subjects to engage in this practice. Their reluctance sprang from certain misadventures with labour migration schemes in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Critics of the government had, for example, likened one early Meiji case of overseas contract migration to slavery, while reports that contract labourers in Hawaii were being maltreated forced the government to attempt to repatriate them.

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86 Ibid., p.99.
88 Taniguchi Shūtarō, “Tsubamekai” [The Swallow Club], in BM, p.571.
89 For an account of the affair, see Imai Teruko, “Kindai Nihon saishō no shōdan kaigai iū to sono hamon” [The first group overseas migration of modern Japan and its effects], Jū kenkyū 17 (March 1980): 1–11.
National pride was the major factor giving rise to government concern for the welfare of poor emigrants, who would never have been treated with such solicitude in Japan. For whatever their domestic social status, poor labourers “represented” Japan, once they were overseas. After such imbroglios, and with a growing sense that poor labourers did not project a desirable image of Japan to people of other countries, the government determined to decline permission for such labour migration schemes. Until 1884, the Meiji regime thus rejected expressions of interest in Japanese migrant labourers from the United States, Holland, Spain, Australia, and Peru.

However, the idea of sending some of the numerous poor people overseas gradually won over influential converts. Intellectuals and officials perceived that the emigration of poorer people as migrant labour would at once relieve the burden they placed upon the domestic economy, lead to remittances of foreign capital that would bolster the Japanese economy, and create future export markets. Further, migrants would also develop a sense of initiative and adventure, and acquire a sense of labour discipline. With official, media and migration-company encouragement, overseas contract labour schemes developed rapidly from the late 1880s onwards, drawing their recruits from the poorer parts of the population.

In practice, most “overseas” movements from buraku communities appear to have consisted of temporary labour stints, particularly in the United States (and Hawaii). Reports presented to a 1911 conference on buraku matters sponsored by the Interior Ministry suggest that by then, overseas labour migration had become commonplace. Akashi Tamizō 明石民蔵 (1856–1920), the eminent buraku politician, banker and entrepreneur, was one of the speakers from Kyoto, and he reported that comparatively large numbers of people had found success as foreign migrant labourers. A delegate from Okayama 岡山 indicated that until the recent introduction of stricter United States’ restrictions on Asian labour inflow, numerous burakumin had been going there and remitting substantial amounts of money. Shirao-kawa Jōsuke 白鳥川譲介, head of the Mikata 三方 district in Fukui 福井 prefecture, similarly reported that prior to the recently-strengthened US immigration restrictions, one hundred people had departed annually as temporary migrant workers, remitting over 100,000 yen every year to buraku communities in his district.

Other media reports suggest that the above remarks reflected a wider trend in Japan’s buraku communities. A 1912 report published in the Doyo Shinbun on a large buraku community in Kōchi prefecture indicated that out of a population of 2000, some 19 men were working in America and remitting money that was improving the economic situation of their hometown. In Wakayama 和歌山, the Kii Mainichi Shinbun 紀伊毎日新聞 reported that overseas labour migration from Arita 有田 district had immensely improved the situation of those who remained. Economic needs, or the desire to improve their economic situation, brought forth many buraku residents into the international labour market.
Conclusion: Migration and Becoming an “Ordinary Japanese”

To recapitulate, this piece constructs a sequence of Edo- and Meiji-period relocation and emigration plans that revolved around the mobilization of outcasts and “new commoners.” In so doing, it traces the transformation in the “élite” perceptions of those groups, from passive objects that rulers could freely mobilize for colonial purposes, towards national subjects who (from a government perspective) could, it was hoped, be mobilized into emigrating voluntarily through appeals to their patriotism.

Meiji-era proponents of buraku emigration basically advised that the presence of burakumin in Japan proper was a problem. They ascribed various faults to them—often centering upon the claim that they did not contribute to national development as much as they might, and then asserted that “emigration” was the best way for them to overcome their faults.

Deficient or negative contributions to national progress were susceptible to being represented as patriotic deficiencies. It was for that reason that the “rectification” of those “faults” could be represented as the national or patriotic duty of burakumin. Emigration, whether for colonial purposes or in order to engage in temporary labouring activities, became one of the prescribed ways in which burakumin could make something of themselves, and thereby contribute to the country.98

The practice of this particular expression of patriotism imposed certain obligations upon the state as well. Meiji intellectuals argued at a general level that in order to ensure that emigrants continued to contribute to state expansion and development programs after their departure, care had to be taken to guard against emigrants losing their affective ties to Japan: the state had to foster migrant love for their homeland by helping them to emigrate.99

Applying this principle to the case of buraku residents, commentators argued that not only ought able-bodied buraku men and women participate in the “great national duty of constructing a fresh new paradise,” but also that the government should facilitate that process.100 State assistance for the implementation of buraku emigration programs was necessary to ensure that emigrant affection for their homeland endured, something that was important from the perspective of future colonial and imperial development.101 In 1919, the Teikoku Kohdokai, too, expressed a similar view in proposing to the government that, “If the state were to set aside a part of Hokkaido, Karafuto, Korea, Taiwan or Manchuria, and lend relocation funds to private authorities, we will lead and direct such a program, and immediately begin mass emigration ... ”102 Emigration was to be a mutually profitable project that engaged participants in a complex web of duties centred on national development and patriotism.

With regard to the proposed emigrants, by referring to factors such as “social disharmony” and a “deficient” contribution to the national cause, commentators implied that burakumin were less than fully “Japanese.” By emigrating from the main Japanese islands, writers suggested that they could
prove their patriotism and become full citizens. While it is impossible to gauge the influence of that discourse upon buraku residents, I wish to end by considering several senses in which emigration-related practices did in fact draw buraku residents into or nearer to the “Japanese national community.”

Intellectuals and officials emphasized three main forms of emigration: settling in Hokkaido, to participate in the development of that colonial territory; moving to the Nanyō, to extend southwards the Japanese sphere of influence; and engaging in temporary labour stints overseas, to assist the country economically.

For burakumin seeking ways to improve their lives through permanent emigration and a better life, the territory of Hokkaido appears to have been the most attractive destination. Whatever their precise motivations for doing so, burakumin who settled there became complicit in the dispossession of the indigenous Ainu. In that sense, or from the Ainu perspective, as well as from the perspective that no buraku communities developed in Hokkaido, those emigrants did indeed succeed in becoming “ordinary Japanese.”

Despite the number of people who recommended southwards-bound buraku emigration, there are few recorded cases of people departing to colonize and develop island Utopias. While plans for constructing a colonial buraku state in the Southern Islands reveal that the discourse about colonizing the Nanyō was influential, they also indicate that planners intended to make some kind of a break with Japan. Due to a lack of suitable territories and the denial of official permission, that hope faded. Remaining in Japan, many instead began working in an ever more organized fashion to bring about “conciliation” and “equality” amongst the inhabitants of the Japanese islands. Their energies were in this sense re-oriented towards “national harmony.”

Contract labour emigration was probably the commonest pattern of buraku emigration from Japan during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was beneficial both to the state, which as a result enjoyed an improved economic situation, and also to emigrants and their families, who were often able thereby to improve their standard of living. One aspect of this practice was that in going overseas, emigrants came to the notice of the state, and received, often for the first time, its protection. But more significantly, the dealings of migrant labourers with “foreigners” were founded not upon their hometown origins, their industrious qualities, or their “descent,” but upon their country of origin. It seems likely that many people first acquired a sense of being “Japanese nationals” through going abroad in this manner.

Although there are few visible indications that patriotism itself motivated people to emigrate, the practice of emigration thus appears likely to have encouraged buraku emigrants to acquire a sense of patriotism. Driven by prejudice and lured by the prospect of a better life, emigrants ended up being mobilized towards national ends.