

ISSN 1598-2661

SUNGKYUN JOURNAL OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES

VOL.16 No.1

APR. 2016



Academy of East Asian Studies
Sungkyunkwan University

Re-Conceptualizing the Boundaries of Empire: The Imperial Politics of Chinese Labor Migration to Manchuria and Colonial Korea*

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ABSTRACT

The migration of Chinese laborers to colonial Korea became a major issue that resulted in entry restrictions in 1934. During the early years of colonial rule the Government General of Korea did not actively limit the entry of Chinese laborers and the colonial state was in fact one of their largest employers. However, in the 1930s migration restrictions appeared not only in Korea but also in neighboring Manchuria. Therefore, the efforts at border control in colonial Korea need to be viewed in conjunction with labor policies in Japan and Manchuria. The restrictions on Chinese labor were ultimately linked to efforts to reconfigure Japan's new territorial possessions after the Manchurian Incident in 1931 as the region became a space for resolving the intractable social and economic problems of the Japanese empire.

Keywords: Chinese migration, Korean migration, Manchuria, colonial Korea, border control, labor control, imperial democracy

Transnational historical approaches become a necessity when examining past interactions in regions where crisscrossing migration and cultural exchange networks extend far beyond national boundaries. A study of the migratory flow of Chinese laborers is a case in point. Millions of Chinese circulated throughout the Japanese empire in search of work. The Japanese empire's insatiable demand for labor propelled the growth of Chinese migratory networks throughout Northeast Asia. The expanding transportation infrastructure greatly facilitated the movement of Chinese as new wage-earning opportunities opened in Manchuria and Korea. For several decades, the availability of low-cost Chinese labor proved highly complementary to the introduction of Japanese capital and technology to the region, yet numerous social issues eventually brought strident calls to restrict Chinese migration. The subsequent effort to limit Chinese entry involved complex interactions that impacted multiple parts of the Japanese empire. The controversies that surrounded this anti-Chinese debate have attracted the attention of some historians over the years, yet further contextualization can help illuminate key historical questions that do not fit easily into today's national histories of China, Korea, and Japan.

Korea's geographical proximity to China and its central location within the Northeast Asian region turned Chinese migration into a major issue for the colony. The Japanese in Korea initially took advantage of plentiful Chinese labor to pursue their colonial infrastructure projects. The tens of thousands of Chinese workers

who entered Korea every year during the early colonial period provided a highly flexible labor market. However, the large influx of Chinese laborers also triggered social tensions not only in colonial Korea but also in Japan, which prompted border control efforts in multiple areas of the Japanese empire in the 1930s. The Government General of Korea's (GGK) restrictions on Chinese migration was a part of a coordinated effort that linked events at the periphery with politics in the imperial metropole. The connection between Chinese labor migration to the Japanese empire with domestic developments in Korea and Japan has not received comprehensive historical analysis. While there may be little question that the policies regarding the imperial borders were reconfigured along new imaginaries of a hierarchical ethnic order that mirrored conflicts over migration in other parts of the globe, the dynamics behind the migration of Chinese can show the high degree to which imperial expansion transformed Japan and the numerous intractable social and economic problems that emerged from the massive movement of people throughout the region.

The Global Dimension of Chinese Labor Migration

One of the most visible spectacles of the Chinese presence in colonial Korea was a regular “ritual of spring” that took place at Inch'on Harbor—the monthly arrival of thousands of laborers mostly from neighboring Shandong province. These Chinese migrants diligently saved whatever meager wages they could earn until boarding their return ships in November. Over 10,000 seasonal workers a year traveled this sea route throughout the 1920s, and they often took the lowest-paying jobs in Korea. Thousands more Chinese laborers came into Korea overland through Sinŭiju and Chinnamp'ŏ. These seasonal workers represented a major subset of the large community of Chinese migrants who resided in Korea on the eve of the deadly riots that followed the 1931 July 1 Wanpaoshan Incident, which left hundreds of Chinese killed or injured throughout Korea.¹ The Chinese presence in Korea became entwined with a major crisis in the region and became the source of considerable controversy. The number of Chinese workers in Korea declined rapidly after the Wanpaoshan Incident but grew again a few years later, reigniting an empire-wide debate over Chinese entry restrictions.

The influx of Chinese laborers into Korea was connected to a much broader labor migration throughout the Japanese empire that stretched into Manchuria, the Kwantung Leased Territories, and Taiwan. While previous works have detailed the complex factors that drove Chinese migration to Manchuria, they generally view

^{*} This work was supported by a grant from the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2008-361-A00005).

¹ The Wanpaoshan Incident began when a group of migrant Koreans and Chinese near Changchun, Manchuria had a dispute over an irrigation ditch. Japanese consular police fired rifles to disperse an angry crowd of protesting Chinese. The event was mistakenly reported in Korea as a bloody clash between the Korean and Chinese. The heightened tensions from the anti-Japanese protests served as a pretext for the Kwantung Army's invasion of Manchuria. See Pak Yŏng-sŏk, *Manbosan sakkŏn yŏn'gu-Ilche taeryuk ch'imnyak chŏnch'aek ūi ilwhan ūrosŏ* [Research into the Wanpaoshan Incident: As a part of the Japanese empire's policy to invade the continent](Seoul: Asea munwhasa, 1978); Min Tu-gi, “Manbosan sakkŏn (1931) kwa Han'guk ōllon ūi taeyŏng—sangihan minjokchuŭijŏk sagak” [The Manpaoshan Incident (1931) and the response of the Korean media—from different nationalist perspectives] *Tongyangsahak yŏn'gu* 65 (January 1999), 142-74.

the issue primarily as a chapter in the modern history of China and do not consider the full extent to which this movement of people was linked to events taking place within the Japanese empire.² When considering the significance of this circulation of Chinese throughout the region, we may keep in mind Fredric Cooper's observation that colonial conquests imposed territorial borders on preexisting long-distance networks, often damaging or destroying the precolonial systems as newly established imperial boundaries reconfigured the space of a region. In discussing the nature of global interconnectivity, Cooper observes: "There might be a better case for calling colonization deglobalization rather than globalization, except that the prior systems were constituted out of specific networks, with their own mechanisms and limits, and except that colonial economies were in reality cross-cut by numerous networks of exchange and socio-cultural interaction" (Cooper 2005, 105). When the Japanese spread their influence into Northeast Asia they encountered pre-existing networks of Chinese that had already begun to expand throughout the region after the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) removed its migration restrictions to Manchuria and projected its power into Korea in the nineteenth century.³ The Chinese networks developed in conjunction with the rise of Japanese imperialism, and the Japanese took full advantage of low-cost Chinese labor. At the same time, the unanticipated social impact of the wage convergence that resulted from the arrival of so many Chinese workers would eventually trigger efforts to restrict their entry and "delink" the Japanese empire from this transnational movement of people. A growing awareness that the Chinese migration to Korea might be connected to the migration of Koreans to neighboring Manchuria and Japan brought on strident calls for border restrictions and the protection of Japanese laborers. The Japanese ultimately formed numerous policies to manage the movement of people within their imperial boundaries, yet full control of the crisscrossing migration of Chinese and Koreans within their borders eluded them until Japan's defeat in World War Two in 1945.

Chinese labor migration in Northeast Asia can be connected to the broader transnational history of migration that flowed into Southeast Asia and reached as far away as the Caribbean islands and South America. The growth of the "coolie trade" through the expansion of global networks in the late nineteenth century was tied to the collapse of the African slave trade (McKeown 1999, 315), and it fed a demand for Chinese labor throughout the world, as well as a fear of its negative social and economic impact. For the most part, Chinese laborers did not

² For more on Chinese migration to Manchuria see Prasenjit Duara, *The Global and the Regional in China's Nation-Formation* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Thomas R. Gottschang and Diana Lary, *Swallows and Settlers: The Great Migration from North China to Manchuria* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); James Reardon-Anderson, *Reluctant Pioneers: China's Expansion Northward, 1644-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). More recently, Ou Kōen has provided a comprehensive overview of Chinese labor migration to Manchuria utilizing Japanese and Chinese language sources in his study *'Manshūkoku' rōkō no shiteki kenkyū* [Historical research on 'Manzhuguo' labor] (Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Hyōronsha, 2015).

³ Kirk Larsen observes that the increase in Chinese influence in Korea in the late nineteenth century can be interpreted as Qing China's participation in a multilateral imperialism along with the Western powers in the region. See Kirk Larsen, *Tradition, Treaties, and Trade: Qing Imperialism and Chosŏn Korea, 1850-1910* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

reach Europe in large numbers, except when the British brought in approximately 100,000 Chinese laborers to France during and after World War I to join the roughly 40,000 who were recruited by the French to participate in post-World War One reconstruction.⁴ However, even though Chinese labor was not a major factor in the European economy, controversies over its introduction emerged even in Germany, where a debate over the negative impact of Chinese laborers emerged after the closure of the borders with Poland and the German acquisition of the Qingdao colony in 1898 (Conrad 2010).

The proliferation of Chinese workers generated a global debate in the nineteenth century because Chinese migration triggered basic conflicts over the right to work and the nature of citizenship. As Adam McKeown argues, “most of the basic principles of border control and techniques for identifying personal status were developed from the 1880s to 1910 through the exclusion of Asians from white settler nations” (McKeown 2008, 2). The Chinese provided labor power in many locations around the world for large-scale construction, agricultural, and infrastructure projects. For example, Chinese laborers played a critical role in the construction of the transcontinental railroad across the United States, but increasing anti-Chinese sentiments led to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. Anti-Chinese sentiments gained considerable momentum in places like South Africa, Australia, and the Americas, where racial tensions and fear of lost job opportunities became major issues. While numerous studies have highlighted the impact of Chinese labor in the global economy, they tend to focus mostly on migration to Southeast Asia and other parts of the world (McKeown 2001; Meagher 2008; Lisa Yun 2008; Houben 1999). However, Chinese labor migration to neighboring Manchuria and Korea has received relatively little scholarly attention, even though efforts to limit this movement were connected to similar factors that led to anti-Chinese restrictions in other parts of the world (Kang Chin-a 2013, 102). Chinese migration within Northeast Asia became entangled with Japanese efforts to establish sovereignty over the region, regulate labor within its borders, and construct an imperial citizenry based on an ethnic hierarchy of differentiated rights. The more Japan became an “Imperial Democracy” the more attention had to be paid to control the entry of workers who impacted the interest of Japan’s working class and destabilized the process of constructing a national citizenry. From this perspective, the migration of Chinese must be linked to the major political developments taking place within the Japanese empire. Yet historical narratives on the Chinese migration to Manchuria in the early twentieth century generally view this phenomenon as a “domestic movement”⁵ and ignore the broader implications

⁴ Only a few thousand Chinese remained as most of the laborers brought in during WWI were repatriated back to China as soon as reconstruction was complete. See Xu Guoqi, *Strangers on the Western Front: Chinese Workers in the Great War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

⁵ Adam McKeown points out that the current population of 100 million Chinese in Manchuria suggests a demographic transition that is similar to those found in European settler colonies, and the region may have become a part of Russia or Japan or an independent country had this migration not taken place. Yet Chinese scholars, in general, do not attempt a global comparison. See Adam McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders*, 46.

of this transnational movement of people. Therefore, we need to consider how anti-Chinese sentiments within the Japanese empire mirrored similar developments that emerged in other parts of the world as globalization flows were restricted to give birth to the modern nation state.

Chinese Labor Migration to Manchuria and Korea

Manchuria had been off-limits to Chinese migration during most of the Qing Dynasty, but the arrival of Russians into the region in the nineteenth century led to a change of policy that encouraged the settlement of tens of millions of Chinese by the first half of the twentieth century. Large settlements of Chinese in Korea began to form after the opening of the ports to foreigners following the Kanghai Treaty of 1876. Japanese and Chinese formed the largest population of foreigners in the newly opened treaty ports. The unfortunate history of natural disasters, political instability, and the impoverished conditions in Shandong Province played a major role in pushing migrants to seek new opportunities in neighboring regions.⁶ While there were some prominent Chinese from the Canton area, the vast majority of Chinese in Korea came from Shandong. Many Chinese settled permanently in Manchuria and Korea, but seasonal laborers constituted a significant proportion of the population. The largest employer of Chinese in Northeast Asia was the South Manchuria Railroad Company (SMRC) based in Dalian, which was established in 1906. The SMRC's published statistics show that approximately 93% of 194,193 workers in its factories and mines in 1931 were Chinese and within this group 71% of factory workers and 83% of mine workers were from outside of Manchuria, mostly from the province of Shandong, and to a lesser degree, Hebei Province (Minami Manshū tetsudō keizai chōsakai 1934, 41-42). Dalian was the center of extremely large organizations of Chinese laborers, some of which numbered in the thousands and had developed formal contractual relationships with the SMRC.⁷ Within the Manchurian developmental discourse of the Kwantung Leased Territories there was a strong awareness that the capital and technology brought in from Japan had combined with Chinese labor to create extremely favorable

Table 1. Chinese Migration to Manchuria through Major Entry Points (1924-1928)

	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928
Dalian	167,206	197,392	267,062	599,452	506,553
Yingkou	61,904	96,647	124,743	153,771	152,556
Andong	52,641	40,740	48,287	78,879	52,703
Land routes	210,719	197,991	167,260	327,645	362,655
Total	492,470	532,770	607,352	1,159,747	1,074,467

Source: Minami Manshū tetsudō keizai chōsakai [SMRC research association], *Manshū no kūrī* [Coolies of Manchuria] (Dairen: Minami Manshū Tetsudō, 1934), 15.

⁶ For more on the factors behind Chinese migration to Manchuria see Thomas R. Gottschang and Diana Lary, *Swallows and Settlers: The Great Migration from North China to Manchuria*, 48-63.

⁷ "Dairen futō no daikūrītō" [The leader of the coolies at Dalian wharf] *Chōsen oyobi Manshū* (July 1935), 33-36.

economic conditions for development.⁸ Chinese migration to Manchuria witnessed a dramatic increase in the late 1920s that reached a peak of 1,159,747 in 1927.

The sudden growth in 1926-1928 reflected the increased economic difficulties and heightened warfare among the warlord factions during the Republican period in China. Events like the Guomindang's Northern Expedition (1926-1928) triggered a surge in migration to Manchuria. According to research conducted by the SMRC, the majority of the Chinese entering Manchuria in the 1920s were male "coolie" labor, although there was a significant increase in the number traveling with entire families intending to settle permanently in the region after 1927 (Minami Manshū tetsudō keizai chōsakai, 16-17). The numbers remained over a million until they decreased dramatically when the Manchurian Incident in 1931 brought warfare to the region.

The expansion of Chinese migration was not limited to Manchuria, as colonial Korea also became a target destination. An examination of the distribution of Chinese laborers in Korea shows that the majority were found in the provinces of P'yŏngan and Kyŏnggi, and if one adds the additional northern provinces, then 90% of the Chinese workers were located in these areas (Chōsen sōtokufu, 1924b, 53). The heavy concentration of Chinese in these provinces corresponds to the overland and sea routes that brought seasonal laborers into Korea. The growing Chinese residential communities in Korea greatly facilitated Chinese labor migration as large numbers of Chinese laborers encouraged the emergence of businesses to support them. For example, within the Seoul area, there were 202 establishments that sold Chinese-style bread by the early 1930s (Chōsen sōtokufu 1924a, 63). The increase in the Chinese population in Korea was slow at first, but by the 1920s, they could be found throughout the colony. The number of Chinese residents in 1910 was approximately 11,000, and this total reached approximately 24,000 by 1920.⁹ Similar to the events in Manchuria, there was a sudden surge of Chinese migration to Korea in the 1920s and a growing number intended to settle there permanently. The population figures for Chinese residents in the colonial statistics vary considerably and do not reflect the seasonal migrant laborers from Shandong that arrived in the spring and returned in November. According to another GGK source, there were 67,800 Chinese residents in Korea in 1931, but the addition of an estimated 30,000 seasonal laborers from China who were difficult to track probably put that number at approximately 100,000.¹⁰

Chinese residents in Korea could be found in a wide variety of different occupations, such as farmers, day laborers, and merchants. A high proportion were involved in commerce, especially in certain sectors like textiles and imported goods. During the 1920s, approximately half of the Chinese population occupied

⁸ "Kūri wo kataru" [Talking about coolies] *Tōa shōkō keizai* (April 1942), 42.

⁹ Son Sūng-hoe notes that because of the discrepancies in the numerous sources it is nearly impossible to establish a precise figure of the number of Chinese in Korea during the colonial period. See Son Sūng-hoe, "1931 nyŏn singminji Chosŏn ūi paehwap'oktong kwa hwagyo" [1931 Anti-Chinese riots in colonial Korea and overseas Chinese] *Chungguk kūnhyōndaesa yŏn'gu* 41 (2009, 143).

¹⁰ "Manshū jihen no Chōsen ni oyoboshita keizaiteki eikyō" [The economic impact of the Manchurian incident on Korea] *Keizai geppō* (April 1932), 40.

miscellaneous occupations, while the other half were laborers who primarily worked in construction jobs.¹¹ The Chinese laborers, in general, belonged to communal organizations called *koryōkpang*, which were headed by work bosses or *koryōktu* who strictly controlled the lives of their workers. The groups ranged in size from dozens of workers to hundreds, and they often consisted of members of the same local village back in Shandong Province. Some of the largest organizations in Korea were located in Sinūiju, and they had over a thousand members. A Chinese worker could change to a different group if he wanted, but could not work for more than one at a time. The bosses of these groups managed the lives of their members and provided lodging and meals. The cost of living was deducted from wages, and the bosses negotiated work on behalf of the laborers. Employment for migrant Chinese outside this system in Korea was extremely difficult. The Chinese worker typically ate Chinese bread baked locally and cheap vegetables at 5 *sen* a meal supplied almost exclusively by Chinese merchants.¹² He saved most of his meager earnings for the return to China in November.¹³ The Chinese laborers lived frugally and remained within the confines of the communal work groups. If they ventured outside the group, then they often experienced great difficulties because of their inability to speak Korean or Japanese.

However, membership in work groups did not always ensure a successful sojourn in Korea for a Chinese laborer. For example, one newspaper account in the 1920s reports that a group of sixty Chinese workers had encountered difficulties in Inch'ŏn because they could not pay for their meals.¹⁴ The colonial newspapers contain numerous accounts of Chinese bosses who had disputes with their workers and sometimes became involved in violent clashes. So while the majority of the Chinese workers came and went without incident, the system also had many problems. Not all Chinese laborers organized into communal groups—more skilled laborers were part of guild-like trade associations that operated differently. However, for the vast majority of unskilled workers, their organized groups provided work opportunities that were difficult to acquire on their own. The organizational structure of the Chinese work groups was not unique in that even Korean workers in Japan had somewhat similar arrangements due to linguistic and cultural barriers. However, what makes the Chinese groups remarkable is their connection to an immense network of organized labor migration that stretched throughout the region. The presence of so many Chinese laborers in Korea created multilingual workplaces that required the knowledge of three languages to operate effectively. Accordingly, a guidebook on common terms used in the railroad

¹¹ According to the 1924 publication *Raijū shinajin*, the approximately 15,800 Chinese workers in Korea in the early 1920s could be divided into high-skill workers and low-skill workers, but the majority of both categories were involved in construction. Most Chinese workers in Kyōnggi Province could be categorized as skilled, while the majority in the northern provinces, where approximately 70% of them resided, were unskilled. See Chōsen sōtokufu 1924b, 53-54.

¹² “Keijō ni okeru shinajin” [Chinese in Seoul] *Chōsen oyobi Manshū* (February 1933), 83.

¹³ “Keijō ni okeru shinajin no seikatsu jōtai” [The living conditions of Chinese in Seoul] *Chōsen oyobi Manshū* (March 1932), 56-57.

¹⁴ *Tonga ilbo* [Eastern Daily] (April 23, 1924).

industry provides examples in Japanese, Korean, and Chinese.¹⁵ The Chinese migrant laborers were a major component of numerous colonial construction and railroad projects that transformed the entire region under the Japanese empire and no discussion of the colonial labor market could begin without factoring in the organizational structures that gave them high mobility and the ability to deliver low-cost labor wherever there was demand.

Restricting the Entry of Chinese Laborers to Korea

Chinese workers played a major role in the colonial economy despite the existence of regulations that restricted the entry of foreigners into Korea since the beginning of colonial rule in 1910.¹⁶ In a sense, the Japanese empire established political boundaries, but there were initially few attempts to manage them. The availability of cheap labor was critical for building colonial infrastructure and attracting Japanese capitalists to invest in colonial Korea. The colonial government was, in fact, a major employer of Chinese workers. According to the data presented to the Imperial Diet, the colonial state employed hundreds of thousands of Chinese laborers each year:

Table 2. Instances of Chinese Workers Hired by the GGK

Year	Number of Workers (Individuals)
1925	276,510
1926	582,196
1927	899,745
1928	386,354
1929	907,425
1930	678,447
1931	502,476
1932	642,429

Source: Chōsen sōtoku kanbō gaijika, *Chōsen sōtokufu teikoku gikai setsumei shiryō*, no. 65 (1933), 20.

The Imperial Diet records show the number of times Chinese laborers were employed in all government-related projects so the above statistics can represent multiple instances of employment for individual laborers over short periods of time. Back in Japan, the government strictly enforced regulations that barred the entry of Chinese workers. Yet the colonial authorities were reluctant to enforce similar restrictions in Korea because the colonial state was a direct beneficiary of cheap labor. In effect, there was a freer labor market in Korea than in Japan due to the

¹⁵ Ōgami Shinichi 1938. This guidebook provides translations of common workplace vocabulary in Japanese, Chinese, and Korean because of the multilingual environments found in Korean worksites.

¹⁶ See Kim Sūng-uk, “20 segi chōnban Hanbando esō Ilche üi nodong sijang kwalli” [The Japanese empire’s labor market management in the Korean peninsula during the first half of the twentieth century] *Chungguksa yōn’gu* 85 (2013): 167. Japan first imposed restrictions on foreign workers in 1899 and imposed similar restrictions in Korea in 1910. However, there was no enforcement of the provisions during the early colonial period and the GGK lacked a systematic policy to restrict the entry of Chinese laborers.

lax enforcement of the regulations, resulting in the unrestricted entry of Chinese workers (Kim Süng-uk 2013a, 169).

The abundant availability of Chinese labor allowed colonial officials and colonial capitalists in Korea to pursue a number of major infrastructure projects. However, this phenomenon also heightened social tensions that led to sporadic outbreaks of ethnic violence in the late 1920s (Kim Tae-ung 2009, 106). Colonial Korean newspapers throughout the 1920s reported on the problem of Chinese laborers and increasingly called for entry restrictions. In general, Chinese wages were slightly lower than Korean wages, while Japanese were often paid twice as much as Koreans and Chinese for performing the same job.¹⁷ The unrestricted flow of Chinese labor into Korea prompted intense debate among Koreans, as well as the Japanese settlers in Korea. An article published in *Chōsen oyobi Manshū* on March 1926 explains some of the issues in considerable detail from the perspective of the Japanese (Hoshide 1926, 18-23). One major reason that migrant Chinese workers could work for much lower wages in Korea was that they had no fixed address and did not have to pay local taxes. According to the regulations of Seoul, an individual could reside in the city for over a year before being required to pay taxes. Therefore, the tax system of the colonial state served to benefit migrant workers. Seasonal migrant Chinese workers competed in the colonial labor market with Korean and Japanese workers without having to assume any of the tax burdens. Japanese workers, in particular, were responsible for a much higher level of taxes when residing in colonial Korea to support education and various welfare services not available to most Koreans. As the Chinese workers gradually gained in skill level, they began to perform many of the jobs that had previously been dominated by Japanese. The result was a decline in the number of Japanese and Koreans in occupations like stone masons and construction workers, while the number of Chinese rose in those areas. The difficulties in finding employment in colonial Korea led some Japanese to return to Japan. Therefore, the article warned against the outflow of wages from Korea and argued that the broader goal of resettling excess Japanese population to Korea would be endangered by the continued presence of Chinese workers (Hoshide 1926, 21).¹⁸

Little was done in the 1920s to curtail the inflow of Chinese migrant labor at the GGK level, so local officials or the police occasionally formulated measures to restrict Chinese laborers. GGK officials remained reluctant to impose limitations on Chinese laborers, and they argued that restrictions on Chinese migration risked triggering a backlash of trade sanctions against Japanese products in China.¹⁹ Anti-

¹⁷ According to SMRC sources, the wages of a Korean worker was approximately half that for a Japanese worker. There was only a marginal difference in wages between Koreans and Chinese, with the Chinese usually being paid slightly less. Minami Manshū tetsudō keizai chōsakai 1934, 66-67.

¹⁸ Numerous articles in the colonial Korean media addressed the problem of Chinese laborers. While many Japanese pundits advocated entry restrictions, others like Abe Kaoru, the editor of the *Chōsen shinbun*, argued that Chinese workers were superior to Korean workers as the latter lacked diligence and frugality. Abe advocated the introduction of a system of labor controls like those instituted in Taiwan that charged a fee to employers that hired Chinese labor from outside Taiwan. See Abe Kaoru, *Chōsen tōchi shinron* [New treatise on Korean governance] (Minshū shironsha 1931), 463-65.

¹⁹ *Chosōn ilbo* [Korean Daily] (June 18, 1929).

Chinese movements in various locations in Korea and strikes against the use of Chinese workers, like the one in Wönsan in January 1929, did trigger mounting concerns about the impact of Chinese laborers on the colonial wage economy, and they eventually led to some local efforts to stem the flow.²⁰ The increase in restrictions and violence against Chinese workers in Korea led to criticism from Chinese newspapers in Shanghai even before the outbreak of the Wanpaoshan Incident in July 1931 (Kang Chin-a, 112). Yet the GGK's attitude towards the problem of Chinese laborers in Korea remained highly ambiguous, and there were only sporadic attempts to address the fundamental issue behind this phenomenon.

Chinese migration experienced a sudden drop in the early 1930s, not as a result of GGK policy, but because of the tragic events of the Wanpaoshan Incident. Angry mobs responded to mistaken reports of Korean casualties in Manchuria by attacking Chinese in the streets and destroying their businesses. Chinese bread stores often became the target of Korean rioters during the incident because they had become the ubiquitous signs of the Chinese presence in Korea. The worst of the rioting took place in P'yöngyang, where the heaviest concentration of Chinese laborers could be found. The Chinese government claimed 133 were killed, 289 were injured and 2.5 million yen in property damages. The total for all of Korea according to Chinese reports was 142 killed, 546 injured, and an estimated 4.1 million yen in property damages (Son Süng-hoe 2009, 155-56).²¹ The violence and antipathy spread beyond P'yöngyang with some of the worse loss of life and property taking place in Seoul, Inchön, and Wönsan. The *Tonga ilbo* reported in February 1932 that due to the uncertainties in Korea 34,000 Chinese had returned to China either through the ports or the railroads.²² The departure of so many Chinese in the aftermath of the Wanpaoshan incident even triggered a major economic downturn in colonial Korea, particularly in the economic sectors where they dominated (Michael Kim 2010a, 209-27).

The mass exodus continued for months after the ethnic riots but, eventually, Chinese began to reenter the colony. The rapid rise in the number of Chinese in Korea then led Japanese colonial officials to implement measures to control their entry in September 1934. Chinese who arrived in Korea had to carry 100 yen or proof of employment before entering. One newspaper account in September 1934 reported that the first four Chinese had been sent back to China within nine days of the immigration regulation that had come into effect on September 1.²³ The move to deport Chinese led to major protests by the Chinese community in Korea. Over two thousand Chinese residents marched to demonstrate against the GGK's policy of restricting entry to Chinese workers. Although the regulations

²⁰ Kim Süng-uk (2013a, 172-73) notes that during the early colonial period, the GGK actually relaxed measures that required official permission to hire Chinese laborers, and it wasn't until the late 1920s that it began to implement controls.

²¹ Official Japanese records give a more conservative estimate, stating that 176 Chinese were killed or heavily injured and an additional 50 were moderately or lightly injured. See Chösen sötokufu, *Shisei sanjūnenshi* [Thirty-year history of administration] (1940), 292.

²² *Tonga ilbo* (March 1, 1932).

²³ *Chosön ilbo* (September 13, 1934).

were intended to restrict migrant laborers, the Chinese Resident Associations of Korea argued that their members would have difficulties returning to Korea from trips to China and demanded that the colonial government revert to the previous practices of non-enforcement. An interview with the Chinese consulate reports that Chinese laborers who could not find a job were sent back to China anyway.²⁴ Therefore, contrary to rumors, the consulate denied that there were hygiene and unemployment problems among Chinese workers.

The GKK initially stood firm in its insistence on restricting Chinese workers and refused to back down on its policy to exclude Chinese laborers despite protests. As a consequence, the number of Chinese laborers entering Inch'ön had declined by 50% after the entry controls.²⁵ Yet the effort to restrict Chinese labor migrants was not successful on the whole because of the porous nature of colonial boundaries. Colonial officials could limit the number of workers who came in through the ports, but they could not restrict those who came in over the land routes. The *Maeil sinbo* reported in February 1936 that the entry restrictions had little effect because businesses near P'yöngyang were still employing Chinese laborers, and so the local police had to identify businesses that had exceeded the allowable number of Chinese laborers.²⁶ When the outbreak of war in 1937 led to a severe wartime labor shortage, entry controls were largely abandoned and the number of Chinese residing in Korea again climbed to over 70,000-80,000 until the end of the war in 1945 (Son Süng-hoe, 143n5).²⁷ The historical significance of the migration restrictions was obscured by the short period of their enforcement. Most historical studies make bare mention of this event because the slight drop in the entry of Chinese later was overshadowed by the sudden growth that took place after 1937. However, despite the limited number of years of migration controls, there is still a need to understand the historical implication of these measures and what they indicate about major events taking place within the Japanese empire.

Social Imperialism and Labor Migration in the Japanese Empire

The measures to exclude Chinese laborers and implement border controls in colonial Korea ultimately had only a marginal impact in reducing the overall number of migrants. However, the entry restrictions appeared simultaneously in multiple areas along Japan's imperial borders, which indicate the need to understand their transnational dimension. A number of scholars, such as Kim Süng-uk, have highlighted the connection between Chinese labor in Korea and the increased migration of Korean workers to Japan (Kim Süng-uk 2013b, 133-59). The focus on Japan broadens the scope of the migration question in the right direction, but there is a need to take one further step and adopt a more comprehensive perspective that also includes the connections to Japan's new

²⁴ *Tonga ilbo* (September 2, 1934).

²⁵ *Maeil sinbo* [Daily News] (September 21, 1935).

²⁶ *Maeil sinbo* (February 6, 1936).

²⁷ This is only an approximation because the number of seasonal workers cannot be determined exactly.

territorial possessions in Manchuria. Chinese migration to Japan was highly restricted due to tight border controls, but limiting Korean migration remained an intractable problem. Colonial sources from the 1930s indicate a strong awareness that the unemployment situation in Korea impacted Korean migration to Japan and that this issue cannot be viewed in isolation from the need to restrict Chinese labor migration (Minami Manshū tetsudō keizai 1933); Chōsen sōtokufu keimukyoku 1934, 187-88). The arrival of thousands of migrant Korean workers in Japan was perceived to be the source of social problems due to their involvement in radical leftist groups, conflicts over housing, and the displacement of Japanese workers in the day-laborer market (Kawashima 2009).²⁸ Moreover, Korean workers engaged in numerous collective labor movements in Japan, which the Japanese authorities began to actively suppress in the late 1920s.²⁹ The issue of Korean overpopulation emerged in conjunction with some fundamental transformations in the country's rural agrarian economy. The cadastral surveys of the 1910s and the development of the commercialization of agriculture resulted in an increasing number of landless peasants who had no job prospects within the colonial Korean economy. The growth of alternative jobs could not keep up with the growing numbers of impoverished and unemployed people. The colonial population on the whole had increased by half by the end of the 1920s and this excess population needed an outlet. The failure of the Program to Promote Rice Cultivation and the collapse of the rice market during the colonial period all contributed to a rapid decline in work opportunities. Consequently, a rapidly growing number of Koreans crossed over into Japan to look for employment.

The problems triggered by Korean migration to Japan then put pressure on the GGK to restrict this migratory flow. However, after the elimination of the travel permit system for Koreans entering Japan on December 15, 1922, the number of Koreans who entered the country increased rapidly, and the GGK only implemented modest restrictions on the outflow. The migration policies of the GGK and the Japanese Home Ministry showed slight but significant differences (Chōng Chin-sōng and Kil Il-sōng 1998, 200-01). The GGK emphasized the problematic nature of restricting the migration of Korean workers who already had a job in Japan, and instead of seeking restrictions, attempted to assist Koreans in locating employment in Japan to help reduce the jobless rate in colonial Korea. However, while the GGK remained lukewarm during the 1920s towards the issue of restricting Korean labor migration to Japan, it could no longer ignore the increasing awareness of the interconnections between the Chinese labor migration to colonial Korea and a host of problems throughout the Japanese empire. A report published by the SMRC in 1933 explained the issue in the following manner:

²⁸ The labor shortage in Japan during the economic boom of WWI had initially brought many Koreans to the country but their unwelcomed presence led to the massacre of thousands after the Kantō Earthquake in 1923. The numbers continued to grow throughout the 1920s and 1930s, which led to increasing calls to restrict their entry to Japan.

²⁹ For more on the suppression of the Korean labor movement in Japan, see Chōn Ki-ho, *Ilche sidae chaeil Han'gugin nodongja hyegūp ūi sang'ae wa t'ujaeng* [The situation and struggle of the Korean working class in Japan during the colonial period] (Seoul: Chisik sanōpsa, 2003).

The number of peasants leaving their farms is over 150,000 a year. Most of these peasants hope to become workers, and consequently the population of workers is increasing. We are already struggling with this problem, but as previously mentioned, the entry of Chinese into Korea is increasing every year. Chinese laborers are in general more productive than Koreans and are relatively more satisfied receiving a lower wage. Therefore, wherever we see the entry of Chinese workers, we get the impression that it is difficult to see Korean workers. Thus, there is the trend of unemployed Koreans entering Japan to escape their poverty... however, the entry of Korean workers to Japan itself then makes Japanese workers lose their opportunities for work and creates a major social issue that requires basic policy solutions. (Minami Manshū tetsudō keizai chōsakai 1933, 32)

As the overpopulation and unemployment problem in colonial Korea continued to worsen, the number of Korean residents in Japan increased dramatically in the late 1920s. The number went from 143,792 in 1926 to 298,091 in 1930 and reached 425,876 in 1933, which led to a new Japanese policy in October 1934 called the “Korean Migration Policy” (Kim Sŭng-uk 2013b, 148-49).³⁰ This measure may be viewed as a response to the growing unemployment problem among Koreans in Japan, which was 16% in 1925, 18% in 1930, 29% in 1932, and 35% in 1933 (Chŏn Ki-ho 2003, 189-90).³¹ The goal of the policy was to restrict the entry of Koreans to Japan and redirect this migration to Manchuria and northern Korea (Chŏng Chin-sŏng and Kil Il-sŏng 1998, 211). The rise in migration to Japan coincided with a sudden decrease in Korean migration to Manchuria after 1931. The total number of Koreans in Manchuria was approximately 600,000, but the number of returnees began to rise in the early 1930s. According to statistics from P’yŏngan Province, the ratio of returnees to migrants was 3.5 in 1930, 5.5 in 1931, 12 in 1932, and 7 between January and April of 1933, which triggered concerns that the rise in returnees from Manchuria would worsen the problem of overpopulation in the countryside (Ou 2015, 60-61). Therefore, the “Korean Migration Policy” called for attempts to reduce the number entering Japan by stabilizing the situation of Koreans in Korea and encouraging their migration to Manchuria. The efforts in colonial Korea to restrain the entry of Chinese laborers in September 1934 coincided with this broader attempt to control Korean migration to Japan, which suggests a need to better understand the reasons why migration controls became so important in the mid-1930s within the Japanese empire.

The key factors behind the tightening of border controls were inevitably linked to the fact that Japan had become what Andrew Gordon characterizes as an

³⁰ The “Korean Migration Policy” called for 1) The adoption of measures to stabilize the situation of Koreans in Korea 2) The adoption of measures to encourage Korean migration to Manchuria 3) Reducing the entry of Koreans to Japan 4) Providing guidance for Koreans in Japan and encouraging their integration into Japan.

³¹ Chŏn Ki-ho notes that the situation was actually more serious because most were temporary workers. He cites the fact that in Kyoto 38.1% of the Koreans were temporary laborers and that as high as 56.5% may have faced chronic unemployment, which meant that on average about 1/3 of the Koreans were unemployed and as much as half of the unemployed workers in Kyoto were Korean. He cites these figures to argue that the unemployment rate among Korean workers may have been ten times higher than Japanese workers.

“imperial democracy,” where unemployment relief measures and the improvement of worker conditions became a major part of the political landscape (Gordon 1991). After the implementation of universal suffrage in 1925, Japan became a different society, where domestic politics and imperial expansion became more closely linked together. While the notion of “Taishō Democracy” is by its very name associated with an earlier period, much of the politics associated with the labor movement that are considered representative of that term emerged in the late 1920s and early 1930s during the early Shōwa period (1926-1989). Labor migration inevitably triggers wage convergence and competition for employment, which then brings calls for strict border controls to ensure domestic political stability. Beneath the clamor for labor restrictions in world history was an increased interest in protecting the national labor market due to the introduction of welfare programs and the rising political importance of labor movements as they become integrated into the state (Lucassen 1998, 58). The presence of migrant Korean workers in Japan disrupted the national labor market during a period when the Japanese state struggled to bring under control a labor movement that threatened to turn towards a radical direction during a long period of economic downturn. Korean activists in Japan formed alliances with other displaced groups, such as the *burakumin*, and played an active role in the Marxist labor movement.³² The chronic unemployment of Koreans in Japan placed a major burden on limited welfare programs, such as the Unemployment Emergency Relief Program, where Koreans often outnumbered the Japanese receiving assistance. As Ken Kawashima notes, “Korean unemployment in Japan was increasingly spoken of as the sign of a general crisis of the Japanese nation” (Kawashima 2009, 172).³³ Therefore, resolving the *Chōsen mondai* or “Korea problem” meant finding a solution to the social and economic instabilities triggered by the large influx of Korean migrants to Japan within this context.

While it is true that the working class-organizations surrendered much of their power to the state-managed Congress of Japanese Labor Unions in 1932, they continued the “enfranchisement-in-exchange-for-mobilization dynamic” that had been a major aspect of Japanese history ever since the Meiji Period (Kyu Hyun Kim 2013, 130). In a sense, concern over Japanese workers became a political necessity in the 1930s because worker interests had become an integral part of the domestic political landscape and critical for wartime mobilization. The increasing need to resolve the economic and social problems in Japan in the early 1930s ultimately played a key role in establishing a grand empire-wide vision for population management. The solutions to Japan’s domestic problems were to be found in the new territorial acquisitions in Manchuria. What we can see taking place in the Japanese empire was a growing attempt to use migration as a tool for social policy. As Louise Young notes, Manchurian migration contained an element of “social

³² For more on cooperation among Korean and burakumin activists see Jeffery Bayliss, *On the Margins of Empire: Buraku and Korean Identity in Prewar and Wartime Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, December 2012).

³³ Ken Kawashima’s study provides a detailed analysis of the problem that Korean workers created in Japan as they increasingly became the recipients of welfare and unemployment support intended for Japanese workers.

imperialism,” where imperial expansion became a way of resolving economic ills and opening up “vast empty tracts of fertile farmland providing ‘lebensraum’ for Japan’s overcrowded and socially conflicted villages” (Young 1998, 334). The encouragement of migration to Manchuria took place during a period when Japanese leaders dreamed of forming an autarkic “yen bloc” to establish a new kind of empire.³⁴ The liberal leaders of the Taishō democracy turned to jingoism and support for Japan’s imperial expansion, which some historians have linked to the rise of censorship and repression of opposing views. However, this perspective ignores the potential for mass mobilization under a democratic framework, for “the support of labor and women for militarism is less a reversal than a continuation of efforts to secure social and political power by whatever means offered them” (Young 1998, 162). Economic depression and social problems in both Japan and Korea led to a major policy change towards an effort to settle Japanese and Koreans in Manchuria and the development of northern Korea.³⁵ The GGK increasingly came to the conclusion that encouraging Manchurian migration of Koreans would be the solution to the social ills in colonial Korea as well as contribute to the greater cause of empire-building. The preface to the GGK publication *Chōsenjin imin mondai no chūtaisei* in 1935, advocated Korean migration to Manchuria, emphasized the interconnection of Korea, Manchuria, and Japan, and argued for the importance of resolving the many issues of the Japanese empire to construct an “East Asian Bloc” (Chōsen sōtokufu 1935). However, migrant Koreans came to be included in the resettlement schemes, not as equal participants, but instead as subordinate members.³⁶ Koreans would assume the ambiguous position of “second-class imperial subjects” or “*idŭng sinmin*” (Yu Sŏn-yŏng 2012, 217-59). While Koreans were included in the Manchurian settlement scheme, the ultimate purpose was to push them away from Japan where they had become associated with domestic social problems. The desire to direct the flow of people outwards from the center but not inwards was more of an imperial vision rather than a reality, for the desired level of border control was never fully achieved. Instead, the labor shortages of the wartime economy after 1937 necessitated the forced labor mobilization of Koreans to Japan. Nevertheless, the attempts to control the migration of people away from Japan in the 1930s reveal important imperial imaginaries of ethnic order. In that respect, the attempts by the Japanese to force larger regional migratory networks

³⁴ As Louise Young argues, the coordination between the Japanese army and home government in Manchuria arose through the desire to form a yen bloc, which gradually took institutional form after the tax and currency initiatives in 1933 and 1934 formed a new framework for trade between Manchuria, Japan, and the rest of the colonies. See Young 1998, 205-206.

³⁵ Approximately 270,000 Japanese were dispatched as a part of this migration scheme, which led to perhaps 80,000 deaths among them during World War Two and the subsequent attempt to return them to Japan once the war was over. As Sandra Wilson argues, the occupation of Manchuria was a watershed for the migration problem in Japan during an era when the newly occupied territories seemed to offer a solution to the economic depression in Japan. However, the reality was that the Japanese settlers to Manchuria were highly reliant on Chinese and Korean labor. See Sandra Wilson, “The ‘New Paradise’: Japanese Emigration to Manchuria in the 1930s and 1940s,” *The International History Review*, 17 no. 2 (May, 1995), 276.

³⁶ For more on the organized Korean migration to Manchuria see Hyun Ok Park, *Two Dreams in One Bed: Empire, Social Life, and the Origins of the North Korean Revolution in Manchuria* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

to conform to its imperial borders may not have been driven purely by the needs of capitalism, which welcomes low-cost labor. Instead, the phenomenon may show that producing ethnic hierarchies allowing differentiated access to rights and limited privileges became an important ingredient in maintaining political stability as the empire expanded.

The plan to resolve Japan's domestic social problems through Manchurian resettlement then added a new dimension to the problem of Chinese workers throughout the Japanese empire. The call for "lebensraum" had not been a major aspect of Japanese imperialism during the early phase of its empire-building, but the policy changes towards this direction were clear by the 1930s. The need to make room for and protect worker interests extended not only to Japan and Korea but also to the newly formed Manchurian state in the 1930s. For these reasons, restrictions on Chinese migration to Korea must be viewed in conjunction with migration restrictions that took place simultaneously in Manchuria to appreciate the larger significance of changes taking place within the Japanese empire. The complex dynamics of Chinese labor migration in Manchuria are described in numerous Japanese-language sources, and they reveal the close interconnectivity of the Northeast Asian region to the transformation of Japan's imperial ambitions. Similar to the situation in Korea, there were no major efforts to constrain the flow of Chinese labor migration to Manchuria until the 1930s. After reaching a peak in the late 1920s, the number of Chinese entering Manchuria declined rapidly in the early 1930s:

Table 3. Chinese Migration to Manchuria through Major Entry Points (1929-1933)

	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933
Dalian	523,947	388,046	226,531	210,847	314,401
Yingkou	248,577	116,800	79,177	71,229	157,782
Andong	53,557	49,575	36,139	28,199	42,779
Land routes	331,210	193,792	125,555	103,759	117,000
Total	1,046,291	748,213	467,402	414,034	631,962

Source: Minami Manshū tetsudō keizai chōsakai, *Manshū no kūrī*, 16.

The Chinese represented in these statistics are for the most part migrant laborers and their numbers experienced a sharp decline in the early 1930s primarily because of the unstable conditions both leading up to and following the Manchurian incident in 1931. There had been some previous efforts to reduce the hiring of Chinese workers in Manchuria because of frequent labor disputes in Japanese-run companies (Manahito 1927, 33-36). However, there were no systematic attempts to limit Chinese migration into the region until the establishment of Manzhuguo in 1932. The incorporation of this vast territory into the Japanese empire resulted in far more effective controls on the entry of Chinese laborers. One of the primary considerations was the active anti-Japanese resistance movement and the security threat that Chinese workers represented. However, ultimately, the most important consideration was the Manchurian settlement plan for Japanese and Koreans.

The migration restrictions on Chinese laborers took place through multiple initiatives after the establishment of Manzhuguo. The first steps took place in 1932 when the special system of reduced fares for Chinese migrant workers was abolished by the SMRC. Chinese entering without funds or having proof of employment were denied entry, but effective controls required a more formal apparatus. The Kwantung Army was initially highly reluctant to allow the mass migration of Koreans because of the fear that they would destabilize the region (Ou 2015, 61). However, the GJK lobbied for the inclusion of Koreans in the Japanese migration program and eventually the Kwantung Army dropped its objections. The establishment of the Labor Control Commission took place after a meeting in January 1934 of approximately thirty representatives of the Kwantung Army, SMRC, Manzhuguo, and the GJK for the “All-Manchuria Labor Restriction Meeting.”³⁷ The goal of this meeting was to discuss limiting the entry of Chinese laborers to Manchuria for the following reasons: 1) Increasing Security and safety 2) Restricting the outflow of wage income and 3) Encouraging Japanese migration to Manchuria.³⁸ The security issues emerged because of the fear that Chinese insurgents disguised themselves as laborers to enter Manchuria. Another important consideration was the significant outflow of money from the wages given to Chinese laborers. The departure of so much capital from Manchuria through the wages of Chinese workers became a major concern. However, the most important factor for labor restrictions was the plan to relocate a large number of Japanese and Korean settlers to Manchuria in the 1930s (Ou, 56). These Japanese and Korean settlers were for the most part poor peasants and there were fears that Chinese laborers would trigger a major unemployment problem. Consequently, on May 1935, the restrictions on foreign laborers went into effect and Chinese laborers were required to receive permission to enter Manchuria, without which they became “illegal aliens.”

Effective control of Chinese migration to Manchuria was then achieved through the establishment of the Tadong gongsi in 1934 to handle the recruitment of Chinese workers (Stewart 1939, 9-10). The organization opened offices in China and issued permits to Chinese workers who wished to enter Manchuria. The system tended to favor those with prior experience sojourning there. According to the September 1937 records of the Qingdao branch, permits were usually given to those who had traveled to Manchuria more than once, and this number was 392 out of 500 receiving permission that month (Waseda daigaku kōa keizai kenkyūjo 1941, 303). Of this group of 500 workers, 37.4% were individuals and 62.6% traveled as a group. All workers who were given permission for the first time had provided proof that they had found employment. These measures served to limit the number of Chinese migrants to Manchuria and were highly effective. The quota were set at 440,000 in 1935, 380,000 in 1936 and 1937, and 400,000 in 1938 (Stewart, 9). The actual numbers that entered in these years were either close to or below the

³⁷ “Zenman rōdō tōsei kaigi” [Manchurian labor control conference] *Manshū hyōron* (January 1934), 94.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

quota during this period until the controls were abandoned in 1939 due to wartime labor shortages and the number suddenly increased to 985,669 (Ou 2015, 35).³⁹ Just as in the case of Korea, the period of labor controls were brought to an end because of the outbreak of war in 1937. Yet, for a brief period, the migration restrictions in Manchuria served to restrain Chinese migration to preserve the region as a potential space for Japanese and Korean settlers.

The role of Koreans in this larger picture remains somewhat ambiguous because of their secondary role in the migration scheme. The restrictions on Chinese laborers were intended to protect the jobs of Koreans, but, while the migration of poor Korean farmers to Manchuria increased during the 1930s, a corresponding rise in Korean labor migration did not take place. GGK officials continued to advocate the dispatch of Korean workers to Manchuria and an article in the journal *Chōsen* in February 1935 explains the seriousness of the Chinese laborer problem in Manchuria by pointing out the extremely large amount of 25,000,000 yen that flowed out of the region each year due to Chinese migrant laborers returning to their homes. The article argued that the migration of Korean laborers to Manchuria could prevent this capital flight to China and keep the flow within the Japanese empire. There were in fact attempts within Manzhuguo to push for a preferential hiring of Korean laborers in the 1930s. For example, on the Kyōdoshinsen line, the construction contractors were told to hire Koreans along with the Chinese laborers, but they were only able to hire half of the Korean labor quatum (Sawaichirō 1935, 93). GGK sources provide an interesting explanation for why efforts to hire more Koreans in Manchurian railroad construction failed. Back in Japan, Koreans comprised approximately 40% of the workforce involved in the construction of buildings, ports, and railroads, and so forth, and Japanese contractors had little problem recruiting Koreans who were willing to work for low wages. The plentiful availability of opportunities for Korean construction workers in Japan meant that they had little reason to migrate to Manchuria in search of similar work. The railroad contractors in Manchuria tried to find skilled workers from among the Korean farmers but they could not be pulled away from their farms during the peak of the harvest season (*Chōsen sōtokufu* 1935, 93-94). The labor market in Manchuria had to compete with the labor market in Japan for skilled Korean workers. Yet the difficult circumstances and low wages in Manchuria could not attract many Korean workers away from the better working conditions and higher wages found in Japan.

Populating the Japanese Empire

The large influx of Korean and Japanese settlers in the 1930s led to the displacement of Chinese farmers from Manchuria because of the need to create agricultural collectives for the new settlers (Hyun Ok Park, 191-92). However, the scheme to restrict Chinese laborers in colonial Korea and Manchuria had limited success

³⁹ Ou Kōen notes that the system of limiting labor migration was replaced with a system of wartime labor conscription because the Japanese could not find enough labor power to wage war when the migration controls were relaxed.

because the Chinese were difficult to replace in the many low-paid jobs that they dominated. Despite numerous efforts by the Japanese authorities, the plan to settle millions of Koreans and Japanese to Manchuria never materialized. There were over 240,000 Japanese migrants to Manchuria by 1945, of whom approximately 78,500 died from disease, hunger, Russian attacks, and suicide when Japan was defeated in 1945 (Young, 409). The number of Koreans in Manchuria grew rapidly in the late 1930s until the population reached a million by 1940. The trauma experienced by hundreds of thousands of Koreans returning from Manchuria after August 1945 filled postliberation narratives with harrowing tales of escape (Michael Kim 2010b, 195-223). The efforts to transplant the excess population of Japanese and Koreans to Manchuria never fully developed in the direction that Japanese authorities envisioned, but the border control policies reveal the ambitions of the Japanese empire to control the flow of people that circulated within it. There is a need here to keep in mind that the primary reason for restricting Chinese labor migration to Manchuria was concerns about the welfare of Japanese settlers. At the same time, the need to address the overpopulation problem of colonial Korea was also a major factor. The efforts to protect job opportunities in Korea and Manchuria demonstrate the high level of coordination that could take place among various competing imperial interests. The labor control policies may provide an excellent example of how the Japanese empire was a highly interconnected entity that requires multiple vantage points to understand properly.

The presence of Chinese networks that crisscrossed the Korean peninsula raises some broader questions concerning the meaning of Japan's imperial borders. Any discussions about Japan's boundaries cannot proceed without a consideration of the overlapping Chinese and Korean networks that both penetrated and extended beyond the empire. The availability of cheap Chinese and Korean migrant labor greatly facilitated the development of Japanese capitalism, yet the benefits had to be weighed against the social problems triggered by labor migration. Korean workers may have received preferential treatment compared with their Chinese counterparts, but the interests of Japanese workers remained paramount. Indeed, what we see emerging in the 1930s was a hierarchical arrangement of differing levels of privileges to travel within the Japanese empire. As Araragi Shinzō notes, the borders between Japan proper and its colonial possessions were technically open but in reality controlled by a strict system of "inner," or *naiji*, and "outer," or *gaiji*, registration (Shinzō 2008, xii, footnote 1). The imperial subjects within the inner registry were placed at the top of the social hierarchy and could move to any part of the empire. Those within the outer registry, such as Koreans, were placed in a secondary category that limited their mobility, yet they were still in a favored position above the Chinese.

The complex issue of restricting Chinese migration to Korea and Manchuria was therefore connected to a multi-regional effort to reorder the Japanese empire, and suggests the need to better understand the social factors behind the reconfiguration of Japan's imperial boundaries. Like many other locations around the world, Chinese migration became identified as a threat to the emerging Imperial Democracy in Japan but only indirectly as a movement perceived to be

connected to the migration of Koreans. The comprehensive plan to restrict Chinese migration throughout the Japanese empire only took shape after the acquisition of Manchuria. Rather than attempt to integrate Koreans into Japanese society and develop a stronger welfare system for impoverished Japanese farmers, the more immediate solution was the encouragement of outward migration. Ultimately, the close link between Chinese labor migration and Korean migration to Japan led to the formulation of migration policies and border controls that were designed to divert excess Japanese and Korean populations towards Manchuria. We may question the effectiveness of the Japanese empire's Chinese migration controls in the 1930s, but they do reveal the extent to which the new "East Asian Bloc" became reimagined as a space that could resolve the economic and social crises of the Japanese empire.

GLOSSARY

Abe Kaoru	阿部薫	Kyōdoshinsen	京圖新線
Andong	安東	Kyōnggi	京畿
<i>burakumin</i>	部落民	Manzhuguo	滿洲國
Chinnamp'ò	鎭南浦	P'yōngan	平安
<i>Chōsen mondai</i>	朝鮮問題	P'yōngyang	平壤
Dalian	大連	Sinūiju	新義州
<i>idūng sinmin</i>	二等臣民	Tadong Gongsi	大東公司
Inch'ŏn	仁川	Wanpaoshan (Wanbaoshan)	萬寶山
Koryōkpang	苦力幫	Wōnsan	元山
Koryōktu	苦力頭	Yingkou	營口

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