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“We Go on Our Own Boats!”: The Pusan-Shimonoseki Ferry and Korean Migrants in the Japanese Metropole

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Introduction

In April 1908, the Japanese periodical *Railroad Review* profiled a day of festivities in the Korean city of Pusan. There, workers had completed a final section of track connecting the occupied territory’s main trunk line to the expanded harbor facilities at its southern terminus. According to the account in *Railroad Review*, the citizens of Pusan were ecstatic at the completion of the line. The journal’s report began at the city’s main station, where dignitaries gathered to send off a new express train to Seoul. Meanwhile in the streets, members of the crowd indulged in refreshments while joy-riders took short trips on the newly laid track. At the harbor, young onlookers in pleasure boats raced about as a recently launched ferry, the *Ikimaru*, docked beside her sister ship the *Tsushimamaru*. Finally, with evening nearing, the reader’s focus was shifted from the harbor and the bright lights of the ferries back to the Pusan station. There the day’s events were brought to a close with a lantern procession that marked the departure of a night train bound for Manchuria. The article ended with this striking parody of lights: two brightly illuminated processions, a line of humans and lanterns advancing in the darkness, mimicking the train as it proceeded northward away from the harbor.¹

This was a celebration of logistics. According to the *Railroad Review*, fusing transportation infrastructure like the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry and the Seoul-Pusan line

¹ Article reprinted in Hong Yŏn-jin, “Pu-Kwan yŏllaksŏn simal gwa Pusanbu Ilbonin in’gu byŏndong” (On Passage of Fukan Ferry and the Change of Japanese Population in Busan) *Han-Il minjok munje yŏn’gu*, 11 (2006): 141-175.

promised to integrate constituent parts of a rapidly expanding empire. Over the course of Japan's occupation of Korea, the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry was an iconic instance of such an integration, linking the archipelago to its colonial possessions on the continent. Over five generations of vessels traveled the line, each one larger and faster than the last. The ferry's first two Ikimaru-class ships weighed roughly 1,680 tons, carried 337 passengers, and could sail between Japan and the peninsula in just under twelve hours. Forty years later, the 7,900 ton Konronmaru-class ferries relayed 2,050 passengers along the same course in just seven hours.² The line was never the sole route between Japan and the peninsula, nor the only one leaving from Pusan; but the ferry was always the most symbolic and widely-used.³ It was featured in poetry, the setting of novels, and the stage for high-profile romantic death pacts.⁴ The ships channeled a huge population of Japanese settlers to the continent, became a mainstay for the imperial tourist industry, and conveyed an entire generation of colonial students, soldiers, and workers to the metropole.⁵

² Hong Yŏn-jin, *ibid.*, 149-153, 162.

³ Kimura Genji, "Pu-Kwan yŏllaksŏn i unsongsa esŏ ch'aji hanŭn wich'i" (The Historical Place Occupied by the Pusan-Shimonoseki Ferry), *Han'guk minjok munhwa*, 28 (2006), pp. 167-182. For a sense of Pusan's position in regional maritime networks refer to the annual reports from the Pusan Customs Office. *Pusankŏ bŏeki gairan* (Overview of Trade at the Port of Pusan) (Pusan: Pusan zeikan, 1931), 261-263.

⁴ Kim Kyung-bok, "Han'guk hyŏndaesi e nat'anan Kwan-Pu yŏllaksŏn ũi ũimi" (The Meaning of Shimonoseki and Pusan Ferryboat in Korean modern poems) *Inmunhak nonch'ong*, 13(1) (2008), pp. 1-22; Lee Byungju, "Kwan-Pu yŏllaksŏn" (The Pusan-Shimonoseki Ferry) (Seoul: Han'gilsa, 2006); "Hyŏnhaet'an kyŏngnang chung e ch'ŏngnyŏn namyŏ ũi chŏngsa" (Young Couple's Romantic Suicide While Transiting the Korean Strait), *Tonga ilbo*, August 5, 1926; "yŏllaksŏn esŏ nyŏnnam chŏngsa wŏnin ũn misang" (Couple's Romantic Suicide on the Ferry: Reason Unknown) *Maeil sinbo*, August 25, 1929.

⁵ Cho, Seong-woon, "1910-nyŏndae singminji Chosŏn ũi kŭndae kwan'gwang ũi t'ansaeng" (The birth of modern tourism of colonized Joseon in 1910) *Korean Resistance Movements*, 56 (2008), pp. 103-146; Cho Jung-min, "Ilche ch'imnyakki sajin kŭrim yŏpsŏ ro pon Pusan kwan'gwang ũi p'yosang kwa rok'ŏllit'i chibae wa hyangyu ũi pada" (The presentation and locality of Busan tourism as viewed from picture postcards in the Japanese colonial era) *Japanese Cultural Studies*, 67 (2018), pp. 35-58; Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876-1945* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2011).

By the time daily service was suspended in 1945, the Pusan-Shimonoseki line had transported over thirty million passengers.

The rapid expansion of maritime lines like the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry can easily be presented as part of a broader crescendo in a colonial relationship.⁶ In the case of Korea, this is a story of ever-deepening ties that culminates in an active campaign of assimilation during the Asia-Pacific War.⁷ However, a closer examination of transportation infrastructure also exposes the more textured dynamics at play in the story of imperial integration. Points of conveyance like the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry played a dual role of transcending geographic boundaries while at the same time mandating new borders. The systems of travel registration and restriction that emerged alongside these increasingly large ships speak to this point. While the boundaries of the empire moved westward with each new generation of the ferry, they were also internal redrawn through constraints on travel.

This study takes up the Pusan-Shimonoseki Ferry to trace the function of transportation infrastructure in the labor relations of the Japanese empire. In doing so, it also highlights the forms of resistance that materialized around these sites of transit. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, underpaid Korean migrants were a vital part of the industrial labor markets of the Japanese metropole. Following a series of breakdowns in

⁶ Shin and Robinson eds., *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (Harvard University Asia Center, 1999); Taylor Atkins, *Primitive Selves: Koreana in the Japanese Colonial Gaze, 1910–1945* (University of California Press, 2010); Nayoung Aimee Kwon, *Intimate Empire Collaboration and Colonial Modernity in Korea and Japan* (Duke University Press, 2015).

⁷ Janet Poole, *When the Future Disappears: The Modernist Imagination in Late Colonial Korea* (Columbia University Press, 2014); Christina Yi, *Colonizing Language Cultural Production and Language Politics in Modern Japan and Korea* (Columbia University Press, 2018).

Korea's rural economy, a large population of displaced workers gravitated towards Japan. These migrants were at once a popular reserve of cheap labor and also the target of social vilification. The border encouraged both of these impulses. How one traveled both depressed the value of colonial labor and heightened the susceptibility of workers to managerial coercion and social subordination. Correspondingly, opposition to these constraints by Korean migrants and labor activists aimed to mitigate a subalternity rooted in their place of origin and mode of travel.

This dynamic is explored through a collection of primary and secondary works on transportation infrastructure and travel policy in colonial era Korea and Japan. In particular, the article benefits from an edited volume on the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry produced by Ch'oe Yŏng-ho, Park, Jin-Woo, Ryoo, Kyo-Ryul, and Hong Yeon-Jin.⁸ It also draws from research on colonial Korean migrants and the politics of work in the metropole by Ken Kawashima.⁹ More broadly, this study fits into a larger interest in the interconnected issues of migration, borders and colonialism in East Asia.¹⁰ For Korea, this scholarly focus has brought to light the fluidity of the peninsula's boundaries across the nineteenth

⁸ Ch'oe Yŏng-ho, Park Jin-Woo, Ryoo Kyo-Ryul, Hong Yeon-Jin, "Pu-Kwan yŏllaksŏn kwa Pusan singminji tosi: Pusan kwa minjok idong" (The Pusan-Shimonoseki Ferry and Pusan as a Colonial City: Pusan and Ethnic Mobility (Seoul: Nonhyŏng, 2007).

⁹ Kim Gwang-Yol, "20-segi chŏnban Hanin ūi Ilbon iju wa chŏngch'ak iju hyŏnji ūi sahoejŏk yŏnghyang ūl chungsim ūro" (Koreans' Immigration and Settlement in Japan during the first half of the 20th Century: Focusing on Their Social Impact), *The Korean Historical Review*, 212 (2011): 35-59.

¹⁰ Noriaki Hoshino and Qian Zhu, "Histories of Modern Migration in East Asia: Studies of the First Half of the Twentieth Century," *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 14:2 (2017): 171-195.

and twentieth centuries.¹¹ It has also helped contextualize the persistent issue of interethnic relations in postwar Japan.¹² In both regards, this scholarship serves as an important starting point for the examination below.

The early twentieth century was characterized by considerable shifts in the patterns of transnational maritime migration. Many of these alterations were reflected in colonial Korea through the forms of border control and conveyance that emerged with the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry. For instance, scholarship on the history of migration in the North Atlantic has emphasized the role of steamship technology, analogous to those that plied the straits of Korea. By increasing the scope and speed of late nineteenth and early twentieth century migration these vessels altered the paradigm of movement. Steamships allowed more people to travel more quickly.¹³ Importantly, they also eased repatriation when market conditions soured.¹⁴ Attention to these dynamics has been part of a larger focus on the interplay between state and market formations in the channelling of mar-

¹¹ James Lewis, *Frontier Contact Between Chosŏn Korea and Tokugawa Japan* (Taylor & Francis, 2005); Hong Soon Kwŏn. "Formation of the Modern City of Busan: Focusing on the Space and Culture of the Japanese Settlement in Busan before 1910," *Korea Journal* (August, 2008): 1-35; Kim Seonmin, *Ginseng and Borderland Territorial Boundaries and Political Relations Between Qing China and Choson Korea, 1636-1912* (University of California Press, 2017); Niansheng Song, *Making Borders in Modern East Asia: The Tumen River Demarcation, 1881-1919* (Cambridge University Press, 2018); Alyssa Park, *Sovereignty Experiments: Korean Migrants and the Building of Borders in Northeast Asia, 1860-1945* (Cornell University Press, 2019).

¹² Michael Weiner, *Race and Migration in Imperial Japan* (Routledge, 1994); Lori Watt, *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2009); Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876-1945* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2011).

¹³ Torsten Feys: "The Visible Hand of Shipping Interests in American Migration Policies 1815-1914," *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 7:1 (2010). 38-62

¹⁴ Torsten Feys, *The Battle for the Migrants: The Introduction of Steamshipping on the North Atlantic and Its Impact on the European Exodus* (International Maritime Economic History Association, 2013): 67.

itime population transfers.¹⁵ Of particular interest, was the role of shipping agents and private firms in framing border controls and implementing systems of “remote control” over migration across the Atlantic.¹⁶ Here, restraints on migration like registration and screening were displaced from the ports of entry to sites of departure and beyond. In this way the border was dispersed across networks of transportation infrastructure.¹⁷

The controls on migration applied at the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry reflect many of these same traits. In a version of remote border control, the Japanese colonial state employed several forms of travel registration to restrain migrants well before they reached the coast. That being said, the case of Korean migration to Japan departs from contemporaneous instances of population movements in several important ways. In terms of actors, the major ferry lines to Korea were an extension of the Japanese Ministry of Railroads, and were far more reactive to state pressure than the private firms that dominated North Atlantic migration.¹⁸ A further line of departure concerns timing. While much of the literature on population movements across the North Atlantic mark 1914 as a break from an earlier age of mass migration, in the Japanese empire the First World War stands as the

¹⁵ Aristide Zolberg: *A Nation by Design. Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (Harvard University Press and Russell Sage Foundation, 2006); Claudia Goldin, “The Political Economy of Immigration Restriction in the United States, 1890-1921,” in *The Regulated Economy: A Historical Approach in Political Economy*, eds. Goldin and Libecap (Chicago, 1994): 223.

¹⁶ Drew Keeling, “The Business of Transatlantic Migration between Europe and the USA, 1900-1914” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2005).

¹⁷ Aristide Zolberg, “The Archaeology of ‘Remote Control,’” in *Migration control in the North Atlantic. The evolution of state practices in Europe and the United States from the French Revolution to the Inter-War Period*, eds. Fahrmeir, Faron and Weil (New York and Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2003): 195-222.

¹⁸ Torsten Feys’ scholarship on this company offers a fascinating window into the infrastructure of migration in the North Atlantic. While it is beyond the scope of this study, it is highly likely that the collection of much smaller private ferry firms operating between Japan and Korea entered into a similar dynamic with the state.

starting point. Similarly, while studies from this period noted the reframing of international migration as a question of national sovereignty, the realities of colonial relations prevented an analogous shift within East Asia until 1945.¹⁹

The following sections focus on the social implications of transport policy, and in particular, the forms of direct and indirect resistance that materialized in reaction to the influence of the ferry line. To do this, the paper draws heavily from colonial era press produced on the peninsula as well as a collection of works on migration published by the office of the Governor-General of Korea (GGK). These materials are a product of their context and as such display the curtailments of expression that defined the colonial era. Nevertheless, they also capture the prosaic character of the migration issue. A glacial figment of the colonial relationship, writing on the topic of migration and transportation varied from the politically didactic editorial to passing observations about weather forecasts and their potential for causing shipping delays. When read against the grain, each of these sources offer important insights into the contradictions of colonial infrastructure in an imperial market hungry for cheap labor.

During the age of pernicious colonial expansion that frames this study, borders functioned as essential forms of economic and ideological infrastructure that buttressed imperial hierarchies.²⁰ More than simply an expression of nationalist ideology or an assertion of sovereign power, borders, like those that developed in connection with the Pu-

¹⁹ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Borderline Japan: Foreigners and Frontier Controls in the Postwar Era* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²⁰ Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton University Press, 1996) pp. 3-15; Ulrich Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (University of California Press, 1985).

san-Shimonoseki line, exerted a formative influence through the legal and bureaucratic institutions that develop alongside. These features of the border have been and remain powerful instruments of formation and interpellation that extend well beyond the geographic lines themselves.²¹ The function of transportation in this regard was often understated, in part because of the way that infrastructure is often naturalized and concealed.²² Yet, as is detailed in the instance of Korean labor migration to Japan, something as mundane as a ferry line can have a tremendous impact on social formations.

Studies on the history of the Korean diaspora in Japan have amply explored how prejudice and systemic precarity have shaped the place of the community throughout the twentieth century.²³ During the colonial era this took the form of deflated wages, constraints on benefits and housing, recruitment policy, and discriminatory hiring and firing practices, all exposed workers to a range of uncertainties that affected their search for employment.²⁴ This paper approaches transport infrastructure and the borders they helped establish as an additional source of precarity. Onerous fees, a strict travel permit system and the dangers of smuggling all worked to degrade a migrant's ability to negotiate the

²¹ Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Duke University Press, 2013).

²² Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (Verso, 2014); Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, and Hawaii 1900-1936* (University of Chicago Press, 2001); Adam McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (Columbia University Press, 2008).

²³ Yasunori Fukuoka, *Lives of Young Koreans in Japan* (Trans Pacific Press, 2000); John Lie, *Zainichi (Koreans in Japan): Diasporic Nationalism and Postcolonial Identity* (University of California Press, 2008); Ryang and Lie eds., *Diaspora Without Homeland: Being Korean in Japan* (University of California Press, 2008).

²⁴ Kawashima, *ibid.* For an analogous discussion relating to Okinawans in Japan see Alan Christy, "The Making of Imperial Subjects in Okinawa," in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, ed. Tani Barlow (Duke University Press, 1997): 141-165.

sale of their labor once in Japan. In the face of these constraints, Korean workers developed a range of active and passive tactics to mediate the border. For these individuals, overcoming colonial discrimination was achieved by mitigating bureaucratic structures that inscribed their difference. Paradoxically, some even called for the forms of spatial integration that empire purported to provide but never delivered. Confronted with intensifying rural poverty and a lack of economic alternatives, unfettered access to the labor markets of the metropole became an avenue by which to mitigate colonial exploitation.

Formation of the Colonial Migrant

Transportation infrastructure like the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry facilitated a circumscribed form of integration within the Japanese empire. For almost forty years, the line effectively connected industrial sectors in the metropole with the rural labor markets of its closest colony, Korea. This dynamic took form soon after the annexation of the peninsula in 1910. At this time, the Pusan-Shimonoseki line helped link two distinct transformations in the imperial economy. In Japan, a phase of rapid industrialization propelled by the First World War was recasting labor markets and labor relations both. At the same time, on the peninsula, the completion of the colonial government's cadastral survey prefaced the emergence of a new population of migrant labor. Both ruptures were drawn together by transportation infrastructure; but at the same time, controls enforced at transit points also set explicit terms over how Korean workers operated in the labor markets of the archipelago. Colonization opened the way for mass migration, but also cemented the subalternity of the migrant.

The end of the 1910s found the Japanese industrial sector in the midst of a rapid phase of economic expansion. Decreased production in a war-torn Europe paired with growing domestic and regional demand for manufactured goods resulted in a boom in production. Between 1914 and 1918, industrial output grew from 1.4 billion yen to 6.8 billion.²⁵ Similarly, in the six years after the outbreak of the First World War, the number of factories on the archipelago increased from 31,717 to 45,806. At the same time, employment in this sector expanded from 948,000 to 1,612,000.²⁶ Under these conditions, manufacturers in the metropole turned to colonial migrants as an affordable solution to wartime labor needs.

A sequence of upheavals in Korea's agrarian economy left it uniquely positioned to resolve the metropole's demand for workers. The final decades of both the Chosŏn Dynasty and its short-lived cognate, the Empire of Korea, were defined by the breakdown of the peninsula's rural economy. Newly opened rice and commodity markets, peasant uprisings, anti-colonial struggles, currency alterations, and tax reforms all impacted a population still concentrated in the countryside.²⁷ Compounding these transformations was the 1918 completion of a cadastral survey by the Governor General's Office of Korea and the Japanese-managed Oriental Development Company.²⁸ This project fully restructured how the peninsula's land was tabulated and taxed. Under the new model, informal

²⁵ Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 139.

²⁶ Kawashima, *ibid.*, 27.

²⁷ Michael Robinson, *Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 8-35.

²⁸ Jung T'ae-hern, *20-segi Han'guk kyŏngjesa* (20th Century Korean Economic History) (Yŏksa munje yŏn'guso, 2010), 91-103.

practices of ownership were negated and lack of title served as the basis for land disposition. Similarly, the reassertion of state ownership over formerly royal holdings led to the evictions of thousands of farmers who informally worked these plots. For many more, dislocation from the land came gradually, with individuals uprooted as a result of more accurate and exacting forms of taxation or as the outcome of the expanded practice of land collateralization.²⁹

Under these circumstances, displaced peasants during were left with few options. Some took to the hills to join a new population of slash and burn farmers. Many more, moved to Manchuria or Siberia in search of new lands and livelihoods. For hundreds of thousands of others, the conditions of the colonial economy necessitated a relocation to the empire's industrial centers. For much of the colonial period, this meant the Japanese archipelago. While Korea's cities grew rapidly throughout the start of the 20th century, colonial policy, particularly during the first decade of Japanese rule, curtailed the development of the peninsula's commercial and industrial sectors.³⁰ As a result, the metropole, in the midst of a wartime production boom, stood out as a singular option for Korean farmers searching for new livelihoods. This shift can be traced in the abrupt expansion of the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry. In 1911, just a year after annexation, the line conveyed roughly 2,500 Korean passengers to Japan every year. By 1919, that number had ballooned to over 28,000. Most of these individuals would return to the peninsula, but many

²⁹ Kang Man-gil, *Ilche sidae pinmin saenghwalsa yŏn'gu* (An Study on the Life of the Impoverished During the Japanese Colonial Period) (Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏngsa, 1995), 23-24.

³⁰ Kang Man-gil, *Koch'yŏ ssŭn Han'guk hyŏndaesa* (A revised modern history of Korea) (Changbi Publishers, 2011).

remained. Figures produced by the Japanese Home Ministry indicate that by 1920 the Korean community residing in the metropole numbered roughly 31,000.³¹

While demand for migrant labor in the metropole varied, in the decades that followed the sustained impoverishment of the Korean countryside continuously replenished the pool of colonial workers drawn to the labor markets in Japan.³² Border policy, enforced at points like the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry, was among the best tools available to both configure and control this population. When the ferry was first established, Japanese migration policy was still guided by the Foreign Workers Exclusionary Law of 1899, which, with the exception of diplomats and students, restricted Koreans from traveling to the archipelago.³³ Formal incorporation of the peninsula into the Japanese empire in 1910 brought with it citizenship and the right of colonial subjects to travel freely. However, only one month after annexation, the Japanese Home Ministry began to exert greater oversight on the flow of Koreans. On the surface, officials expressed concern over a growing population of unskilled colonial workers. However, this sentiment was never clearly disaggregated from state anxieties over the inflow of foreigners, anti-colonial activists, anarchists, and unionists.³⁴

³¹ Kim Gwang-Yol, *ibid.*, 41-42.

³² Gi-Wook Shin and Do-Hyun Han, "Colonial Corporatism: The Rural Revitalization Campaign, 1932-1940" in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, eds. Shin and Robinson (Harvard University Asia Center, 1999).

³³ Ryoo Kyo-Ryul, *ibid.*, 215.

³⁴ Dolf-Alexander Neuhaus, "'Awakening Asia': Korean Student Activism in Japan, The Asia Kunglun, and Asian Solidarity, 1910-1923," *Cross Currents: East Asian History and Cultural Review*, 24 (2017), 105-131.

The needs of wartime manufacturing during the late 1910s often offset these concerns. The Korean labor that emerged from the countryside at this time was channeled through an expansive recruitment system geared towards the demands of the metropole's industrial and construction sectors. Under this regime, the Pusan-Shimonoseki line became the site where Korean workers were configured as an underpaid class of labor. Recruitment and terms of employment were set in the Korean countryside, but it was the potential for the denial of passage at the ports that helped enforce these inequalities. During the wartime boom, migrants were contracted for a time span of two to three years. Recruiting more than ten employees required pre-approval from colonial authorities and included contract stipulations about the type of work, hours, methods of payment and savings, expenses, travel fees, and approval for underage workers.³⁵ Later iterations of travel registration required migrants to demonstrate a sufficient degree of fluency in Japanese. Workers also needed to provide proof of employment and document savings sufficient for the price of a return fare.³⁶ A central part of this registration process was the setting of wages prior to departure. While subject to variation, GGK-issued wage charts encouraged pay rates anywhere from thirty to fifty percent lower than that of a Japanese worker.³⁷ Only after completing this process of negotiation and registration could migrants receive the documentation required by port authorities.

³⁵ Kawashima, *ibid.*, 32-33.

³⁶ Ryoo Kyo-Ryul, *ibid.*, 221.

³⁷ Kawashima, *ibid.*, 34; Myung Soo Cha, "Unskilled Wage Gaps within the Japanese Empire," *The Economic History Review*, 68.01 (2015), 23-27.

In spite of these depressed wages, employment options and rates of pay remained for many migrants preferable to conditions on the peninsula.³⁸ Once more, even in its restricted form, the mobility afforded by colonial labor markets was a notable important over what a rural worker could have imagined just decades before. These considerations were further framed by the development of a permanent population of Koreans in Japan and the more flexible channels for employment that came into being alongside. Frequently friends or family already in the metropole mediated positions for workers considering migration.³⁹ With this expansion of the Korean community in Japan also came opportunities for entrepreneurship, which, by the start of the 1940s, accounted for 11 percent of the jobs held by Korean workers in the metropole.⁴⁰

During the first decades of Japanese colonial rule, the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry brought together two entangled phases of economic transformation. On the peninsula, the colonial cadastral survey produced a new population of displaced workers. Drawn to the metropole, these migrants helped drive a wartime expansion of manufacturing and construction. The ferry helped integrate both of these transformations. Yet, at the same time the geographic barrier of the straits allowed for state and economic actors to develop internal constraints on movement through terms of employment that were often precarious and undervalued. Failure to give assent to these conditions could mean the denial of pas-

³⁸ Mikwi Cho, "Koreans Across the Sea: Migration of Labourers to the Metropole, 1910-1937," *European Journal of Korean Studies*, 19.1 (2019), 161-200.

³⁹ Mikwi Cho, *ibid.*, 169.

⁴⁰ Kim Gwang-Yol, *ibid.*, 43.

sage, a phenomenon which became increasingly common as the wartime expansion of Japan's industry sector came to a close.

The Borders of the Empire

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, concern over the rapid growth of the migrant community in the archipelago, combined with an array of pejorative traits assigned to Koreans, stimulated a specific sense of alarm over the question of migration. This sentiment was captured through a perennial discourse on the “domestic migration problem” (*naichi tokō mondai*).⁴¹ It presented Korean migrants as a threat to social stability, a channel for radical ideology, and a source of wage deflation. Fueling these concerns was the rapid growth of the Korean community in Japan. At the start of the 1920s, roughly 31,000 Koreans were residing in the archipelago. Within twenty years, the population swelled to nearly 1,190,000.⁴² Such a rapid increase points to the extent to which the colony and metropole had become socially and economically enmeshed. However, also evident in this story of integration was a pattern of restraint and control. A system of travel screening and permits effectively formatted migrants and incentivized movement elsewhere within the empire. Operating as an instance of remote control over the border, these formations did not seal the metropole from the colony. Nevertheless, transportation-

⁴¹ This phrase can be placed into the discourse on the “Korea Problem” as a whole. See, Kawashima, *ibid.*, 18-21; Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 153; Andre Schmid, “Colonialism and the ‘Korea Problem’ in the Historiography of Modern Japan: A Review Article,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 56:4 (2000). 951-976.

⁴² Kim Gwang-Yol, *ibid.*, 42.

based restraints on migration still exerted considerable influence on the economic and social position of Korean workers headed to Japan.

The Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry was a primary site for the application of these constraints. A paper trail of documents delineated a migrant's journey to formal employment in the metropole, starting from the village and extending all the way to the factory gates. The ferry served as one of the best locations to screen these documents. Such travel requirements were part of a larger matrix of contingency that shaped the experience of Korean workers in Japan. From housing policy and arbitrary firings, to bureaucratic intransigence and wage discrimination, colonial migrants were constantly confronted by everyday uncertainties that heightened their precarity in the market.⁴³ Workers certainly could cross to Japan without documentation, or violate the terms of their contract once in the metropole. However, in either case, their extra-legality in the market would be set.

Rules governing the migration of Korean workers went through several alterations over the course of the colonial era. However, the consistent requirement of documentation meant that restraints of some form was applied throughout the period. During the first phase of migration in the 1910s, Korean migrants headed to the metropole had to produce police issued travel certificates that established the holder's identity, contracted workplace and intended residence. These documents were inspected at the ferry docks where passengers were further required to pass a physical examination prior to boarding.⁴⁴ Starting in 1919, the end of the wartime boom and the outbreak of anti-colonial protests in

⁴³ Kawashima, *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Ryoo Kyo-Ryul, *ibid.*, 220.

Korea resulted in a strict curtailment of travel from the peninsula.⁴⁵ Shortly after, at the urging of the GGK, the entire model of migration control was loosened in favor of a “Free Passage” system. Then, just months later, in the wake of the Kantō Earthquake of 1923 and the frenzy of anti-Korean violence that followed, the Japanese Home Ministry again drastically restricted passage, going so far as to implement a program of migrant repatriation.⁴⁶

These oscillations in migration policy were framed by a consistent demand in Japan for cheap labor. Even the acute xenophobia that followed the 1923 earthquake could not lessen this common denominator. Reconstruction programs hinged on a steady supply of Korean workers and restrictions on Korean migration were loosened within months.⁴⁷ A marker of the importance of this source of labor can be seen in the growth of the Korean community in Japan, which by 1924 had reach 120,000.⁴⁸ Correspondingly, however, was a much larger body of individuals blocked from entry. Between just October and December of 1925, 145,000 migrants were denied passage at the Pusan harbor, swelling the city with workers.⁴⁹ To mitigate this backlog, in the summer of 1928 the Governor General’s Office mandated that ferry passengers carry travel documents from

⁴⁵ Ryoo Kyo-Ryul, *ibid.*, 226.

⁴⁶ “Naeji tohang chehan ūn Chosōnin poho mokchōk” (Limits to Migration in Order to Protect Koreans) *Maeil sinbo*, September 09, 1923; Ryoo Kyo-Ryul, *ibid.*, pp. 223-224; Michael Weiner, “Koreans in the aftermath of the Kanto earthquake of 1923,” *Immigrants & Minorities*, 2:1 (1983), 5-32.

⁴⁷ Kawashima, *ibid.*, 70-71.

⁴⁸ Ryoo Kyo-Ryul, *ibid.*, 218.

⁴⁹ “Naichitokō-sha ga, Pusan ni ishū” (Migrants swarm Pusan) *Chōsen shinbun*, February 18, 1925; Ryoo Kyo-Ryul, *ibid.*, 224.

their local towns.⁵⁰ The aim of this policy was to maintain the dispersal of workers at their locales, recreating the effect of a border across the districts of the peninsula. These policies considerably restrained formal access to wage labor in Japan, a fact reflected by the forty percent drop in the number of migrants travelling on the ferry between 1925 and 1926.⁵¹

In addition to these restrictions on transit, the colonial state also established new initiatives to redirect migrants within the empire at large. First developed in the late 1920s, these programs flourished in the early 1930s as both the global economic depression and a more aggressive strategy of imperial expansion came into being. Workers at this time were given administrative and logistical support to enter labor markets away from Japan.⁵² In the colony, hydroelectric dam projects in the north as well as the development of irrigation and transportation infrastructure in the south were suggested in the press at this time as possible points of divergence.⁵³ Meanwhile, outside of the peninsula, the invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and the establishment of the Japanese dominated state

⁵⁰ “Masumasu zōka suru Chōsen hito no naichitokō-sha, jimoto keisatsusho no shōkai ga nakereba Pusan de zettai ni soshi”(Gradual Increase of Korean migrants to Japan: Migration without Local Police Document to be Prohibited at Pusan) *Chōsen shinbun*, August 08, 1928.

⁵¹ Ryoo Kyo-Ryul, *ibid.*, 224-225.

⁵² Mikwi Cho, *ibid.*, 188.

⁵³ “Chosōnin nodongja nūn Chosōn nae esō sohwa” (Chosōn labourers should be used in Chosōn) *Maeil sinbo*, April 15, 1927; “Manyōn tohang chōji” (Prevention of Rampant Migration), *Tonga ilbo*, May 27, 1927; Ryoo Kyo-Ryul, *ibid.*, 224-225.

of Manchukuo in 1932, led to even more direct attempts to orient Korean migrants northward.⁵⁴

By the mid-1930s, this hybrid of restriction and redirection contributed to a marked reduction in the number of Korean passengers on the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry.

Whereas in 1933 over 146,000 Koreans took the line, the following years saw the number of passengers reduced to 107,000 in 1934, 83,000 in 1935, and 86,000 in 1936.⁵⁵ While passenger rates may have decreased, these figures belie other patterns of migration. By the early 1930s, a series of new ferries to Japan were established at multiple points in Korea. Moreover, along with the development of ever more stringent border regulation, migrants frequently avoided tabulation by turning to a range of informal modes of transport. This trend can be seen in the statistics generated in the metropole. While figures from the ferry suggest a reduction in migration, the Japanese Home Ministry recorded that by 1936 the population of Koreans in Japan had grown to almost 700,000.⁵⁶

By the eve of the Second Sino-Japanese War, movement between the metropole and peninsula approached its peak. In spite of the measures of remote control meant to function as a border between the two regions, formal and informal travel became ever more common. Overcrowding of ships, especially at year's end, clogged the ferry lines

⁵⁴ *Chōsenjin rōdōsha ippan jijō* (The General Status of Korean Labor) (Minamimanshū tetsudō kabushiki gaisha, 1933); “Naeji manyōn tohaengja-rūl Manju-ro ponael pangch'im” (Plan to send migrants to Manchuria instead of Japan) *Maeil sinbo*, February 02, 1933; “Nam-Chosōn ūi nodong imin” (Migrant workers from southern Chosōn) *Maeil sinbo*, December 03, 1935; “Naeji tohaengja wa toManja ka kyōkchūng” (Rapid Increase of Migrants to Japan and Manchuria) *Maeil sinbo*, April 21, 1936; Hyon Ok Park, *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Hong Yōn-jin, *ibid.*, 156-157.

⁵⁶ Ryoo Kyo-Ryul, *ibid.*, 218.

and weather-related cancellations and delays resulted in huge backlogs that frequently brought disruption to the cities that anchored the line.⁵⁷ By the middle of the 1930s, additional ships were introduced between Pusan and Shimonoseki to help deal with the increased flow of people and goods.⁵⁸ With no reduction of movement in sight, occasional voices in the colonial press even circulated the idea of sidelining ferries altogether in favor of a suboceanic tunnel.⁵⁹

The steady increase in intra-state migration in the interwar Japanese empire ensured that the “domestic migration problem” remained a consistent point of public and state concern. Discussions on the topic shifted focus between local dynamics and transnational trends. For instance, a secret 1927 report produced by the GGK’s Bureau of Police Affairs took the issue to be an expression of regional social conditions. Wartime production, the authors explained, followed by rumors of abundant positions, continued to attract Korean migrants. However, the workers’ lack of education, poor job skills and general precarity, left them vulnerable both to nationalist thought and to the appeals of socialist agitation. In turn, the report argued, migrants posed a specific threat to social stability.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ “Renrakusen hikitsuzuki kekkō shi, ryokan wa dai konzatsu notei” (The ferry continues to be delayed, guest houses are overflowing) *Chōsen shinbun*, August 28, 1935.

⁵⁸ Ryoo Kyo-Ryul, *ibid.*, 228.

⁵⁹ “Kwan-Pu yōllaksōn muyong! Chosōn kwa Kuju sai rŭl yōllak hanŭn taehaejō t’ōnnel ūl kyehoek” (The Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry is useless! Plans to link Chosōn and Kyushu with an undersea tunnel) *Maeil sinbo*, July 07, 1935; “Sagahyōn-Masan’gan ūl yōn’gyōl” (Linking Saga and Masan) *Tonga ilbo*, June 29, 1937.

⁶⁰ *Chōsen keisatsu no gaiyō* (An Overview of Policing in Chosōn) (Chōsen sōtokufu keimukyoku, 1927), 158-165.

Other voices were more willing to redirect the discussion of the “domestic migration problem” towards social critique. On the pages of interwar Korean newspapers, often peppered with accounts of the migrants’ trials, editorial sympathy was weighted in favor of the workers. Writing under colonial censorship, pundits used the topic to highlight the inequalities of an imperial system that allowed only some of the population to move freely.⁶¹ Conscious of the dynamics connecting rural poverty, surplus labour, and the deflation of Korean wages in Japan, pundits writing in this vein frequently criticized descriptions of the migrant as aimless.⁶² The problem of migration, the argument went, was more the fault of profiteering industrialists in the metropole and officials in the colony who neglected rural poverty. To some in the press, the problem of migration to Japan could only be solved by the economic enrichment of the colony.⁶³

Elsewhere, the interwar issue of migration in the empire was simply framed by transnational trends. For instance, in a 1934 study produced by the Japanese Ministry of Colonial Affairs, border control was presented as part of a global trend towards greater state oversight on human and capital flows.⁶⁴ In this sweeping study, the migration legislation of multiple states was comparatively analyzed through the lens of post-World War One market dynamics. According to the authors of this work, border policy was a central tool for the state as it attempted to manage the heightened pace of global exchange.

⁶¹ “Chosŏnin tohang e sin chehan” (New limits on Korean migrants) *Tonga ilbo*, April 06, 1928.

⁶² “Nongch’ŏn ūi p’ip’ye” (Rural impoverishment) *Tonga ilbo*, March 31, 1928; “Tohangja chŏji munje e taehaya” (On the question of migration controls) *Tonga ilbo*, December 01, 1928.

⁶³ “Ch’un’gung kwa yuimin” (Seasonal poverty and the floating population) *Tonga ilbo*, March 03, 1922.

⁶⁴ *Kakkoku ijū hōki no jissai*, (The Status of International Migration Regulations) (Takumushō, 1934).

Such comparative studies were attuned to a marked shift in transnational border policy that followed the end of the First World War. Globally, states at this time began to gravitate towards greater control over citizens as a mode of exerting national sovereignty.⁶⁵ However, for polities oriented towards settler colonialism, this reorientation to the nation state was never as clear cut. The ambiguous status of imperial subjects in a Pan-Asian empire like that of Japan, constantly complicated urges to consolidate the borders of the nation. A Korean worker might be viewed as a migrant in the metropole, but in Manchuria they were taken to be full-fledged members of an expanding power.⁶⁶ This uncertainty over the precise boundaries of the polity and its membership, internal to the logic of imperialism itself, frustrated the inclusion of the Japanese empire into the global trends of post-World War One migration policy.

Whether as an expression of a regional-specific phenomenon or a new global trend, writing on the interwar “domestic migration problem” converged on a negation of the colonial relationship. Authors attempting to frame interwar migration policy as a part of global trends passed subaltern subjects as foreign nationals and described provincial boundaries as sovereign borders. Even when the issue was framed as an outcome of market greed or bureaucratic neglect, suggested solutions focused on developing the Korean

⁶⁵ Cheryl Shanks, *Immigration and the politics of American Sovereignty, 1890-1990* (University of Michigan Press, 2001); Leo Lucassen, “The Great War and the Origin of Migration Control in Western Europe and the United States, 1880-1920,” in *Regulation of Migration: International Experiences*, ed. Anita Böcker (Amsterdam, 1998); Carl Strikwerda, “Tides of Migrations, Currents of History: The State Economy and the Transatlantic Movement of Labor in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” *International Review of Social History* 44 (1994): 367-394, 375.

⁶⁶ Hyun Ok Park, *Two Dreams in One Bed: Empire, Social Life, and the Origins of the North Korean Revolution in Manchuria* (Duke University Press, 2005). For more on attempts by the Japanese state to assert imperial power through Manchuria see, Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004); Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (University of California Press, 1998).

economy as though it could be desegregated from the empire. This explicit gradation of sovereign subjects and space was all the more astonishing given that Korea, unlike Manchuria was specifically annexed by Japan. These realities ensured that de-colonized renderings of Korean migrants as foreign would never correspond with the conditions at regional transit points like Pusan. Korean workers seeking passage to Japan were not outsiders within the empire, and the metropole was not some distant shore.

By some metrics, interwar statistics on Korean migration demonstrate the failure of the colonial state to control its “domestic migration problem.” The constellation of collateral, contracts, tests, and screenings that helped enforce a border between the colony and the metropole had clearly failed to bring an end to the mass migration of Korean workers. However, while the border never fully prevented movement, the formative function of the institution remained potent throughout the 1920s and 1930s. During this time, registration and screening systems demanded workers submit to state and market concessions that hardwired terms of employment, and more broadly, the status of their class as racialized subordinates in the metropole. The impact of this system was not lost on Korean migrants and activists at the time, and a politics of resistance quickly emerged to mitigate these constraints.

“We Go on Our Own Boats!”

The structures of migration control enforced at transit points like the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry had two distinct outcomes for Korean migrants bound for Japan. For those able to acquire the correct documentation, migration policy ensured underpaid work

for strictly delineated periods of time. For all others, the policies necessitated informal passage or the use of smuggling networks. As discussed above, the ebb and flow of Korean workers to Japan can be easily charted in the statistics produced by bureaucracies like the Ministry of Railroads.⁶⁷ However, these state records fail to capture the tens of thousands of workers who operated outside normative channels of transportation. Non-sanctioned migration was common, creative and difficult for the state to manage. Equally political and practical circumventions, workers turned to informal migration to assert their freedom of movement and to enter labor markets with a greater degree of flexibility. Meanwhile, radical unionists on both sides of the Korea Strait, took up the right to travel as part of a larger platform of reform.

By the late 1920s and into the 1930s, Korean migrants developed a number of informal tactics to mediate the border. At Pusan, harbor police overseeing the docks were frequently overwhelmed by the high volume of traffic. On any given day and particularly at year's end, the city's piers and moorings were brimming with people, ships, trains, and cargo.⁶⁸ In instances when border controls were more stringent, the city became a bottleneck for thousands seeking passage to Japan.⁶⁹ Those unable to board the ferry had multiple ways to sidestep travel controls. Newspapers of the time reported on how workers stowed away in the coal hoppers and holds of freighters, or in the coolers and storage

⁶⁷ Hong Yŏn-jin, *ibid.*, 156-157.

⁶⁸ “Kujŏng put’ŏ tohang kyŏkchŭng maeil p’yŏnggyun ch’ŏnyŏjung” (Rapid Increase in Passengers Since the New Year, Daily Average of Thousands), *Tonga Ilbo*, February 19, 1928.

⁶⁹ “Naichi tokŏ soshide Pusan de shŭshoku” (Migration blocked, searching for work in Pusan) *Chŏsen shinbun*, December 06, 1925.

rooms of fishing ships.⁷⁰ In some cases, the more brazen would simply commandeer a vessel and set sail on their own.⁷¹ Others mediated the border through the impersonation of registered workers or by purchasing forged documents.⁷² Reports from the period suggest that these counterfeits were plentiful and relatively cheap.⁷³ For instance, in the spring of 1927, a raid on a printing house in Pusan netted thousands of fake travel documents. Stamped with the Harbor Office's official seal, the forgeries were priced at only 5 yen apiece.⁷⁴

These ad hoc arrangements could lead to unfortunate ends. Accounts in the colonial press of the day told of prospective travellers who would pay smugglers for passage only to find no ship at the embarkation point.⁷⁵ At sea, travellers were vulnerable to even greater risks. Passage to Japan was often done on small, overcrowded vessels that loaded and traveled at night.⁷⁶ Moreover, the smugglers' lack of coordination with state officials

⁷⁰ “Mirhang hanūn Sōn-Chiin kisōn t’an’go e chambok chung ch’ep’o” (Koreans and Chinese arrested while hiding in a ship’s coal room) *Maeil sinbo*, March 24, 1925; “Senjin rōdōsha hyakuyomei o kitanai sakanabako ni tsumete Naichi ni mikkō o kuwadatsu” (Roughly a hundred Korean workers packed in dirty fish lockers plotting to smuggle to Japan) *Chōsen shinbun*, April 13, 1926.

⁷¹ “Chosōn changjōng sam-myōng Irin paltongsōn kangt’al mirhang” (Three young Korean men steal a Japanese owned motorboat to sail for Japan), *Tonga ilbo*, March 04, 1927.

⁷² “ToIl chūngmyōng wijo susang esō p’ich’ak” (Counterfeiter of travel permits to Japan captured by police), *Tonga ilbo*, January 17, 1928; “Kyōngch’al ūi injang ūl saegyō tohang chūngmyōng ūl wijo sibyo-myōng ūn musahi kōnnōga pōmin ūn palgak p’ich’ak” (Counterfeit travel permits with fake police seal: ten people safely crossed while the offender was discovered and arrested) *Maeil sinbo*, April 27, 1929; Mikwi Cho, *ibid.*, 187.

⁷³ “Munsō wijo ka maeil sam-sa kōn” (Several counterfeit cases daily) *Tonga ilbo*, December 23, 1928.

⁷⁴ “Pusan susōin kwa toIl chūngsō wijo” (Counterfeit travel permits to Japan with the Pusan port authority seal) *Tonga ilbo*, March 27, 1927.

⁷⁵ “Nodongja mirhang k’ojō sambaekyō-wōn p’yōnch’wi” (Migrant smuggling case, 300 yen defrauded), *Tonga ilbo*, September 01, 1929; “Iyōngmalli esō paekyō tongp’o panghwang” (Far from home hundreds of migrants wander), *Tonga ilbo*, May 20, 1927.

⁷⁶ “Pōmsōn, paltongsōn ūro mohōmjōk mirhang” (Risky smuggling voyages with sailboats and motorized vessels), *Tonga ilbo*, May 17, 1927.

left them exposed to the dangers of the passage. This could lead to predictably tragic results. In the winter of 1935, one capsized transport drifted for three days before its survivors were discovered.⁷⁷ Even more tragic events were common. In the fall of 1934, the *Yonggunghwan* capsized and sank in a storm while smuggling a group of migrants to Japan. Of the fifty-nine people onboard only five were rescued.⁷⁸ Again, in the winter of 1940, one hundred and thirty migrants drowned when the *Chiyŏng* sank as it attempted a similar voyage.⁷⁹

Framed in part by this context, unionists in both Japan and Korea decried the impact that regulatory barriers and high transportation costs had on migrants. According to some in the labor movement, the best way to mitigate these systemic restraints was by further integrating the markets of the colony and metropole. For several years at the start of the 1930s, one organization in particular, the East Asian Transport Union, proposed to achieve these ends through a return to a system of “Free Passage” on collectively owned transport ships. Operating under the slogan, “we go on our own boats” this organization identified intra-imperial borders as a definitive feature of labor relations. According to activists connected to this movement, maritime transportation routes between the colony and Japan were a source of obstruction, not integration. Correspondingly, the easing of

⁷⁷ “Mirhang paltongsŏn chŏnbok toeŏ sam-ilgan haesang p’yoryu” (Smuggling Motorboat Capsizes, Adrift for Three Days), *Tonga Ilbo*, January 31, 1935.

⁷⁸ “Mirhangsŏn i p’okp’ung e chŏnbok osip-sa-myŏng i chŏnmol” (Smuggling Vessel Capsizes in Storm, Fifty-four Drown), *Tonga ilbo*, November 20, 1934.

⁷⁹ “Mirhangsŏn Chiyŏnghwan ch’immol ilbaek-samsip-myŏng iksa” (The smuggling ship the Chiyŏng sinks: one hundred and thirty drown) *Tonga ilbo*, January 08, 1940.

restraints on movement was held to be one of the best ways to deliver greater autonomy for workers in an empire-wide labor market.

These views guided the tactics and advocacy developed by the East Asian Transport Union. Formed at the start of the 1930s, the group linked migrant communities on both sides of the Korea Strait. Locally, the organization's stated aim was to undermine a transport monopoly held by two private ferry companies that operated between Jeju, a large island located to the southeast of the Korean peninsula, and the industrial hub of Osaka.⁸⁰ With deep roots in the migrant and activist communities of both of these locations, the East Asian Transport Union quickly grew to include almost 12,000 members.⁸¹

Much of the group's efforts were focused on the localized issues of transportation costs and conditions. However, as the name of the organization suggests, the leadership of the East Asian Transport Union were also purposeful focused on the larger issue of migration in the colonial context. In one proclamation from 1931, a writer for the union decried the regional systems of migrant transit, noting that ferry companies in general mistreated passengers during voyages and extorted migrants with inflated ticket and

⁸⁰ Hwang Kyung-Soo, "Haebang ijön üi Chejudo-Ilbon hangno t'amsaek kwa kwan'gwang chawõnhwa pangan," (The searching and tourism resource plan of Jeju-Japan sea route before independence) *Journal of the Korean Regional Development Association* 20:1 (2008): 113-132.

⁸¹ Kim Ch'ang-hu, "ChaeIl Chejuin kwa Tonga t'onghang chohap undong" (Jeju Islanders in Japan and the East Asian Transport Union Movement). *Chejudosa yõn'gu* 4 (1995): 109-143; "Tonga t'onghang chohap," (The East Asian Transport Union) *Tonga ilbo*, December 01, 1930.

shipping fees.⁸² A union report from 1932 continued to highlight these regional issues.⁸³ The group called for the construction of better transport ships, reduced prices, and the protection of migrants from exorbitant costs. Centrally, the organization lobbied for the abolishment of border controls between the colony and the metropole, and more broadly the end to constraints on migration and discrimination based on nationality.⁸⁴

The East Asian Transport Union employed a number of tactics to achieve these aims. The group's 1932 report outlined a campaign that included literacy programs, the recruitment of ferry passengers, onboard performances, speeches, and targeted boycotts.⁸⁵ Building off of these mobilization and outreach efforts, the group's most highly-profiled intervention came through the establishment of a collectively owned ferry line. In keeping with the organization's specific local goals, this union-run ferry was meant to help reduce the high costs of travel between Osaka and Jeju. However, the program also included designs to expand service regionally, with the stated aim of eventually replacing privately contracted transportation.⁸⁶

⁸² "Chŏn'guk tohang nodongja chegun ege koham" (Statement to the nation's fellow migrant workers) in Kang Chaeŏn, "Chejudo wa Taep'an: Taep'an esŏ ūi Tonga t'onghang chohap kwa nodong undong" (Jeju Island and Osaka: the East Asian Transport Union and the Labour movement of Osaka) *Jeju Island Studies* 13 (1996): 281-289.

⁸³ "Tonga t'onghang chohap che 3-hoe chŏnggi taehoe ūian ch'oan" (Report from the third annual East Asian Transport Union conference) in Pak Kyŏng-sik, *Chaell Chosŏnin kwallyŏn charyo ch'ongsŏ p'yŏn che 12-kwŏn* (Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 1994): 339-359.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Pak Kyŏng-sik, *ibid.*, 332-345.

⁸⁶ "Tonga t'onghang chohap Kyoryonghwan ch'ulhang" (The East Asian Transport Union's Kyoryong sets sail), *Tonga ilbo*, November 07, 1930.

The initiative received generous coverage in the colonial press.⁸⁷ The East Asian Transport Union's development was closely charted and its ferry program in particular was praised as an instance of much needed Korean economic autonomy and collective action.⁸⁸ For instance, in an editorial column of the *Oriental Daily News*, one commentator asserted that the union was a fitting illustration of the broader economic awakening underway among migrants in Japan. The paper favorably likened Korean workers in the metropole to the German and Irish diaspora in America, or the overseas Chinese of Southeast Asia.⁸⁹ According to this appraisal, the union highlighted a new attentiveness to the power of collective action, which the editor took to be an avenue for economic renewal in the colony itself. This theme was reprised by the same column a year later when the paper pointed to the ferry union as an example of Korea's nascent maritime culture. Drawing parallels to the Phoenicians, the author suggested that the union was a prophetic manifestation of the peninsula's nautical and historical potential.⁹⁰

These evaluations were in striking contrast with the literature produced by the union. The organization's publications generally lacked the flourishes that characterized

⁸⁷ By 1932, the East Asian Transport Union came under increasing political pressure from police, economic pressure from competitors and ideological pressure from other activist groups. The union was dissolved in January 1934. See, "Seishūtō ni okeru tōa tsūkō kumiai-in no bōkō jiken hanketsu yōshi" (A Summary of the Judgment on the Acts of Violence by Members of the East Asian Transport Union of Jeju Island) *Shisō geppō*, vol. 5 (May, 1932).

⁸⁸ "Manyō Chejudomin pun'gi charyōk ūro t'onghang kaesi" (Ten thousand Jeju islanders rise up and open their own transport route) *Chosōn ilbo*, November 1930; "Cheju-Daep'an'gan ūi hangno kyōngjaeng usim mijūngyu ūi chōga rūl hyōnch'ul hamyō sagakchōn kaesi" (A four-way war opens: transport costs between Osaka and Jeju lower than ever before) *Maeil sinbo*, January 23, 1931; "Tonga t'onghang chohap tasi t'onghang kaesi" (East Asian Transport Union reopens line) *Chungang ilbo*, December 05, 1931.

⁸⁹ "ChaeP'an tongp'o ūi changdo" (The aims of our compatriots in Osaka) *Tonga ilbo*, November 04, 1930.

⁹⁰ "Tonga t'onghang chohap ūi paljōn" (The development of the East Asian Transport Union) *Tonga ilbo*, November 21, 1931.

its coverage in the colonial press, but in important ways it was far more grounded. Glowing appraisals, like the ones offered by the editors at the *Oriental Daily News*, hardened a border between the colony and the periphery, and in turn the logic of the “domestic migration problem.” In such reporting, the East Asian Transit Union was singled out because of its apparent promise for the economic potential of the peninsula. By contrast, union writers generally avoided reductions of intra-imperial migration to zone specific concerns. For these activists, the presence of colonial workers in the metropole was an expression of an imperial economy, not an issue that could be reduced to the same borders that confounded the migrants on the daily basis. Rather than suggest that its tactics were part of a developmentalist intervention specific to the historical, geographic, or economic conditions of the peninsula, the East Asian Transport Union’s politics highlighted the fundamental entanglement of colonial conditions and industrial markets. Union reports stressed the connections between the exploitation of Korea migrants and colonial policies. Similarly, they stressed the relationship between the depopulation of the agricultural economy and the creation of a devalued market for temporary workers.⁹¹ It was in part because of this history of imperial market integration that activists called for a return to the “Free Passage” system. For union writers, this was among the most effective ways to improve the status of workers who otherwise were compelled to occupy an economic role determined by their means of arrival. The unstated point of this final position, as well as of the analysis that informed such a conclusion, was that the “domestic migration

⁹¹ Pak Kyöng-sik, *ibid.*, 327.

problem” in the empire could only be resolved by redefining the scope of the domestic itself.

Smuggling routes and informal modes of passage allowed Korean migrants to bypass travel restrictions, but illegal migration did not prevent them from encountering the impact of transport infrastructure or the borders that they helped maintain. The documentation required for legal passage, ensured that Korean labor in Japan would remain underpaid and precarious. For those operating outside of legal transportation routes, this exposure to the contingencies and exploitations of everyday life as a colonial migrant were analogous, if not even more acute. However, circumvention of transport infrastructure did allow for workers to exercise a greater degree of autonomy over the conditions of their lives. Moreover, as argued by voices of opposition like the East Asian Transport Union, rather than depend on the colonial state to resolve the issue of rural poverty, the interests of migrants would be better served by the dissolution of the structures at the border that codified them as precarious itinerates.

The End of the Line

The onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 and its expansion into the Asia-Pacific War in 1941 brought the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry to a frenetic end. With the empire’s transition to a wartime footing, earlier policies meant to regulate and restrain the flow of Korean labor to Japan were rapidly loosened. The National Mobilization Law of 1938, along with additional legislation the following year, eased restrictions on the

movement of Korean workers.⁹² By 1944, there were over 2 million Koreans in Japan.⁹³ Correspondingly, accounts from this time described the Pusan harbor as perennially crowded, with the ferry system struggling to accommodate the vast numbers of workers, conscripts, and general passengers traveling to and from the metropole.⁹⁴

Ships that serviced the line at this time bore the markings of the empire's militarization. Ferries were painted a bluish-grey to help camouflage them while at sea. On their decks anti-aircraft stations scanned the horizon for threats. The possibility of attack grew with the passing months and was realized with greatest loss on the October 5th, 1943 when one of the line's newest ships, the *Konronmaru* was torpedoed by an American submarine.⁹⁵ Regular operation of the ferry service between Pusan and Shimonoseki finally ended in June of 1945. Allied air raids, submarine attacks and the planting of nautical mines in the waters around Shimonoseki forced the harbor and the ferry to cease operation. What remained of the lines' ships was diverted to Fukuoka.⁹⁶

For four decades, the maritime transportation infrastructure that linked Korea with Japan played duelling roles. While clearly a mode of territorial cohesion and spatial inte-

⁹² Ryoo Kyo-Ryul, *ibid.*, 229.

⁹³ Ryoo Kyo-Ryul, *ibid.*, 230-233.

⁹⁴ "Pusanhang taehollan: yöllaksön mot t'an sünggaek sat'ae" (Pusan harbour in tumult: passengers said to be unable to take ferry) *Maeil sinbo*, July 09, 1940; "Yöllaksön chiyön e Pusanhang hollan" (Pusan harbour in a state of confusion with the ferry's delay) *Maeil sinbo*, July 29, 1940.

⁹⁵ "Yöllaksön Kollyunhwan ch'immol akkwijök chamsuham üi noegyök ül patko" (The ferry the *Konronmaru* is sunk: torpedoed by enemy submarine) *Maeil sinbo*, October 08, 1943.

⁹⁶ After the war the ferry resumed to help with the vast project of repatriation. the last voyage along the route was in April of 1949. See, Ch'oe Yöng-ho, "Ilbon üi p'aejön kwa Pu-Kwan yöllaksön: Pu-Kwan hangno üi kwihwanjadül" (The defeat of Japan and the Busan-Shimonoseki cross-channel liner: repatriates on the channel liner). *Han-Il minjok munje yön'gu*, 11 (2006): 243-287.

gration, ferry lines also helped demarcate a border between the metropole and its closest colony. For Korean migrants, this border turned travel into a process of configuration that heightened their precarity in the labor markets of Japan. The system of contracts, travel permits and screening procedures that Korean migrants were required to mediate prior to boarding effectively formatted their position in the metropole. Such mechanisms delineated the peninsula and the archipelago even as annexation and ever increasing rates of travel bound the two together. As highlighted in the sections above, elements of these bureaucratic barriers operated as a mode of remote control over the border.

Attempts to mitigate the effects of the border speak to the power of these formations. The wide-spread instances of non-sanctioned passage point to the continued willingness of migrants to exercise what agency they could over their movement in imperial labor markets. Similarly, unionist opposition of ferry routes and border controls clearly expressed the need to frame the issue of migration within the colonial context. For these activists and migrants alike, the “domestic migration problem” was an issue of intra-imperial borders and it could only be resolved by allowing migrants to travel as they pleased.