Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945, by Mark Caprio. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009. 320 pp. US$ 35.00. ISBN: 978-0-295-98901-3 (paperback)

That this book has already received favourable reviews from leading scholars in the field is a reflection of its positive contributions to a subject that has attracted strong, sometimes polarized viewpoints. Yet although several scholars, in addition to travelers and journalists at the time, have analysed Japan's colonial policy towards Korea at various depths, this and Alexis Dudden's 2005 work are the only full-length studies to date. The book is written in a very readable style, marked by well-researched descriptions and felicitously presented arguments.

Caprio opens his work with examples of Koreans who embraced Japan's doctrine of *naisen ittai* 內鮮一體 ("Japan and Korea are one body"), formulated towards the end of the colonial period, to introduce the main questions of his study: what position did Japan envision Koreans taking in the Japanese empire; and how justified was the belief of some Koreans that by the 1940s Japan was putting into practice, in a manner beneficial to Koreans, the logical outcome of the assimilation policy? His answer, put simply, is that these Koreans' optimism was misplaced for several reasons: the purpose of the intense assimilation of colonized people as nationals provided for by *naisen ittai* was to secure political allegiance during a time of war; bringing this about required holding out a carrot of eventual true assimilation as citizens, but was backed by a stick that contradicted this carrot—hard military power and eradication of Korean culture and identity; and assimilation was in any case not possible when the administrative practices embodied the colonizers' belief in their permanent superiority over the colonized.

In support of these conclusions, we are first treated to a detailed summary of the options provided to the Japanese by the colonial theories and practices of Western nations. The most important parts are the nature of England's "internal colonization" of Scotland, Wales and Ireland, and the advanced degree to which Japan kept abreast of and studied their expansionist activities (although this is undermined somewhat in the concluding section where the Japanese are charged with a superficial understanding of it). The discussion of English internal colonization certainly makes the Korean supporters of at least Japanese political assimilation much more understandable and indeed cogent

and practical, especially since it indicated that a matter as important to national identity as language culture could be retained and that Welsh and Scottish royalty could occupy the British throne.

Caprio takes issue with scholars who claim Meiji Japan's expansionism was a "late starter," arguing instead that its "internal assimilation" of Ezo (Hokkaidō) and Ryūkyū was already the business of expansion. Furthermore, the idea that the annexation of Korea was anomalous because it was a highly populated nation within the same order of civilisation entails too arbitrary a distinction between "internal assimilation" and "peripheral assimilation" of peoples not geographically and culturally contingent. Even so, Caprio provides plenty of fuel for those who wish to portray Japanese imperialism as a surrogate for the West, claiming Japan used Euro-U.S. examples as models by which to legitimize their policies and measure their success. Although he does not go the whole hog, pointing out that by 1910 Japan was a fairly experienced colonial power that might have learned from its own experiences, he states this only conditionally and vitiates it in the conclusion by claiming Japan failed to learn from its own experiences. Nevertheless, he has carried out admirable, extensive research on the process whereby Japan chose the assimilation policy, and henceforth anyone who wishes to argue one way or the other on this issue is compelled to tackle at least the same amount of work and engage the evidence he has adduced.

The following chapters provide detailed and helpful discussion of Japan's internal expansion, the transition to Korean colonization, the impact of the 1919 March First independence movement on assimilation policy, the nature of the "cultural policy," its replacement by *naisen ittai*, and the positions of Korean critics and supporters of this policy. The narrative and analysis throughout lead finally to a more explicit statement of the conclusions listed in the second paragraph above. The style is fluent and the analysis of complex matters is deft. At a number of points, however, a reader might be forgiven for wondering whether Caprio is offering any new thesis, or synthesis or conclusion, and what constitutes the core of his contribution. The work certainly advances our knowledge, but how far does this knowledge advance our understanding?

For example, when it is suggested that the principal lessons Japan should have taken from its study of Western precedents was "the importance of gaining the support of the colonized, as well as the need to convince their own people of the colonized people's new imperial position" (p. 48), it comes to mind that R. H. Mitchell already concluded back in 1967 that Japan undermined their

carrot with their stick of a discriminatory superiority complex. Even Caprio's concluding remark that the main reason Japan's assimilation policy was fatally flawed was its failure to "rally the people around the idea of including Koreans in their livelihoods as fellow imperial subjects" (pp. 211-12), is a restatement of Mitchell's insight. Regarding the ambiguity of Korea as internal or peripheral colony and the task of the Government-General to develop Korean potential to attain equality with Japanese citizens, chapter three restates a view held at least since the 1960s, including its suggestion that the March First Movement demonstrated that Japanese assimilation policy was a signal failure. Does Caprio provide any insights or conclusions that substantially advance those of Lee Chong-sik's *Politics of Korean Nationalism* (University of California Press, 1963)? It is also troubling that he does not engage with Dudden's *Japan's Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), since she takes a clear stand on the problem of measuring Japan's policies and practices against Western norms: simple courtesy itself would acknowledge her work.

Caprio provides a more sensitive treatment of Japanese cultural policy in the 1920s than his antecedents. Although we already know that education remained separate and unequal, we learn that Japan nevertheless compares well with other imperial powers in this regard, especially in the attempt to introduce schools for both Japanese and Koreans. And although the problem of rhetoric and reality on the cultural policy is well known, Caprio reveals that even the rhetoric abounded in ulterior motives and aims. Still, in the end he concludes with the long-held judgment: "These reforms did not bring Koreans much closer to assimilation, but they did provide the Japanese with important means to observe and control their indigenous independence movements" (p. 140). Unfortunately, although he does later touch briefly on the question whether the Koreans had any desire to be assimilated in any case, he does not consider whether this might be one reason the reforms failed to advance assimilation.

Of course, if sustained research confirms some main findings of the past, the only responsible course for a scholar is to confirm them. But in places Caprio is simply filling in positions already clearly known with further examples: "Not everyone endorsed Japanese assimilation policy," citing Shiratori Kurakichi (p. 84), simply adds another voice to the skepticism of Suehiro Shigeru and others over the practicability of the policy on the ground. But overall, the book does not simply add more detail. It does two things: it considers scholarship to date (with one exception), its areas of agreement and contention, and measures

these against the evidence unearthed; and it provides historically pertinent global and local contexts by which to understand the findings of Caprio's own careful sifting of evidence. In this sense, it is a valuable work. Even where it seconds views already held, it does not provide comfort for the kind of simple judgments or partisan positions that are still too often forwarded when referring either to Japanese colonial policy or Korean responses.

Certainly, the additional information on views on assimilation held by the Japanese based in Korea provides an important new source of Japanese viewpoints that obviously had very practical consequences for whatever policy was chosen. These thus go much further to explain the depth of the contradictions to the rhetoric of racial and cultural kinship found in social attitudes and administrative conduct of Japanese in Korea. The presentation of the viewpoints of the Japanese, and of the Koreans who supported assimilation, at least in the final seven years, does increase our understanding of their positions and the amount of often painful thought that went into it. Caprio above all humanises the narrative, which is no small contribution and a refreshing change.

It is with the arguments advanced in support of his conclusions that scholars will most usefully engage. The main argument of the work concerns the poorness of the choice made for total assimilation, since it was not only unrealistic in the context of the Japanese inability to match its attitudes and administration with its rhetoric of accepting Koreans as full and equal members of an expanded Japanese nation-state but is also inherently unworkable.

In chapter 5, Caprio gives as the context for Japan's withdrawal of the cultural policy in the latter 1920s its "mounting crisis on the Asian continent" (p. 141), which led to adoption of *naisen ittai* following the outbreak of war with China. In this regard, it has been hard to see how even pro-Japanese elements could possibly have believed that Japan's determination to have Korean people join the war effort against China and later the West signified an advance in Japan's acceptance of Koreans as equal partners, especially when they shut down Korean newspapers and mobilized extra police to cope with Koreans who objected to their militarization on behalf of Japan's imperial expansion. But Caprio helps us understand better how it worked. Yet surely the same thing was being done to the Japanese people in Japan proper, who could not organise any independent movement on the war. So there was equality of sorts!

The analysis of the continued ambivalence of colonial policy is useful:

now that it had to harness full Korean support, it both praised Korean advances in civilization and competency and moved to "eradicate Korean culture and identity." But this, the argument goes, was the logic of assimilation in the context of the times. But would an integration policy be more viable? Assimilation can hardly be a two-way process, whereby both sides take on each other's colours and together create a different colour; but in a power imbalance as obvious as a colonizer/colonized relationship, even integration could hardly be a two-way process. Does this leave segregation, wherein a select social stratum learns the language and administrative arts of the imperial power, as the only workable alternative to total assimilation at that time?

In chapter 6, rather than enter the fray over defining patriot *versus* collaborator, Caprio claims he presents the views of Koreans at different poles in order to evaluate how appropriate and effective Japan's assimilation policy was. But he does enter the fray, definitely, by framing the issue thus: "With the world quickly moving toward war, did it make more sense for Korea to seek independence or to seek autonomy within the context of a greater East Asian alliance?" (p. 173). For proponents of the collaborator thesis do not accept a framework that opens the possibility of "collaborators" holding a coherent position with Korea's advantage in its sights.

On this topic, I concur entirely with his position that those whose "opinions are most fitting are those most directly affected by Japanese rule—those who remained on the Korean peninsula" (p. 174). Here, his discussion does break new ground and it is impossible not to come away with a more complete understanding of the culturalist and gradualist stances, or to see how the "collaborators" advanced many of the same critiques of the contradictions that marked colonial practice, namely, that the main obstacle to Korean willingness to be assimilated was not their attitudes but those of the Japanese, for however assiduously and sincerely Koreans endeavoured to adapt to Japanese civilization, it was all completely in vain if the Japanese were unwilling to recognise them as their equals.

Bravely, Caprio's conclusion broaches questions that are irredeemably speculative: had Japan emerged victorious in 1945 and had it had its originally conceived period of 50 to 100 years to prepare them, would they have successfully assimilated the Koreans? No, Caprio answers, they would not, and backs this with an argument that there are historical grounds on which we can approach this counter-historical question: the clear evidence of deep flaws in

Japan's choice of assimilation and its practice of colonial rule.

Space does not permit engagement here with the series of misperceptions, discrepancies and original faulty choice of colonial policy that Caprio adduces as together making the Japanese colonization of Korea fatally flawed. I will conclude simply by querying whether in this section he is consistent with his own insistence that we frame the narrative in terms of the historical context within which the policy was debated, chosen and implemented. It might be the case that it is impossible for a nation to assimilate a people that they consider inferior. Yet in the context of the times, as opposed to the much earlier times of England's policy towards Wales and Scotland, the social-Darwinist nation-state system required cultural homogeneity, and so if a power aimed at incorporating a conquered people into its own nation-state polity, total assimilation was the natural policy to implement. It could be argued with reference to experiences elsewhere in the 1960s and 1970s that where total cultural assimilation did not occur, maintenance of colonial territories was impossible. But that, of course, was at bottom the Korean culturalists' argument, and we could speculate, too, whether their position might have found some vindication had war not intervened.

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