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**Chapter 1**

**Emigration as a Japanese National Project:**

**A History of Japanese Emigration**

Ginyu Igei (1908–2005) left his native village of Kinson, Okinawa in November 1934 to work as a teacher in a Japanese school in Peru. Kinson was a poor farming village and had to rely on, and prospered from, the money sent by emigrants who had left the village. Emigration was widely regarded in the village as a quick way to make money and climb up the social ladder. Many of Mr. Igei’s friends and relatives had also emigrated to Hawaii, the United States, Brazil, and Peru.

At that time, emigration was Japan’s national project. To encourage emigration, the government provided subsidies to those who left for Brazil and Peru. Prospective emigrants in Okinawa received a 10-day training program at the Okinawan Oceanic Center to become “proper emigrants” before setting sail on the long overseas journey (Igei 1993; Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1971). “If emigration was the same national policy as conscription, it was better to leave the country than to die in a war,” Mr. Igei told me. “By working hard abroad and sending money home, I could still contribute to my country.” Mr. Igei indeed worked hard as a “proud immigrant” in Peru. After completing his initial assignment to work as a Japanese teacher, he engaged in farming and opened a clothing shop in Lima. During World War II, his shop was looted, his properties were confiscated, and he was “kidnapped” and imprisoned by the Peruvian police and the American FBI on suspicions of espionage. Overcoming the “mountains and rivers” in life, he said, he dedicated much of his life after the war to the development of Lima’s Japanese community. Later on, he earned national honorary medals from the Japanese and Peruvian governments in recognition of these efforts.

However, none of this was what he had originally planned when he first left Kinson. His initial intention was to return to Okinawa after five years upon completing his mission to build a Japanese school for *nisei,* Peruvian-born children of Japanese immigrants. He had never dreamed of settling in a land so far away from home. Nor had he imagined that he would never see his father again. On the relatively cold day of November 9, 1934, Mr. Igei and his wife set out on their 56-day sea voyage, promising to return “soon” and leaving behind family members and 1,200 fellow village onlookers waving and crying, “Build an Okinawan colony in Peru, and come back quickly!”

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The history of Japanese emigration is a story of one million individuals, like Mr. Igei, who left with hopes and ambitions and endured years of hardship in a foreign land. This story is also a history of Japan’s national development. The Japanese state led the way by adopting emigration as part of its national project and, subsequently, shaping the lives of many immigrants abroad. What was at stake for the Japanese state, and how was emigration induced? Who left Japan and under what circumstances? This chapter traces the history of *emigration—*who left, how, and why*—*before turning to the history of *immigration —*how immigrants settled and adapted in the host society*—*in the next chapter.

**I. How Japanese Emigration Began**

Much of Japanese emigration in the modern era (since 1868) was carried out as a state-led project.[[1]](#footnote-1) During the Tokugawa feudal period (1600–1867), Japan was largely closed and isolated, with limited contact with the outside world.[[2]](#footnote-2) When that regime came to an end, the new era, initiated in 1868 by the Meiji Restoration, began to look outward and promoted emigration as a tool for its “modernization” efforts. As in many European countries, emigration was an integral part of the nation-building process (Green and Weil 2007).

Emigration began in 1868 with a group of 153 farmers who left for Hawaii to work on sugar mills and plantations[[3]](#footnote-3) (Idei 1930; Ishikawa Tomonori 1997; Ogishima 1939; Tigner 1981). Following this, over one million people left the country altogether, mostly for the Americas, although during the immediate pre-WWII period (1932–1945), some 220,000 people also headed to Manchuria through Japan’s national migration-colonization policy (JICA 1994; See Figure 1). Many of these emigrants were sent by the state, either directly or indirectly, or through private emigration companies that worked in close cooperation with the government.

Overall, the patterns of, and state motives for, emigration reflected Japan’s ambivalent position in the geopolitical order, caught between “the West” and “Asia,” as the Japanese elites perceived at that time (Oguma 1998). Since opening its ports in 1854 to Western powers, Japan was subjected to various unbalanced treaties, which granted extra-territorial rights beyond the Japanese legal framework to Westerners stationed in Japan (Moriyama 1984). Fearful of these encroaching powers, the Meiji leaders made a conscious decision to “enrich and empower the country.” Of utmost importance for the leaders was catching up with the technologically and militarily more advanced “West,” and enhancing their country’s international status in the midst of swift modernization and political transformation. Central to this project was emigration.

Emigration was viewed as important for national development in four ways: (1) relief of population pressure; (2) economic growth; (3) food and resource security; and (4) colonialism and geopolitical expansion (Tigner 1981). An underlying concern for the state was how to manage and utilize its population. Although people were a critical resource for the nascent Meiji government, too many of them posed a burden, especially when rapid population growth coincided with increased demands on the state (Fitzgerald 2009). At the same time, the government hoped to bring in resources by sending people abroad. Consequently, while emigrants were pushed out of Japan to release population pressure, they were simultaneously incorporated as part of the greater Japanese nation to gain political and economic leverage abroad. It is in this way that Japanese emigration began.

***(1) Emigration as a Demographic Solution***

Throughout the history of Japanese emigration, the dominant official rationale for emigration was to address the problem of overpopulation. The Meiji era saw rapid population growth, accompanied by rapid industrialization, and the government viewed it with alarm as an impediment to development. During much of the Tokugawa period (1600–1867), the population remained stable at about 30 million, but it grew to 38 million in 1888 and to 51 million in 1910 (Idei 1930; Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1949, 1958, 1971; Yoshida 1909). This quickly became “a problem” in a country of limited arable land and resources, which already had a high population density (Crocker 1931; Idei 1930; Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1958). The problem was considered particularly acute in rural areas suffering from severe and widespread poverty, and was further aggravated after World War II when six million soldiers were repatriated from various parts of the dissolved Japanese empire (Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975).

Following the end of the war, Japan had to cope with food shortages and massive unemployment, and emigration was used as an escape valve to relieve population pressure. Similar to the Netherlands, which exported unemployment to Germany in the early twentieth century (Van Eijl and Lucassen 2007) and Britain, that “shoveled out paupers” to the United States and Australia during the nineteenth century (Green and Weil 2007), emigration served as a means of alleviating poverty and demographic chaos (Endoh 2009).

Although demography was a principal official reason for justifying emigration, there were other, and more important, motives behind it. In fact, emigration did not solve Japan’s population “problem.” In hindsight, the approximately one million emigrants sent abroad between 1868 and the 1970s constituted merely 2.5% of the country’s population growth during that period. The rate was indeed negligible compared to the comparable figures for England (74.2%), Italy (46.8%), and Germany (14.6%) (Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975). The total number of emigrants was also very small, given that over 50 million people left Europe between 1820 and 1930; the United Kingdom alone sent 18 million between 1846 and 1932, and about 13 million Italians emigrated between 1880 and 1915 (Choate 2008; Ishikawa 1997). Moreover, while emigration was encouraged, there was an influx of laborers from Japan’s newly acquired overseas colonies. Among them were 770,000 Koreans who were brought into Japan between 1917 and 1927 to meet the growing demand for manual laborers (Idei 1930). Emigration, therefore, represented more than a means of population reduction, as will be explained below.

***(2) Emigration for Economic Development***

Emigration was encouraged, first of all, for Japan’s economic development. Just as many developing countries today rely on emigrant remittances (Agunias and Newland 2012), Meiji Japan sought to accumulate foreign capital, acquire advanced technologies, and foster trade by sending emigrants to prosperous destinations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1971; Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975). Despite the relatively small number of actual emigrants, the money they sent back home was nonetheless significant. According to Shiga (1887), the $100,000 sent by Hawaii emigrants alone provided a “significant reserve of foreign currency” in 1887 (Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975). In 1933, remittances, totaling 98.6 million yen, constituted as much as 10% of Japan’s total trade surplus (Suzuki 1992). Although precise statistics are scarce, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized the important role remittances played throughout the course of Japanese emigration history in its publication, “The 100-Year History of Japanese Emigration” (1971). In addition to remittances, the report also made mention of return visits by emigrants, estimating that in 1967 alone they spent over 1.5 billion yen during their visits to the “homeland” (ibid., p. 12).

Through emigration, the government also tried to boost trade as part of its strategy for economic development. The government envisioned that emigrants would promote Japanese products abroad because they often consume and buy products from their native country. The export of Japanese foodstuffs, called *takuan boeki* (trading of Japanese pickled radishes), did indeed grow, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1971), thanks to emigrants who were “fond of consuming green tea, kelp, pickled plums, and other uniquely Japanese products” (p. 13). In this way, emigrants were regarded as agents for development for stimulating trade, promoting industries, and acquiring modern skills and technology from abroad (Nihon Kaigai Kyokai 1950; Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975).

***(3) Emigration for Food and Resource Security***

Emigration was also viewed as a means to secure raw materials and food. It was particularly important for Japan, a resource-scarce country with limited arable land. To secure foodstuffs, the Japanese government sought to expand agricultural production by sending emigrant farmers to Brazil and elsewhere (Endoh 2009; Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975). The government’s strategy was to establish Japanese farming “colonies” abroad by purchasing plots of land and having emigrants engage in agricultural production. In this way, the emigrants often cultivated export products, such as soy and vegetables, for Japan’s domestic consumption.

Similarly, cotton produced by emigrants served as a crucial raw material for Japan’s industrial development. As cotton became a key commodity to the country’s pre-war industrialization and export industries, its production grew in Peru and Brazil in the 1920s and 1930s using Japanese capital and labor. Several cotton trade companies sprang up in these countries with the support of government subsidies. These companies relied on Japanese emigrant labor to produce raw cotton; much of it was then shipped to Japan where textile materials were produced, and some finished products were exported back to foreign markets (Tigner 1978). In the late 1930s, the Japanese produced some 25% of the cotton crop in Peru (Tigner 1981), which resulted in growing public animosity over “the Japanese monopoly” and an increased trade imbalance in favor of Japan (See Chapter 2).

A principal motive behind these efforts was to expand and diversify the country’s trade base via emigration. The government viewed it as critical to establish diverse trade partners and production routes to assure the supply of raw materials, particularly in the turbulent times of the early twentieth century. When anti-Japanese movements spread throughout the West in the 1930s, Japan turned to Brazil for raw cotton, buying less from U.S. and British-Indian suppliers (Endoh 2009). When supplies were cut elsewhere, the government sought resources in Japanese colonies and settlements abroad. In this way, farms established by emigrants became “overseas platforms for Japan’s global resource security strategy” (Endoh 2009). Subsequently, they paved the way for Japan’s territorial expansion abroad.

***(4) Emigration for Territorial Expansion and Colonialism***

Territorial expansion was indeed central to Japan’s emigration project during much of the pre-war period. The Meiji era began with a quest for world power status and to catch up with the West; to do so, the government regarded territorial expansion, via emigration, as indispensable. Consequently, emigration was often conflated with colonialism; the terms “emigrants” (*imin*)[[4]](#footnote-4) and “colonists” (*shokumin* or *kaitakumin*) were frequently used interchangeably or combined (*ishokumin*), until well into the 1930s. “Let’s send millions of Japanese emigrants to California to construct New Japan.” “Let’s build a country for the Japanese race in the Rockies” (cited in Wakatsuki 1987). Such statements were occasionally made in parliamentary discussions. In 1929, when the Ministry of Colonial Affairs (1929-1942) was created to take charge of Japan’s emigration project, emigrants were sent to Manchuria as “colonial emissaries” or “frontier envoys” (*takushi* or *kaitakumin*) under the Manchurian Colonial Emigration Promotion Plan (Manshu Kaitaku Imin Suimin Keikaku 1936).

The conflated notion of emigration and colonialism was, of course, not unique to Japan. It closely resembled that of Italy, which sent millions of emigrants to the Americas, Europe and elsewhere to “scramble for colonies” to catch up with the more economically advanced European countries (Choate 2008). Neither was the idea completely novel. It had existed in Japan ever since Takeaki Enomoto, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, founded the Colonial Company (*Shokumin Kyokai*) in 1893 in an attempt to create Japanese colonies abroad. Although his experiment in Chiapas, Mexico was short-lived (1897–1898), it laid important foundations for Japan’s pre-WWII emigration principles (Endoh 2009). In 1894, a resolution was passed in Parliament to promote emigration explicitly for the purpose of constructing overseas colonies (ibid.).

To promote emigration-colonialism, Japanese statesmen and scholars often glorified Western imperialism and colonial history, and deplored Japan’s fallen status as a colonial power (Wakatsuki 1987). “Japan has fallen behind the West as a result of 300 years of isolation,” lamented Inazo Nitobe, a prominent scholar-diplomat, stressing the need to send more emigrants abroad (cited in Wakatsuki 1975). Kazutami Ukita (1910) also advocated emigration at a 1910 social policy convention: “There will be no prosperity for this country if its citizens remain confined to the small Japanese archipelago with limited resources.” It is “our destiny to advance overseas,” he asserted.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, “overseas advancement” (*kaigai hatten*) became a national buzzword (Endoh 2009). At the same time, emigration was identified as a mission for Japan’s development and a duty of the Japanese race (Wakatsuki 1987). The statesman Minoru Togo proclaimed in his 1906 essay, “Japanese Colonialism,” that overseas advancement was Japan’s mission, and indeed duty, as “the only Asian country capable of becoming a colonial power” (Kumei 1995). To do so, wrote Shigenobu Okuma, Japan’s premier during 1914–1916, in “The Expansion of the Yamato (Japanese) Race and Colonial Projects” (1908), “the most urgent task is to send colonial-emigrants (*shokumin*) everywhere and explore the wealth of the vast nature...under the banner of the rising sun” (cited in Wakatsuki 1987). Emigrants were not mere labor migrants, stated Shinpei Goto (1917), who served as the head of civilian affairs of Taiwan under Japanese rule and the director of the South Manchuria Railway: “They are colonial-emigrants” who, as pioneers of overseas advancement, assume “a life-and-death responsibility for the Japanese nation and the Yamato race” (p. 28).

Such nationalistic discourse grew hand in hand with the rising anti-Japanese antagonism in the West, particularly in the United States. In the context of growing Japanese immigration and Japan’s rising power following victory in the Russo-Japan War (1904-1905), the *San Francisco Chronicle* launched a concerted anti-Japanese campaign. The Asiatic Exclusion League (1905) emerged to “preserve the Caucasian race upon American soil” and spearheaded a widespread movement against the Japanese (Takaki 1989). In 1906, the San Francisco Board of Education directed school principals to send Japanese children to the “Oriental School,” effectively enforcing racial segregation in school. Amid heightened tensions between the United States and Japan, both governments agreed to restrict the immigration of Japanese laborers to the United States via the “Gentlemen’s Agreement” (1907). Subsequently, the Alien Land Law (1913) was passed in California, denying landownership by the Japanese in the state, and the Immigration Act of 1917 (the so-called the Asiatic Barred Zone Act) prohibited “Asiatic” immigration on racial grounds (Chan 1991; Daniels 1971; Takaki 1989). Canada followed suit by prohibiting Japanese immigration to the country through the Immigration Act of 1908. Australia prohibited non-European immigration under its so-called “White Australian policy” (1901–1972). Guatemala excluded all “Asiatics” in 1909, followed by Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Normano and Gerbi 1943; Rippy 1949). Japan tried to retaliate by proposing to abolish “racial discrimination” at the Versailles (Paris) Peace Conference at the end of World War I (1919). Yet, the proposal was voted down, most notably by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, in view of the forthcoming Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 (the National Origins Act and the Asian Exclusion Act) in his country, which definitively banned “non-White” immigrants (Chan 1991).

Growing antagonism against the Japanese in the world, in turn, fueled Japan’s quest for colonial emigration. When opportunities to emigrate were severely restricted, the meaning of emigration also shifted. Previously regarded as an individual pursuit of prosperity and happiness, emigration came to bear a strong national character as a mission for Japan’s “overseas advancement” (Wakatsuki 1987). “Race” prominently featured in this endeavor. Calling the world’s situation “unjust,” “racist,” and “deeply humiliating,” the legal scholar Kazutami Ukita (1910) pushed for “the expansion of the Japanese race” via colonial emigration (also Noda 1941; Shibata 1941). Shigenobu Okuma (1908) supported the idea that “racial expansion” would lead to “the prosperity and the well-being of the world’s humanity” in his aforementioned thesis, entitled “The Expansion of the Yamato (Japanese) Race and Colonial Projects.” Such arguments gained currency in Japan, especially after its victories in the Sino-Japanese War (1894) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). In 1896, *Jiji Shimpo*, a daily newspaper, boasted about Japanese triumph against China as a testament to their vitality as “one of the superior races in the world” (cited in Wakatsuki 1987).

Through such rhetoric, Japanese authorities, furious at being treated as an “inferior race,” became determined to “overcome the White supremacy” by raising the status of “non-White races oppressed by the West” (Rippy 1949; Shibata 1941; Wakatsuki 1987). Enraged by the world’s “discriminatory” laws that shunned Japan’s pursuit for “overseas advancement,” they also renewed their commitment to territorial and racial expansion (Ryoji Noda 1941). This eventually contributed to, and justified, Japan’s growing militarism. Under the pre-war slogan of “*Hakkko Ichiu*” (eight corners of the world, conquest by the Japanese race), Kenichi Shibata (1941) advocated the use of military power in promoting colonial emigration, so that “the Japanese race can prosper, peacefully together, with indigenous populations” (p. 2).

Japan’s quest for colonial emigration, therefore, was pursued in tandem with growing hostility in the West, along with Japan’s growing fear of Western dominance in the world. As a result, although the Japanese emigration policy initially aimed to acquire “advanced” skills and resources from the West, much of its colonial emigration endeavor was directed toward the less developed regions of Latin America, Asia, and the Pacific, still unexplored by the Western powers (Wakatsuki 1987). With a rising tide of anti-Japanese antagonism, there were only 19 developing countries that accepted Japanese immigrants in 1936 (ibid.). The more antagonism Japan faced, therefore, the further emigrants were pushed to less and less developed areas.

Begun as part of the Meiji government’s modernization program, the Japanese emigration project evolved along with the country’s self-perceived relationship with “the West” and “Asia,” in which it saw itself being located in the middle (Oguma 1998). Out of fear of being colonized by the “more powerful” West, Japan justified its own colonialism in what was seen as a “more backward” Asia. Enraged by anti-Japanese “racism,” the country exerted its power elsewhere. In an attempt to emulate the West, Japan tried to distance itself from Asia, while at times seeking alliance with Asia as a way of countering the exclusionary force wielded by the West. This ambivalence stemmed from the triangular-shaped hierarchy, and reflected the patterns of who emigrated from Japan, how they emigrated, and where they settled, at least during the pre-World War II period.

**II. Who was the Emigrant? Emigration as a Form of Social Exclusion**

Excluded from targeting the West, the state-led emigration project was also carried out as a form of social exclusion from Japan proper (Endoh 2009). Above all, to control the country’s rapidly growing population, the emigration policy targeted populations deemed superfluous or undesirable, including the poor, ethnic minorities, unemployed, communists, and social rebels (Ueno 1977; Wakatsuki 1987). Similar to how Britain sent the Irish, ex-convicts, and urban lumpen-proletariat to Australia, and how the United States sent freed slaves “back” to Liberia in the nineteenth century under the “opportunistic deportation policy” (Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989), much of emigration from Japan was carried out in such a way as to “shed the unwanted” (Endoh 1999; Wakatsuki 2001).

***Peasants***

Central to this policy were rural peasants who were displaced by the rapid industrialization and agricultural transformation (Idei 1930; Irie 1951; Yoshida 1909). In an attempt to “enrich the country” by importing Western principles and technology, the Meiji leaders made a conscious decision to industrialize the country at the expense of the larger agricultural sector (Moriyama 1984). The most important policy that affected the farming areas in the early Meiji period was the land tax reforms initiated in 1873 (ibid.). Unable to pay these taxes, over 300,000 peasants lost their lands (Takaki 1989). The commercialization of land further uprooted small-scale tenant farmers, as it helped already wealthy landowners to acquire more land, resulting in an increased concentration of large landowners (Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975).

In this context, emigration surged as a way to provide excess farmers with alternative jobs abroad (Idei 1930). The government presumed that those “low-class citizens” would be “civilized” by acquiring advanced Western labor discipline and ethics (Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975). Moreover, by eliminating those “lowly laborers,” it would alleviate the population problem, because “those people tend to have more children” (Yoshida 1909) and “exacerbate poverty” in rural areas (Muto 1963). Indeed, proponents of emigration were concerned that rural poverty and overpopulation, together with increasing rural-urban migration, would create urban chaos and social instability. Yosaburo Yoshida (1909) observed in an academic journal: “The competition among the working classes in a country where the area of land is limited, where no national labor organization exists, where no labor legislation operates, results in vast millions of struggling creatures spending their daily lives under the economic pressure of landlords and capitalists in a hopeless and stricken condition” (direct quote, pp. 159–160). Subsequently, emigration was promoted as a way of alleviating economic and demographic problems exacerbated in the context of rapid social transformation.

The majority of emigrants who left Japan were, indeed, poor farmers with little formal education or training (Irie 1951; Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1958). Many were also second and later sons between the ages of 20 and 45, without the right to inherit family properties (Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975). Because of primogeniture and ancestor worship, the eldest son usually inherited the household, daughters married out, and younger sons, single or married, migrated to the city and sometimes abroad (Maeyama 1994). Those who ventured abroad often did so with a dream of becoming a landowner, since it was not possible to do so at home (Endoh 2009).

***Social Rebels and Marginalized Populations***

In the economically and socially tumultuous period following WWI, radicalized peasants became a target of the emigration project. Plagued by economic distress, peasants increasingly took to the streets to protest against their landlords, and emigration became a way of quelling social disputes and restoring social order (Endoh 2009). Growing peasant mobilization was facilitated by the newly elected government of Takashi Hara (1918–1921); as the first commoner Prime Minister of Japan, Hara granted the people freedom of speech, assembly, and unionization by breaking the monopoly of oligarchs long kept in power since the Meiji Restoration of 1868 (Endoh 2009). Between 1920 and 1921, the number of peasant uprisings grew from 408 to 1,680, as did that of peasant unions: from 681 in 1920 to 4,582 in 1927 (ibid.). In particular, the massive Rice Riots of 1918 had a widespread impact on society. Triggered by the soaring price of rice, the riots involved over 700,000 peasants and 110,000 soldiers, leading to miners’ revolts and laborers’ strikes across the country, especially in the industrial zone of the Southwest (Endoh 2009).

Many of those rioters were ethnic minorities and marginalized populations who were particularly vulnerable to economic woes. Among them were Koreans who were brought into the industrial production sites after Japan’s annexation of Korea in 1907. Also notable were the Burakumin, or descendants of “outcasts,” as so classified under the Tokugawa era’s feudal class system. Although the Burakumin constituted just 1.5% of Japan’s total population, they represented about 10% of the 8,000 individuals arrested in the 1918 Rice Riots (Endoh 2009). Long marginalized, the Burakumin were traditionally confined to stigmatized occupations, such as butchers, tanners, and executioners in the western part of Japan; by the early twentieth century, they mostly engaged in tenant farming and, like other farmers, began to migrate out of their villages to work in coal mining and military-related manufacturing, etc. (Endoh 2009). To deal with the Burakumin “problem,” the government set up the “Buraku Improvement Budget” (*buraku* kaizenhi, which later developed into the *Yuwa* Buraku policy) in 1920, and used a part of the budget to promote emigration by subsidizing their travel to places such as Hokkaido, Manchuria, and as far as Brazil (ibid.).

Similarly, when the unemployment of coal miners became an issue of public concern, emigration was used as an outlet for displaced workers. According to Ueno (1977) who interviewed hundreds of Japanese ex-miners in Brazil, their emigration to the country began as early as 1908 and increased in the recessionary period of the 1930s, peaking later in the 1960s when the coal industry significantly declined in Japan. Most notably, when a massive labor dispute occurred at the Mitsui Miike Coal Mine (1959-1960), Japan’s largest coal mine located in the Southwest, many laid-off miners set off for Brazil (Ueno 1977). Many of those miners at Miike and elsewhere were convicts, communists, and post-war expatriates from China and the Korean Peninsula who occupied the bottom rungs of Japanese society (ibid.). *São Paulo Shinbun* (Sept. 1, 1960), a Japanese-language newspaper in Brazil, reported that Mitsui Mining Company planned to construct “Mitsui Farms” in Brazil as an outlet for the displaced miners. In 1961 the Japanese government also set up a special measure to “deal with unemployed coal miners” (*Tanko Rishokusha Rinji Sochiho*) and promoted their emigration to farms in Latin America by providing subsidies and training (Endoh 2009).

In summary, a disproportionate number of marginalized populations left the country under the Japanese emigration program. Faced with economic difficulties, the Burakumin, peasants, and vulnerable industrial workers frequently rebelled, and were subsequently assisted by the government to set sail abroad. Similar to the process in other countries, such as Britain and Germany (Green and Weil 2007), emigration became a solution to growing domestic problems. This practice became common in Japan during the 1910s and 1920s when emigration was identified as a “social relief” strategy (Nakayama Kaigai Shudan Iju 2014; Wakatsuki 1987). During this turbulent period, Japan’s emigration project was firmly institutionalized under the jurisdiction of the Social Affairs Department of the Home Ministry, the ministry in charge of domestic order and social welfare provision (Endoh 2009). In 1918, the Ministry set up the Social Relief Investigative Committee (*kyuzai jigyo chosa kai*) and explicitly promoted emigration as a relief effort for the unemployed (Nakayama 2014). When a massive earthquake destroyed much of the Tokyo metropolitan area in 1923, some victims were sent to Brazil with transportation subsidies provided by the government (Tigner 1981). Likewise, those who suffered most were aided by the government to leave under the national banner (ibid.).

***Geographic Origins of Emigrants***

These emigrants hailed disproportionately from the southwestern parts of Japan (Map). During the first state-sponsored emigration period of 1885–1894, over 90% of the Hawaii-bound emigrants were from just four prefectures in the region: Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Kumamoto, and Fukuoka (JICA 2004). Out of all pre-war emigrants, almost half originated from Hiroshima, Kumamoto, Fukuoka, and Okinawa (ibid.). Okinawa, in particular, was an important emigration prefecture throughout Japanese emigration history. Of the emigrants who left prior to 1941, 11% were from Okinawa, and their share increased to 15% between 1926 and 1941 (JICA 1994) (Figure 2). Okinawa was, and still is, Japan’s poorest prefecture. Its weak economy and shortage of revenue made Okinawa necessarily dependent on the central government as “a permanent burden on the national treasury” (Kerr 1958). Emigration quickly became a way of coping with economic difficulties. When sugar prices fell in the 1920s, damaging Okinawa’s vital industry, large flows of emigrants left for both mainland Japan and abroad (Toyama 1990). During World War II, Okinawa suffered a fierce ground battle, and the devastating conditions left on the islands further spurred emigration after the war, when Okinawa was under U.S. occupation (1945–1972). The Okinawan government also encouraged emigration during that period by establishing the Emigration Bureau (1952), the Ryukyu Overseas Emigration Company (1960), and emigrant training centers (Kerr 1958). In some cases, the U.S. government was involved in relocating residents of entire villages overseas to make room for the construction of U.S. military bases in Okinawa (Tigner 1981). For example, the U.S. Department of State, with funds from the Foreign Operations Administration and the Department of the Army, relocated Okinawan villagers to Bolivia in exchange for 125,000 acres of free land and assistance with settlement from the Bolivian Development Corporation (ibid.).

One reason for the emigrants’ regional concentration was economic. Relatively poor and predominantly agricultural, the Southwest was strongly affected by the process of industrialization (Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975). Another factor was a tradition of emigration that had already been established there through years of migrating to the city and abroad (Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975). The personal networks developed in the process were crucial, as they reduced the costs associated with travel and settlement (Nihon Kaigai Kyokai 1950; Massey and Garcia 1987). Also important were recruitment methods that focused on particular areas to optimize costs and facilitate emigrants’ adaptation process in the host country (Kodama 1989).

In recruiting emigrants, the Southwest was often targeted, in part because of personal contacts. The initial Hawaiian recruitment program of the late nineteenth century focused on this region because of the personal relationship between Robert Walker Irwin, the Hawaiian Consul, and Takashi Masuda, Head of Mitsui Bussan, a major Japanese trading company. Originally from the Yamaguchi prefecture, Masuda was concerned about poor farmers in his region and suggested to Irwin, an adviser to Matsui, to recruit laborers there for Hawaii’s plantation work (Takaki 1989). Similarly, the regional focus may have been the result of the Southwestern origins of many Meiji oligarchs. Once emigration from the region was under way, it was then fueled by individual stories, spread by word of mouth, about opportunities abroad (Takaki 1989).

Emigrant recruitment focused on the Southwest also because of frequent social turbulence in the region (Endoh 2009). Home to the nation’s pre-war key production sites of coal, steel, and navy vessels, the region traditionally drew industrial workers from all over the country and Japan’s overseas colonies. In addition to the Miike Coal Mine, mentioned earlier, the nation’s largest ship-building factory was built there (in Kure) in 1889, followed by the largest state-owned steel manufacturing plant (in Yahata) in 1901. As a conglomerate zone of military-industrial production plants, the region experienced frequent labor disputes and riots. The aforementioned Rice Riots (1918) were most intense in this region, and more police officers were deployed there than in any other region (Endoh 2009). Subsequently, emigration was promoted to quell the social unrest, and many distressed workers in the region emigrated, especially to South America (ibid.).

Although “over-population” was a principal rationale used by the government in promoting and justifying emigration, the Southwest in fact had neither the highest population density nor the highest birth rate in the country (Yoshida 1909). It was certainly not the only region in Japan plagued with demographic and economic problems ( Idei 1930; Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975). The Southwest was nevertheless targeted, because keeping order in the region, as a key industrial-military base, was politically and militarily vital for the state (Endoh 2009).

In this way, state involvement in emigration intensified during the turbulent years of the 1910s and 1920s. During this period, emigration became a truly “national” project; as a “social relief” strategy, emigration was identified as an “imminent task to resolve various social problems” and encouraged “in every possible way” with increased state subsidies (Tigner 1981; Wakatsuki 1975). Around this time, emigrants were often sent off with fanfare in the presence of police officers and staff of the Home Ministry (and later the Colonial Ministry), and saluted on a national radio program before setting sail abroad (Wakatsuki 1987). Incidentally, this period of heavy state involvement coincided with the peak of emigration traffic to South America (notably to Brazil, 1923–1933).

**III. Emigration to South America**

Emigration to South America began as a result of yet additional exclusionary measures imposed in the United States. Although the United States was not directly involved, by shutting its own doors to Japanese immigrants, it played a decisive role in rerouting Japanese emigration to South America. Prior to the “Gentlemen’s Agreement” (1907), the United States and Hawaii were the primary, and preferred, destinations for Japanese emigrants. Emigrants in Hawaii were expected to save 10,000 yen after three years of contract work, whereas, in Brazil, the comparable figure (in 1918) was only 665 yen (Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975). Denied access to these traditional and more profitable destinations, the Japanese government and emigration companies had to seek alternative destinations.

South America emerged as an alternative. In addition to rich mineral reserves and vast fertile lands that Japan lacked, this region was undergoing a rapid expansion of commercial agriculture with Western capital flowing in. There was an abundance of labor opportunities, and wages were still higher than in Japan. South America, often dubbed the continent of “banana republics,” cultivated export products—e.g., coffee, sugar, beef, and wheat—to meet the demands of European colonial and U.S. capitalist interests (Albert 1976; Endoh 2009). Proponents of Japanese emigration saw a similar opportunity in the region to transplant emigrant farmers to cultivate export crops, such as cotton and soy, as a way of securing food supplies (Endoh 2009). The *Japan Times and Mail* (December 23, 1922) presented South America as a “golden opportunity” with “vast agricultural lands, natural resources, and the same climatic conditions as in Japan,” and urged the Japanese government to establish formal agreements with countries in the region to promote emigration (cited in Rippy 1949).

***Peru***

Peru was the first South American country to receive Japanese immigrants. Because of the diplomatic relationship established in 1873 (the first in Latin America) and the personal relationship between Augusto Leguía, a manager of the British Sugar Company, and Teikichi Tanaka, an agent for the Morioka Emigration Company, a contract labor agreement with Peru was reached in 1899. Leguía, who later became Peru’s President (1908–1912 and 1919–1930), was a member of the Peruvian Sugar Producers Association, a powerful agricultural lobbying group, and was interested in expanding the country’s agro-export business (Morimoto 1989). In 1898, he turned to Tanaka, his former classmate in the United States, for help in recruiting immigrant labor. Based on this request, the Morioka Emigration Company, which had gained considerable experience from the Hawaii-bound emigration business, proposed to the Japanese government to establish a contract migration program to Peru (Endoh 2009). Japanese emigration to Peru then began in 1899 with a group of 790 males, mostly farmers from the Southwest. The emigrants worked on various coastal plantations under a four-year contract, assigned by Leguía’s British Sugar Company (Arakaki 1964; Thompson 1974).

Following the Pacific War with Chile (1879–1883), Peru underwent rapid development as a result of economic expansion in Western Europe and the subsequent increase in demand for agricultural products (Fukumoto 1997). The increasing use of fertilizer in Europe created a greater demand for guano from the Peruvian offshore islands; the cotton market grew in Peru after the supply of raw cotton dwindled in the United States as a result of the Civil War (1861–1865); and British textile mills adapted to Peruvian cotton after 1900 (Thompson 1979). Between 1890 and 1943, exports of agricultural products, particularly sugarcane, cotton, and guano, increased ten-fold, from 14,000 Soles to 150,000 Soles (Fukumoto 1997). During roughly the same period Peru’s output of sugar alone grew more than 60% (Masterson 2004). This required armies of cheap labor, which posed a problem. Peru’s plantations had long depended on slave labor, but slavery was abolished in 1854. And the “coolie” trade, which had brought over 87,000 Chinese indentured laborers, was abolished in 1874. Moreover, the attempt to attract indigenous populations from Peru’s interior failed because of peasants’ strong attachment to their lands (Normano and Gerbi 1943). The other alternative was to rely on immigration.

The Peruvian state, dominated by people of European descent, was not willing to accept “Asiatic” immigrants (Fukumoto 1997; Tigner 1989). Ever since the country gained independence from Spain in 1821, the majority of indigenous populations, as well as the small population of Asians and blacks (3%), had been ranked below Europeans and their descendants (10%) in the country’s racial hierarchy. In an attempt to “improve their race,” the government implemented the White Preference Law (1873) and provided subsidies exclusively to European and U.S. immigrants (Suzuki 1992; Vasquez 1970). These efforts were nonetheless fruitless, because Europeans often preferred more profitable and more politically stable destinations, such as Argentina, Chile, and Brazil. Peru had little to offer the prospective settler due to lower standards of living, the antiquated hacienda system prohibiting land ownership, and poor sanitary conditions with frequent epidemics, such as malaria, yellow fever, and typhus (Vasquez 1970).

Faced with a “national crisis of labor shortages,” the Peruvian government, under pressure from plantation owners, reluctantly allowed Japanese immigration. Following Japan’s victory in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), Peruvian leaders were willing to see if the Japanese would prove more useful than the earlier Chinese immigrants (Tigner 1978). The *Tokyo Keizai Shimbun* (quoted in Rippy 1949) described the situation with bitter-sweet enthusiasm:

The government of Peru welcomes White workers and is not any too fond of yellow laborers, but business in this country is not sufficiently developed to appeal to White labor. It will, therefore, be obliged to depend upon Far Eastern immigrants. If the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs and the emigration companies put forth all their efforts, this country will become a second Hawaii (p. 52).

Peru did not become a second Hawaii. Japanese immigration was soon curtailed in 1923 with the abolition of contract labor migration, under the pretext that many immigrants had fled or perished on the plantations due to harsh labor conditions. In reality, however, it was abolished due to Peru’s economic contraction, following declining demand in Europe (Fukumoto 1997). After 1923, Japanese immigrants were allowed to enter only by way of “calling” (*yobiyose*) from close kin already settled in Peru.

***Brazil***

When Peru began to tighten its immigration laws, Japan’s emigration project swiftly shifted to Brazil (Endoh 2009). Similar to Peru, emigration to Brazil began in the context of growing labor shortages on plantations, after African slavery was abolished in 1888 and European countries restricted emigration, notably Italy, which issued a government order in 1902 restricting emigration (Masterson 2004; Nishida 2018). As in Peru, “Asiatics” were not preferred for the country’s “Whitening” policy. Yet, placed between Blacks and Whites in the country’s racial hierarchy, Asians were viewed as “submissive” and “manageable” enough for harsh plantation work (Schpun 2016). In 1907, the government of São Paulo agreed to receive 3,000 Japanese immigrants by providing travel subsidies, conditional on family-based immigrants of at least three members, in an attempt to secure a stable supply of labor (Masterson 2004). The following year (1908), 781 immigrants set sail for Brazil to work on coffee plantations in the state of São Paulo.

Upon arrival, Japanese immigrants faced considerable hostility in the country, which favored White immigrants, just as they had in Peru. Hostility escalated in the 1920s, as the flow of Japanese immigration peaked in the country, compounded by the world-wide recession and rising nationalism preceding the advent of the authoritarian regime of Getulio Vargas (1937–1945). This resulted in various restrictive measures, including the 1934 constitution that precluded the Japanese, along with other foreigners, from becoming medical doctors or lawyers. In 1937, foreign language education of children under the age of fourteen was prohibited, followed by the ban of all foreign language schools in 1938. A series of laws were passed to restrict immigrant rights to assembly, freedom of the press, and loans. Most significant of all was the Act to Restrict the Immigration of Aliens by Two Percent (1934). This national origin quota act limited the number of new entrants to 2% of the population of each nationality already in the country for the previous 50 years. Informally called the Japanese Exclusion Act, it aimed to curtail the entry of the Japanese, who made up the largest immigrant group during that period (Endoh 2009; Wakatsuki 1975). Subsequently, the volume of Japanese immigration to Brazil decreased drastically, from 22,900 in 1934 to 5,750 in 1935 (ibid.).

Despite the rising tide of restrictive measures across countries, the Japanese government continued to send emigrants. In fact, amid growing hostility, the government tightened its grip on its emigration project by redirecting emigrants to less desired and less populated hinterlands (Tigner 1981; Wakatsuki 1975). During this period of intensified “nationalization” of emigration, the government established two key organs—the Overseas Development Company (*Kaigai Kogyo Kabushiki Kaisha*) and the Overseas Emigration Association (*Kaigai Ijuu Kyokai*) in 1917 and 1927, respectively—and, through them, acquired various farmlands in the states of São Paulo and Pará in Brazil, along with Junin Province in Peru and La Colmena in Paraguay, to settle emigrants as agricultural migrants (Endoh 2009; Tigner 1978). It was in these remote areas where emigrants cultivated barren lands and planted seeds to establish Japanese farming settlements (ibid.).

Through the government’s “desperate attempt” to send emigrants to “just about anywhere and everywhere” (Wakatsuki 1987), Japanese emigration to Brazil continued, even after World War II, mostly through state emigration programs. What also contributed to the expansion of Japanese emigration to Brazil (unlike to Peru) was that immigrants there were allowed to own land and become independent farmers after their labor contracts ended (Endoh 2009). In this way, Brazil became the recipient of the largest Japanese immigrant community.

***Pre-War Emigration as a Japanese National Project***

Emigrants sent under the “national project” were largely expected to remain “loyal subjects” to the Japanese emperor (Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975). The pre-war ideology held that all Japanese were connected to the blood-based family headed by the emperor (ibid.). When debating the status of foreign-born children of Japanese emigrants, a statesman Shinpei Goto (1917) asserted that: “The Japanese will always remain Japanese, no matter where they emigrate and whether they acquire a foreign nationality. Japanese ‘blood’ will always be Japanese” (p. 16). Since pre-war emigrants were considered an indispensable resource for Japan’s economic development and overseas expansion, it was crucial for the state to keep them “Japanese” (Endoh 2009).

To keep their loyalty, the Japanese government tried to instill a nationalistic ideology by subsidizing the construction of Japanese schools abroad. Wherever Japanese emigrants settled, Japanese schools were established, and the Japanese language, along with Japanese spirit and morals, were taught in accordance with the national school curriculum (Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975). This practice was particularly noticeable in Brazil where a majority of pre-war immigrants arrived and settled during the period of Japan’s rising militarism (Maeyama 1994; Negawa 2016). An official of the Japanese Education Promotion Committee (Nihonjin Bunkyo Fukyukai), dispatched by the government, commented, “It is important to preserve and educate the Japanese language and spirit… (because) … the overseas Japanese are destined to share the same fate with their motherland (Japan)” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1938).

Likewise, the government played an influential role in consolidating Japanese immigrant communities abroad. Japanese associations formed in the Americas were often top-down, led by and linked to the Japanese state. In Peru, the Central Japanese Association, the umbrella association of the community (today’s Japanese-Peruvian Association), was created by Lima’s Japanese consulate in 1917 (Peru Shimpo 1975). In Brazil, formal associations were also led by Japanese consulate staff and employees of (quasi-official) emigration companies; subsequently, they were structurally and symbolically connected to Japan (Maeyama 1994). Similarly, the Japanese Associations of America, the central body of the immigrant community in the United States (1908–1926), functioned under direct control of the Japanese state (Ichioka 1977). Originally established to fight against the growing anti-Japanese movement in San Francisco, the association was hierarchically organized with the Japanese consul on top; through such a structure, the government exerted influence over its emigrants in America (ibid.). Since membership in such quasi-state Japanese associations was often compulsory, it helped the government to draw resources from and maintain links with emigrant communities (Endoh 2009). Such practices, in turn, resulted in fueling anti-Japanese sentiments in the host societies (Normano and Gerbi 1943).

Consequently, pre-war emigrants tended to maintain a strong sense of attachment to Japan and the idea of repatriating one day (Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975). Many emigrants, indeed, kept their Japanese nationality without taking up foreign citizenship. Their low naturalization rate was partially attributable to restrictive measures in the host countries, such as the United States and Peru. Yet even in Brazil, where there were no such restrictions, only 2.6% of Japanese immigrants (5,000 out of 190,000) took up Brazilian citizenship (Wakatsuki and Suguki 1975). Emigrant nationalism sometimes erupted in extreme forms. In the aftermath of World War II (1946–1947), an armed conflict broke out in Brazil, led by *Shindo Renmei* (Way of the Subjects of the Emperor’s League), an ultra-right nationalist association that did not believe in Japan’s defeat. Similar nationalist organizations—*Aikoku Doshikai* (Patriotic Association of Men of the Same Ideals), *Kodo Remmei* (Federation of Imperial Doctrine), and *Yamato Minzoku* (Club of Men of the Same Race of Old Japan)—also emerged in Peru, preaching that stories of Japan’s defeat were false (Thompson 1974; Peru Shimpo 1975).

The intricate, and inseparable, relationship between emigrants and their “motherland” was crucial for the successful implementation of Japan’s pre-war program of colonial emigration (Iitsubo 2016). In essence, emigration was central to the process of Japan’s nation-building, and Japanese overseas *colonias* were cultivated as an integral part of its national development strategy. Pre-war emigrants were expected to retain ties to Japan and contribute to its national modernization project as agents of economic development and territorial expansion, even though they were often “pushed out” by the government to feed the rest of the population.

This contradictory relationship, or what Endoh (2009) calls “the double functions of exclusion and inclusion” (pp. 11–12), underpinned the motives and consequences of the Japanese emigration program. To include emigrants there (abroad), they were excluded here (sent out of Japan); because they were included here (as part of the Japanese nation and race), they were excluded there (by the host societies). This simultaneous inclusion and exclusion continued after World War II, although the relationship between Japan and its emigrants changed drastically in rhetoric and ideology.

**IV. Ideological Turn Post-World War II**

In the aftermath of World War II, emigration was temporarily suspended while Japan was under U.S. occupation (1945–1952). When the Japanese government resumed, so too did emigration, but it took a drastic turn in the post-war period. The demand for emigration was ever high, since the devastating defeat in the war had left the country in ashes, with acute food shortages. The repatriation of six million soldiers and civilians from various parts of the dissolved Japanese empire further aggravated the problem. Between 1945 and 1955, Japan’s population expanded from 72 million to 110 million (Wakatsuki 1987). While the country lost 45% of its land after the war, its GNP per capita remained a mere $112 in 1950, compared with $1,600 for the United States, $216 for Argentina, and $127 for Brazil (ibid.). In this context, the government identified emigration, along with industrial development and birth control, as a solution to both population pressure and desperately needed employment in the war-shattered country. Yet few countries were willing to accept Japanese immigrants. Japanese immigrants were unwelcomed practically everywhere, because the war had heightened anti-Japanese sentiments throughout the world; they were regarded as “war criminals” and “barbaric invaders” of the “unassimilable or ugly yellow race” (Wakatsuki 1987). To pursue its emigration project, the government therefore adopted a policy that stressed the needs of the host society, instead of reviving the racially charged nationalism and colonialism that had preceded the pre-war period (Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975).

Specifically, emigrants were encouraged to settle, assimilate, and contribute to the host society. Criticizing the “narrow-mindedness” of pre-war Japanese immigrants who “often stuck together speaking only Japanese abroad,” the government now advocated full integration and permanent settlement in the host society: “The immigrant should become good, law-abiding citizens of the host society and intend to settle and die there” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1955; Nihon Kaigai Kyokai 1950). Citing the “success” of pre-war Japanese emigrants who “cleared virgin forests,” the government also afforded emigrants the new status of “pioneers in frontier expeditions” (Endoh 2009). The mission of Japan as a “peace-loving country,” the government declared, was to “foster the world’s welfare and prosperity…through frontier exploration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1954). According to “The Principles of the Emigration Policy” (ibid.), “Our aim is to provide labor, technology, and capital… to contribute to the development of frontiers still unexplored in the world” (cited in Wakatsuki 1987).

Post-war Japanese emigration resumed in 1952, following the U.S. occupation (1945–1952) that prohibited out-migration. Upon restoring the county’s diplomatic and commercial relations with other countries through the San Francisco Peace Treaty (1952), emigrants were sent, again, to various “frontiers” under direct state sponsorship. The primary destination continued to be South America. Few other places were willing to accept Japanese immigrants, and emigrating to Asia or doing anything reminiscent of Japan’s wartime aggression had to be avoided. Post-war Japanese emigrants, therefore, settled in faraway lands—remote hinterlands, mountainous areas, and barren lands in Bolivia, Paraguay, the Dominican Republic, and the Brazilian Amazon—through bilateral governmental agreements. It was a compromise between the host state willing to use immigration to explore its frontiers and the sending state desperate to secure destinations for large-scale emigration. In these areas, lands were frequently purchased by the Japanese government (with loans from U.S. banks) and through its assistance, more farming *colonias* were built (Wakatsuki 1975). Post-war state-assisted emigration to South America continued until 1973 (officially, it ended in 1993, as explained in Chapter 6) when the last ship, *Nippon-maru*, set sail for Brazil with 285 emigrants aboard (JICA 2004). Between 1952 and 1973, a total of some 70,000 people were sent abroad, mostly to South America.

***State Motives for Post-War Emigration Policy***

As with the pre-war period, population control was a leading official rationale for promoting emigration. As early as 1949, a resolution regarding the “population problem” was passed in the lower house of Parliament, identifying emigration as a solution. Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida expressed this in 1949 with a sense of desperation: “We sincerely hope that we will be allowed to send emigrants freely and be welcomed by many (destination) countries soon. Emigration alone may not mitigate the excess population, but will certainly contribute to improving the standard of living in Japan.” Lamenting the “continuous antagonism toward the Japanese that still prevails in the U.S., Canada, and Australia,” Yoshida vowed to “work hard to appeal to the world that Japan is now a democratic country and that the Japanese are peace-loving people!” (cited in Wakatsuki 1987).

Through emigration, the government also hoped to restore its national image and status as a fully-fledged member of the international community. The Council of Emigration (Kaigai Iju Shingikai), created in 1955 as an advisory body for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that the principles of emigration lay in “the contribution toward the world’s co-prosperity and friendships between Japan and other countries” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1960, 1958). Its principal aim was to “provide our citizens with opportunities to engage in creative activities and employment in a culturally different environment beyond Japan” (cited in Wakatsuki 1987). Through this experience, emigrants were also expected to contribute to the development of the host societies by “maximizing their potential in frontiers” (Council of Emigration 1962). Emigration, in short, should not be viewed simply as a transfer of labor, but as a transfer of technology and human resources to promote international development and cooperation. This, the government envisioned, would help enhance and reinvigorate Japan’s international prominence and reputation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1971).

In addition, emigration was regarded as a vital means of post-war economic development. Government officials were aware that Southern European countries benefited economically from emigration to more prosperous countries, such as Germany and France, in the 1960s (Wakatsuki 1987). They were also aware of how Europe had prospered as a result of massive emigration to “the new world.” Comparing Britain with Japan, post-war emigration advocates attributed their difference in national status to the history of emigration. “Despite both being island nations, Britain regarded its oceans as a public path to overseas advancement, whereas Japan regarded them as a fortress to protect itself from foreign countries. We Japanese need to develop a more international perspective to achieve greater economic success (like Britain)” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1971).

To promote emigration, the government often cited, and celebrated, the contribution made by pre-war Japanese emigrants in the Americas. (Emigration to Manchuria and elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region, prompted in close association with colonialism, was not regarded as successful and was not mentioned.). A study commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the 1950s indicated that agricultural production within the Japanese *colonias* in Brazil totaled as much as 7.4 billion yen. These immigrant settlements also generated significant economic benefits for Japan, the report concluded, as they facilitated trade and investments; more than half of Japan’s exports to Brazil ($14.2 million) went through the *colonias* (Tigner 1981). Moreover, emigrants to Brazil sent millions of yen in remittances home to their families and spent at least $3.8 million during their trips back to Japan (Wakatsuki 1987).

Pre-war Japanese immigrants’ agricultural contribution was indeed significant. According to a survey conducted in 1958, Japanese farmers in São Paulo were responsible for the production of 94% of the state’s tomatoes, 92% of the tea, 68% of the potatoes, 43% of the peanuts, 37% of the eggs, 27% of the cotton, 22% of the bananas, 7% of the coffee (Tigner 1981). In the Amazon, the Japanese were the first to plant jute and pimenta (black pepper) successfully, which became one of the region’s principal commodities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1971). By the late 1960s, the Japanese contributed 6.7% of Brazil’s agricultural production, although they constituted only 0.7% of the country’s total population (ibid.). During a state visit to Japan in 1958, a Brazilian official praised their accomplishments as “acts of true heroism:” “Japanese immigrants cleared virgin forests and planted coffee plantations with the sweat of their bodies and the vigor of their arms…Emigrants from some countries have tried to exploit Brazilian resources for the benefit of their own country, but Japanese immigrants have done just the opposite” (Tigner 1981). Japanese immigrants’ agricultural success was also phenomenal in the United States; in 1910, they reportedly produced 70% of California’s strawberries, and by 1940, they grew 95% of the state’s fresh snap beans, 67% of its fresh tomatoes, 95% of its celery, and 44% of its onions (Takaki 1989). Likewise, they contributed to Peruvian agriculture by modernizing merchandising methods, implementing efficient operations and higher ethical standards, and improving cleanliness and sanitation in food processing and distribution (Tigner 1981). The *Peruvian Times* extolled their contribution: “There is no other race that contributed so much to agriculture in the Peruvian Amazon as the Japanese” (cited in Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1971).

Recognizing that such immigrant success would enhance Japan’s image and status, the Japanese government not only valued the existence of emigrant communities abroad, but also stressed the need to help them succeed. “It is crucial for Japanese emigrants and their descendants to climb up the social ladder and achieve a respectable status in their country,” the government proclaimed in the report, “The 100-Year History of Japanese Emigration,” by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1971). This report explained how it would improve Japan’s reputation and economic activities by citing a comment made by the governor of São Paulo in 1961: “We welcome Japanese companies and their investments in Brazil, because we trust 600,000 Japanese immigrants and their descendants in our country” (cited in Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1971). Japanese companies were able to enter and operate in the Brazilian market thanks to the large immigrant community there, according to the report, “because of the existence of well-established and successful Japanese communities in Latin America, over 20% of Japan’s total foreign direct investment abroad was directed to the region in 1969” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1971). An important state motive behind its continuous emigration policy, therefore, lay in the instrumental role played by the immigrant communities. “If we fail to send more emigrants, we may lose the numerous overseas footholds (*ashiba*) that we have arduously built through years of emigration” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1971). In sum, emigration was a tool to boost post-war economic development; and it certainly played a role in Japan’s remarkable growth.

***How the State Promoted Emigration***

After World War II, the emigration program was led by the Emigration Bureau (*Iju-kyoku*) within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1953–2004). To oversee and promote emigration, the government allocated a budget of 37.6 billion yen between 1953 and 1958 and created various key state agencies, including the Federation of Japan Emigration Association (*Kaigai Iju Kyokai Rengokai*) in 1954 and the Japan Overseas Emigration Promotion Corporation (*Nihon Kaigai Iju Shinko Kabushiki Gaisha*) in 1955 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1958) (Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975). The budget continued to increase[[5]](#footnote-5) even after the actual number of emigrants dropped significantly after 1960.[[6]](#footnote-6) And the emigration policy gradually shifted in focus from sending emigrants from Japan to the settlement of immigrants and support for their descendants abroad (See Chapter 6). The term to refer to “the emigrant” (*imin*) also began to shift to “the settler” (*ijusha*) in policy discussions and government documents (Nakayama 2010).

Much of this settler assistance program focused on South America. One reason, according to the government, was the mere need. “Ideally, the host societies should provide assistance for the immigrants who settled there. The U.S. and Canada do so in principle, but in South America, they often lack sufficient economic resources” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1975). The government also claimed it important to provide support for the Japanese immigrants to “maintain an amicable relationship with the host countries” and justified such a policy because “they are Japanese nationals” (p. 33).

Indeed, the state’s role in emigrant settlement was always greater in South America than in North America because of the way emigration was induced. While Hawaii and U.S. emigration flourished in the earlier period (1868–1908), in which private agents and emigration companies played crucial roles (in cooperation with the government), much of Latin American emigration (except for early flows to Peru and Brazil prior to the 1910s) was carried out under direct state sponsorship in collaboration with the destination countries. Through the “strategic national policy” (Endoh 2009), emigrants were often recruited, financed, trained, and transplanted in South America by the state. As such, the relationship between the state and emigrant communities developed differently in South America than in North America, as explained more fully in Chapter 6.

**Conclusions**

Throughout the history of Japanese emigration, the state played a pivotal role in shaping its course: how emigration was induced, from where, who left, and where and how they settled. Obviously, Japan was not unique in this regard (Gabaccia 2007; Green and Weil 2007; Zolberg 2007). Britain repeatedly resorted to emigration to solve its internal dissent, poverty, and population pressure (Gray 2010; Zolberg 2007), and many other European countries attempted to “shovel out paupers” in the process of national consolidation and development (Fahrmeir 2007). A particularly notable comparison may be Italy, which, like Japan, struggled to attain a global power status as a latecomer to development and sent emigrants (mostly poor workers) in close association with colonial moves during the nineteenth–twentieth centuries (Choate 2008). But Japanese emigration was much more centralized (ibid.), and the state exerted more direct influence, not merely in sending emigrants but in shaping their lives abroad. While it was fairly common for immigrants to maintain some ties to their native lands, the case of Japanese immigrants was particularly noticeable. In discussing pre-war immigrants in the United States, Ichioka (1977) asserted: “…none had links to the governments of their native countries like the connection between Japanese immigrants and the Japanese government” (p. 436).

Although the state’s role remained fully in force throughout the history of Japanese emigration, its policies were far from consistent. During the pre-war period, emigration was largely regarded as “temporary” labor migration (although many emigrants, especially after the 1910s and 1920s, did not return to Japan); after the war, the policy shifted to emphasize “permanent” settlement in the host societies. Moreover, while pre-war emigration was directed to diverse destinations—Hawaii, the United States, Peru, Brazil, and Manchuria, etc.,—post-war flows were largely confined to the five South American countries of Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

In both the pre- and post-war periods, emigrants’ ambiguous (and subservient) relationship with Japan remained consistent. Pre-war emigrants, though often caricatured as “abandoned people” (*kimin*), were expected to remain loyal to Japan and contribute to its economic development and colonial endeavors. In the post-war period, while urging emigrants to become fully-fledged nationals of the host society, the government was continuously involved in building “Japanese” communities (especially in South America) in the hope that the immigrants and their descendants could serve as a “bridge” in maintaining an amicable relationship between Japan and the host countries. Either way, those who left (or abandoned) Japan were excluded as emigrants, but were simultaneously included as immigrants with special ties to Japan. Likewise, excluded as immigrants settled abroad, they were also included as emigrants who had origins in Japan. This ambiguous relationship necessarily placed them on the margins of Japanese nationhood.

Within Japan, emigration and emigrants often carried negative connotations—abandonment, misery, sorrow—as reflected in the titles of numerous books published on the topic, such as *Nihon o Suteta Nihonjin* (*Those Who Abandoned Japan*) by Ishidoya (1941, 1991), *Suterareta Nihonjin* (*Abandoned Japanese*) by Fujisaki (1986) (also by Tamiya Torahiko), *Gaimusho ga keshita Nihonjin* (*The Japanese Eliminated by the Foreign Ministry*) by Wakatsuki (1981), and *Sobo* by Tatsuzo Ishikawa (1935). This image was reinforced by the negative stereotypes of those who left as mostly rural farmers, the poor, unemployed, and ethnic minorities (Gardiner 1975; Kerr 1958; Ueno 1977). The government often lamented this negative public perception as “Japanese people’s misunderstanding about emigration” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1958). Yet emigrants (and their descendants) were often treated as “second-class citizens” by Japanese government officials and businessmen who visited or worked in various South American countries (Peru Shimpo 1975). The chasm between “immigrants” and “expats” prevailed throughout the Americas (ibid.), and the immigrants frequently resented the “discrimination” and “arrogance” they faced when interacting with those who felt superior and more Japanese. So, when the descendants of Japanese immigrants actually “returned” to Japan from South America beginning in 1990, they found themselves in a similar situation (Chapter 4).

Although the history of Japanese emigration is a history of Japanese national development, it must not be forgotten that it was woven from individual stories of those who left and settled abroad. Despite the strong presence of the state, emigration was in the end voluntary. Some decided to leave to accompany family members, while others did so to avoid conscription (Moriyama 1984); and the vast majority of emigrants left for economic reasons (Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975). During the period of 1885–1895, when the government recruited state-sponsored emigrants to Hawaii, the monthly earning expected of each emigrant was $15 (=17.65 yen), equivalent to 1.7 years of wages for the average employed farmer in Hiroshima (Kodama 1992). Similarly, the average emigrant wage on the U.S. mainland in the late 1890s was about a dollar a day (Takaki 1989). Japanese emigrants left, and aspired to leave, because “money grew on trees” in America (Takaki 1989). When state-sponsored contract migration was first advertised in 1885, 20,000 people reportedly applied for 944 positions (Wakatsuki and Suzuki 1975).

These individual decisions were nevertheless shaped by the financial support, propaganda, and recruitment efforts by the state and its agencies (Endoh 2009). Mr. Kanamaru, an ex-miner in Brazil interviewed by Ueno (1977), explained how his work decisions consistently reflected government policies. “During World War II, I went to the navy because of conscription, and, after the war, worked in a coal mine because of a government employment program. When the government decided to close the mine, I left for Brazil because the government encouraged that with financial incentives” (p. 65). Similarly, prospective pre-war emigrants to the United States were allured by rosy stories of Mr. Ushizima, a successful farmer known as the “potato king of California,” and of Mr. Domoto, “the greatest flower raiser west of the Rockies” (Yoshida Yosaburo 1909). Many emigrants to Peru, including Mr. Igei, decided to leave, because they heard the country was “paradise” with “a mild climate and rich soil for farming” (Konno and Fujisaki 1994).

The journey undertaken by many emigrants was far from rosy. As depicted in the popular books above, their lives were full of misery, hardships, and abandonment, and they faced considerable difficulty in adapting to the new land far away from home. This history of Japanese immigration, or the process of becoming an “immigrant” in the host society, was simultaneously the history of emigration, shaped by their status as “emigrants” from Japan. The Japanese state exerted its influence on their lives even after they left, because emigration, though fundamentally an individual pursuit of happiness, continued to be an important “national” project for the sender state. We look at this history next as it unfolded in the Peruvian context.

1. The degree of state involvement was not consistent. The first state-sponsored emigration program (*kanyaku imin*), bound for Hawaii, began in 1885 and lasted until 1894. The state’s role in emigration intensified in the 1920s; under a strategic national policy, the majority of emigrants were recruited, financed, trained, transported, and resettled by the Japanese government. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. After the Tokugawa government implemented a closed policy in 1636, there was little trade or interaction with the outside world, with the exception of the Netherlands, China, and Korea, through certain designated ports. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This was arranged by Eugene Van Reed, a labor recruiter for Hawaiian sugar planters, who was stationed at the US consulate in Yokohama. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The term *imin* was defined as a labor migrant; according to the Encyclopedia of Japanese Diplomatic History, it referred to “people and their families who voyaged to countries other than China and Korea for the purpose of labor” (quoted in Kumei 1995:13). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The budget of JICA and its precedent organizations on emigration and related expenses increased from roughly 11.8 million yen to 2.1 billion yen between 1954 and 1972 (Wakatsuki 1987: 849). After that it reached 2.4 billion in 1988 and 2.6 billion in 1995 when emigration officially ended. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. An important incident that led to the end of the state emigration program was the “failure” of Japanese emigration to the Dominican Republic (1956–1959). Sent by the state to engage in farming in remote hinterlands, the emigrants faced unbearable labor conditions in barren lands and returned to Japan in groups in 1960–1961. They later took the Japanese government to court in 2000, leading to an agreement in 2006 when the then-Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi issued an official apology and compensation for all Dominican-bound emigrants. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)