Toru Kaizawa's "Identity 4" (Manahil Rashid Awan / Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum) (Greg A. Hill / Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum)

Imperialising, Inside-Out: Unravelling Japan's Indigenous Subjugation

Manahil Rashid Awan

Reform and Revolution: China's Twentieth Century

Professor Kevin Landdeck

May 6th, 2025

Introduction

The start of a Google search, "Why is Japan so…" autocompletes to "clean," "safe," "popular," and "advanced."[1] The modern image of Japan reflects passivity, tourism appeal, and technological advancement. In doing so, Japan's governments in recent decades have contributed to its orientalism, performing for the Western gaze. Confronting Japan's modern history as an imperial power can lead to disillusionment with its friendly façade. This paper engages with that tension, accusing Japan of histrionics.

The pacifist image, underscored by Japan's constitutional ban on a national military, sharply contrasts with its relatively recent history of colonial violence for empire-building. Japan relinquished its empire with its WWII surrender; however, Okinawa and Hokkaido remained under Japanese administration. Yet Japan's history of treating its imperial subjects did not vanish with the loss of its empire. Wounds left by Japan's colonial policies, enforced by the repressive state apparatus of police and military, remained raw, especially in Taiwan.[2]

The placement of these wounds was instrumental to Imperial Japan's nation-building. A core framework of this paper is settler colonialism. This is a "structure, not an event."[3] Japan not only annexed lands (engaging in extractive colonialism) but also deliberately engineered identities for political purposes for the "elimination of the native."[4] In retrospect, this settler colonialism is understood additionally as colonial modernity- theory based on "colonialism and modernity [being] simultaneous expressions of capitalist expansion."[5]

---

[1] See: Appendix: Fig. 1
[2] Ramon H Myers and Mark R Peattie, The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945 (Princeton University Press, 1987), 213.
[3] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Journal of Genocide Research 8, no. 4 (2006): 388, https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240.
[4] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Journal of Genocide Research 8, no. 4 (2006): 388
[5] Tani Barlow, "DEBATES over COLONIAL MODERNITY in EAST ASIA and ANOTHER ALTERNATIVE," Cultural Studies 26, no. 5 (September 2012): 624, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2012.711006.

Japan's colonial project did not merely reshape the identities of its imperial subjects; it also transformed Japan itself, molding its identity to absorb and govern these subjects.

This paper explores how identity was shaped under Japanese rule, using the frameworks of colonial modernity and settler colonialism. Regarding colonial modernity, this paper will examine Japan's current borders by analyzing the processes of **dōka** and **kōminka**, both within these borders and in territories lost after Japan's surrender. The fragmentation of identity will be examined through the processes of its construction. Ultimately, this comparative analysis will investigate how Japan transformed itself during this period, as well as the lasting impacts on Hokkaido and its now external imperial subjects, through case studies of Taiwan. This process is referred to, as in the title, as **imperialising, inside-out**.

Frameworks and Historiography

(a) Settler Colonialism

This paper adopts the settler colonial framework, centering Patrick Wolfe's theory of the "logic of elimination", a key concept in Anglophone settler colonial studies.[6] The theory outlines the core tenets of settler colonialism and how it differentiates from extractive colonialism: an inherent drive to eradicate native populations and identities to seize their land, and crucially, to maintain that possession. Wolfe's analysis continentally focuses on North America and Oceania, sourcing its primary examples from these regions. In her book *The Fabric of Indigeneity: Ainu Identity, Gender, and Settler Colonialism in Japan*, Ann-Elise Lewallen, a prominent Ainu studies scholar, advises the reader to "trouble the literature by once again decentering the West, including the decentering of Indigenous

[6] J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "False Dilemmas and Settler Colonial Studies: Response to Lorenzo Veracini: 'Is Settler Colonial Studies Even Useful?,'" Postcolonial Studies, December 29, 2020, 1–7, https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2020.1857023.

perspectives born from Western colonial contexts."[7] This may appear contradictory to this paper's adopted framework- why? This section will demonstrate how Japan's imperial structure displayed and continues to display clear parallels with Wolfe's theoretical framework, despite its initial Western application.

Wolfe emphasizes that while the pursuit of territory may be racialized, the core objective remains land acquisition: "the primary motive for elimination is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory."[8] What does Wolfe mean by "structure, not an event"? Wolfe suggests that settler colonialism is ongoing: it does not end after invasion, expulsion, or even a century. This is why Wolfe emphasizes the importance of maintaining possession as central to the colonizer's project. "It is both as complex social formation and as continuity through time that I term settler colonization a structure rather than an event, and it is on this basis that I shall consider its relationship to genocide."[9]

Drawing partly on Raphael Lemkin's concept of 'genocide,' the "logic of elimination" is multifaceted, with both negative and positive dimensions. "Negatively, it strives for the dissolution of native societies. Positively, it erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base."[10] This positive process involves replacing native cultures and identities, yet, as Wolfe writes, "settler colonialism does not simply replace native society *tout court*. Rather, the process of replacement maintains the refractory imprint of the native counter-claim."[11] A

---

[7] Ann-Elise Lewallen, The Fabric of Indigeneity : Ainu Identity, Gender, and Settler Colonialism in Japan (Santa Fe: School For Advanced Research Press, 2016), 31
[8] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Journal of Genocide Research 8, no. 4 (2006): 388
[9] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Journal of Genocide Research 8, no. 4 (2006): 390
[10] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Journal of Genocide Research 8, no. 4 (2006): 388
[11] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Journal of Genocide Research 8, no. 4 (2006): 389

common misunderstanding is that settler colonialism must be sustained solely through state-sponsored violence against native populations. This is not the only mechanism.

> "The positive outcomes of the logic of elimination can include officially encouraged miscegenation, the breaking-down of native title into alienable individual freeholds, native citizenship, child abduction, religious conversion, resocialization in total institutions such as missions or boarding schools, and a whole range of cognate biocultural assimilations."[12]

Wolfe's framework is directly applicable to the Japanese Empire, particularly in the case of the Ainu in Hokkaido. Japan's settler colonial project exemplified the "positive" logic of elimination through strategies such as miscegenation, the breaking down of communal landholdings, and the imposition of Japanese citizenship. First, intermarriage between Ainu and Japanese settlers was actively promoted, particularly by officials like Kita Masaaki. In 1933, Kita- known as the "chief architect" of Ainu welfare policies- advocated a "mixed-blood" position, urging the government to promote Ainu-Wajin marriages to facilitate assimilation.[13] Backed by eugenicist rhetoric, these policies framed intermarriage as a pathway to "improvement." Propaganda claimed, often without evidence, that "mixed-blood children take after the superior race, and are born almost as Wajin."[14] The cumulative degradation of Ainu identity, alongside systemic pressures, led some Ainu individuals to reject their heritage altogether. As one testimony records: "So in elementary school I decided to choose the Wajin side since only one of my parents is Ainu... and I rejected the Ainu part of my ancestry."[15]

Secondly, the breaking down of native title into alienable freeholds aligns with Wolfe's argument. The Dawes Act of 1887 in the United States, which divided tribal lands

[12] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Journal of Genocide Research 8, no. 4 (2006): 388
[13] Ann-Elise Lewallen, The Fabric of Indigeneity : Ainu Identity, Gender, and Settler Colonialism in Japan (Santa Fe: School For Advanced Research Press, 2016), 112
[14] Ann-Elise Lewallen, The Fabric of Indigeneity : Ainu Identity, Gender, and Settler Colonialism in Japan (Santa Fe: School For Advanced Research Press, 2016), 112
[15] Ann-Elise Lewallen, The Fabric of Indigeneity : Ainu Identity, Gender, and Settler Colonialism in Japan (Santa Fe: School For Advanced Research Press, 2016), 99

into individual plots for sale, finds a parallel in Japan's Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act.[16] Michele Mason describes this law as "the linchpin of the Japanization of Ainu," designed "to convert Ainu to farming by parceling out inadequate plots of land."[17]

Thirdly, the 1930s marked a turning point as the Ainu were granted Japanese citizenship. Yet this legal status did not translate into full cultural inclusion. As one scholar observes:

> They were not completely culturally assimilated. They remained distinctive in terms of religion and separate schools, meaning that discrimination, landownership issues, ethnic tourism, and a pervasive public representation of their culture and themselves as 'primitive' also remained.[18]

Citizenship, in this context, became a tool for suppressing Ainu identity while reinforcing Japan's imperial authority: "the forced conferment of Japanese citizenship and the aggressive assimilation policies were significant means by which Japan claimed absolute authority over the island and established itself as a competitive imperial power."[19]

Furthermore, systems of resocialization and "cognate biocultural assimilations" will be discussed under the sections of dōka and kōminka.

(b) Colonial Modernity

Colonial modernity is a daring neologism, coined in the 1990s, that offers a historiographical alternative to modernization theory. The latter was previously sported by historians such as Ramon Myers and Mark Peattie, whose scholarship was notably postwar. Shifting the lens beyond the West, colonial modernity opens the door to greater academic

---

[16] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Journal of Genocide Research 8, no. 4 (2006): 400

[17] Michele M Mason, Dominant Narratives of Colonial Hokkaido and Imperial Japan Envisioning the Periphery and the Modern Nation-State (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 9.

[18] Lin Poyer and J Tsai, "Wartime Experiences and Indigenous Identities in the Japanese Empire," Journal of Military and Strategic Studies 19, no. 2 (January 1, 2018): 44.

[19] Michele M Mason, Dominant Narratives of Colonial Hokkaido and Imperial Japan Envisioning the Periphery and the Modern Nation-State (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 9

nuance. This academic nuance is critical: it allows us to account for the complex, layered realities of empire. In particular, the concept of colonial modernity exposes the imperialism of Japan and China, histories often neglected or sanitized by other historiographical approaches.

The power in Colonial modernity begins at its synopsis: colonialism and modernity are interwoven.

> If we declined the old idea that modernity follows colonialism in time a la modernization theory, then we could start from the plausible and demonstrable assumption that colonialism and modernity are simultaneous expressions of capitalist expansion. It could make visible how globalizing colonial or imperial capital inhabited and reconfigured space, all space; not just some spaces.[20]

Barlow argues that colonial modernity fundamentally undermines one of modernization theory's core assumptions: that modernization and colonialism are distinct. Instead, the drive for capital accumulation means that modernizing and colonizing are inseparable- conjoined twins of capitalist expansion. Barlow emphasizes that globalizing imperial and colonial capital reconfigured space, not just economically, but socially and culturally. Modernization theory is often critiqued for its implicit racism, as it promotes a diffusionist model: modernity originates in Western Europe and spreads outward, seeding "vernacular" forms elsewhere.[21] This argument collapses under scrutiny. It rests on an orientalist, Eurocentric worldview that historical evidence does not support: modernity did not originate in Western Europe and then diffuse outward. Colonial modernity emphasizes process and spatial reality over Eurocentric geography. It highlights how colonial and imperial forces occupied not just physical space,

---

[20]Tani Barlow, "DEBATES over COLONIAL MODERNITY in EAST ASIA and ANOTHER ALTERNATIVE," Cultural Studies 26, no. 5 (September 2012): 624, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2012.711006.

[21]Tani Barlow, "DEBATES over COLONIAL MODERNITY in EAST ASIA and ANOTHER ALTERNATIVE," Cultural Studies 26, no. 5 (September 2012): 625, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2012.711006.

but also psychological and social spaces worldwide, challenging the diffusionist model and avoiding Eurocentric assumptions.

The colonial modernity framework disrupts the rigid categories of modernization theory. As Barlow argues, it allows us to ask questions that transcend the positivist categories of nation, modernity, tradition, culture, stage of development, and civilization.[22] This approach also makes it possible to connect past to present- to trace how practices of selling, buying, investing, marketing, and advertising operated under colonial modern conditions as international capital mobilized into aggressive corporate form.[23]

(c) Postcolonial Theory

Although settler colonial studies and the concept of colonial modernity were only formalized recently within Anglophone academia, colonized and Indigenous people have long written about colonization. Their works were often marginalized or dismissed- an erasure sustained by the lingering hierarchies of colonialism itself. This erasure is partly reflected in the prominence of figures like Edward Saïd and Homi K. Bhabha within postcolonial studies, even though they build on the foundational insights of earlier thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi. Although Fanon and Memmi wrote before postcolonial theory was formally named, they remain foundational inspirations for the field.[24] However, it seems that the application of this theory to the Japanese Empire is relatively less prominent. As a result, this section will primarily comprehend Bhabha's theory of hybridity

---

[22] Tani Barlow, "DEBATES over COLONIAL MODERNITY in EAST ASIA and ANOTHER ALTERNATIVE," Cultural Studies 26, no. 5 (September 2012): 624, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2012.711006.

[23] Tani Barlow, "DEBATES over COLONIAL MODERNITY in EAST ASIA and ANOTHER ALTERNATIVE," Cultural Studies 26, no. 5 (September 2012): 617, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2012.711006.

[24] Becky Fenerty, "LibGuides: Postcolonial Theory in the 21st Century: Is the Past the Future or Is the Future the Past? (February 2021): Home," ala-choice.libguides.com, February 2021, https://ala-choice.libguides.com/c.php?g=1117036.

and then analyse Leo T. S. Ching's application of postcolonial theoretical frameworks onto Taiwan, specifically under the Japanese Empire.

Among these theorists, Homi Bhabha's work on hybridity offers particularly complex insights, especially concerning colonial modernity. His work on 'hybridity' goes hand in hand with colonial modernity. Bhabha's concept of hybridity complements the framework of colonial modernity. He argues that when imperialism seeks to mold its subjects, the native heritage it seeks to erase does not vanish- it mutates, adapting to and reshaping colonial power itself.[25] This idea complicates the relationship between colonialism and modernity, challenging the notion of a clean separation between the two. The presence of these "hybrid traces" raises the question: can there ever truly be ideological domination or purity in colonial contexts?[26] In this sense, colonialism and modernity cannot be separated; they are intertwined, coexisting within the same spaces, mutually constitutive rather than distinct.

In the backdrop of mutually constitutive relationships and colonial modernity, Leo T.S. Ching encapsulates Western frameworks with postcolonial frameworks while epitomizing colonial modernity and with the basis of settler colonialism.

> Japanese or Japaneseness, Taiwanese or Taiwaneseness, aborigines or aboriginality, and Chinese or Chineseness—as embodied in compartmentalized national, racial, or cultural categories—do not exist outside the temporality and spatiality of colonial modernity, but are instead enabled by it.[27]

Interestingly, Ching weaves a web through historiographical schools to construct a complex narrative. This is most prominent in his usage of dōka and kōminka, two concepts that will be deconstructed in the following section.

---

[25] Tirdad Zolghadr, "A Conversation with Homi K. Bhabha | Bidoun," Bidoun (Bidoun, 2006), https://www.bidoun.org/articles/homi-k-bhahba.
[26] Tirdad Zolghadr, "A Conversation with Homi K. Bhabha | Bidoun," Bidoun (Bidoun, 2006), https://www.bidoun.org/articles/homi-k-bhahba.
[27] Leo T. S. Ching, Becoming "Japanese" : Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 11.

In the burgeoning academia of postcolonial analysis of Imperial Japan, this paper has provided several theoretical frameworks and indicated their ideological consistencies while indicating relevant parallels to Japanese expansionism.

Assimilation and Imperialization (Dōka and Kōminka) in Case Studies

(a) Hokkaido and Dōka

Until 1997, the Ainu were not officially recognized as an Indigenous people. Although the 1899 Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act- intended to convert the Ainu into farmers through land distribution- had long been repealed, no positive effort was made for nearly a century to recognize the Ainu as a distinct political collective. For those 98 years, the historical narrative was perverted. Siddle writes of how "both official and popular versions of the history of Hokkaidō and its adjoining territories emphasise peaceful development (*kaitaku*) in virgin lands (*shojochi*) made possible by the heroic sacrifices of Japanese pioneers."[28] This narrative of "development in virgin lands" mirrors the concept of terra nullius (empty land), a trope weaponized by many settler colonial states in constructing their legitimacy.

(i) Establishment

Hokkaido's incorporation into the Japanese Empire intensified after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, when 'Ezochi' was renamed 'Hokkaido' in 1869. That same year, Japan established the Colonization Commission, or *Kaitakushi*. Its role was to formally incorporate and develop the prefecture, rooted in *kaitaku*, meaning development, making it a key instrument of Japan's settler colonial project in the region. A core objective of the *Kaitakushi*

[28] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 1.

was to exploit Hokkaido's land for the growing Japanese empire, particularly in response to geopolitical tensions with Russia.[29]

How does the settler colonial project manifest ideologically? Through the construction of shojochi- virgin lands- framed as undeveloped and awaiting Japanese cultivation (*kaitaku*).[30] Following Siddle, this paper argues that such narratives situate Japanese nationalism within a Hegelian framework- one that presents history as a linear progression culminating in Japan's modernity. In this view, Japanese settler colonial mythology intertwines with nation-building, implying a linear, teleological approach to history. The narrative continues by noting the "heroic sacrifices of Japanese pioneers."[31] By framing Hokkaido as "underutilized" or "underdeveloped," Japan claimed the authority to define what counted as "utilized" or "developed" land. In this scaffolding of a settler colonial narrative, any prior Ainu sovereignty was ignored, and as a result, self-determination became a luxury not afforded to the Ainu. By declaring Hokkaido "uncultivated," Japan justified resource extraction and large-scale settlement, further consolidating its settler colonial claims. This proves Wolfe right in his hypothesis that settler colonialism is driven by "access to territory."[32]

Consequently, the state implemented immigration policies to promote the influx of Japanese settlers (*Wajin*) into Hokkaido.[33] These policies included the *1872 Hokkaidō Tochi Baitai Kisoku* (Regulation for the Lease and Sale of Hokkaidō Land) and the *Jisho Kisoku* (Land Regulation Ordinance). These laws enabled settlers to privately own land, facilitating

---

[29] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 55-56.
[30] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 57.
[31] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 1.
[32] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Journal of Genocide Research 8, no. 4 (2006): 388
[33] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 53.

the partition and seizure of Ainu territories.[34] This partition occurred with explicit recognition of Ainu ancestral land, as Article Seven of the Jisho Kisoku states:

> The mountains, forests, rivers, and streams where formerly the natives fished, hunted, and gathered wood shall be partitioned and converted to private (jinushi) or collective (murauke) ownership.[35]

This was an evident consolidation of Japanese power over Hokkaido. This process was a strategic alienation of the Ainu from the land they had lived on, drawing back to Wolfe's framework of settler colonialism.

(ii) Dismantling through Dōka

As mentioned earlier, Wolfe's "logic of elimination" has its negative and positive dimensions. While the creation of a new colonial society represents the "positive" aspect, the initial and ongoing "negative dimension," meaning the active dissolution of native societies, was aggressively pursued against the Ainu to establish Japanese hegemony in Hokkaido. This involved a multifaceted assault on the foundations of Ainu society, culture, and livelihood through the rubric of dōka (assimilation). Under Meiji rule, the state pursued policies with the explicit goal of dismantling Ainu society and culture.

The state under Meiji rule employed dōka policies in a systematic process to undermine the Ainu's economy. Heavy restrictions on Ainu hunting and fishing practices included bans on spring-bow traps and poisoned arrows. After these restrictions, authorities imposed outright bans on fishing in specific areas, undermining traditional subsistence practices and cutting off resources vital for trade. These policies were justified as necessary for resource conservation or "in view of the danger to *Wajin* (Japanese settlers) hunters."[36] Yet despite the justification of resource conservation, "drastic overhunting by Wajin armed

---

[34] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 56.
[35] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 56.
[36] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 62.

with rifles" posed a serious threat to "Ainu subsistence activities."[37] The intensity of overhunting contributed to Ainu starvation in the winter of 1878 to 1879, when "an official described the Ainu as 'sitting waiting for death'."[38] The criminalisation of Ainu economic traditions, coupled with resource degradation by settlers from Honshu, forced the Ainu into economic dependence on the state, with no alternative but demise.

The dōka process extended into language, the core vessel for tradition, social structure, and community worldviews. Language use was further suppressed in daily life, particularly through a Japanese education system, sometimes residential, that banned its use. The process also targeted Ainu religion and practices, which were central to Ainu identity. Notable examples include the tattooing of women (*sinuye*), a key marker of social identity, and the *iyomante* (bear-sending) ceremony, which Japanese settlers condemned as "barbaric" and savage within their so-called "civilizing" mission.[39] This coercion to abandon facets of Ainu identity was a deliberate ploy in dōka. The stripping of Ainu uniqueness was a settler colonial mission to render them an indistinguishable political collective, with the end goal of dōka. The Japanese bureaucracy dismantled Ainu governance and conflict resolution systems, stripping the Ainu of agency over their people and land. This process worked to break the Ainu people's group identity and, within that identity, their social cohesion.

Forced relocation impacted connections with the Ainu's ancestral lands (*iwor*) and harmed the livelihoods linked to specific environments. As a result, the government legislated and ordered the deterioration of traditional Ainu identity under the disguise of dōka. These removals began in the 1880s and were intensified by successive policies targeting Ainu communities in lucrative areas. As a result, displaced Ainu were often forced into

[37] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 62.
[38] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 63.
[39] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 61.

reservations (*hogochi*) or *kyūdojin buraku* (former native villages), as "official policy was that the Ainu must become farmers."[40] While land was distributed to Ainu for farming, the most fertile and agriculturally valuable lands were reserved for Japanese settlers. The Ainu were systematically prevented from achieving self-sufficiency, despite their efforts not to follow the laws that threatened their existence. For the state's goal to control and increase pressure on the Ainu, these mechanisms created a dependency on the state, reinforcing Wolfe's subconcept on the "dissolution of native societies" as a significant means of settler colonialism.[41]

While dōka legislation reveals clear discrimination on an individual level, the widespread racialization of the Ainu by the Japanese state and society served to justify these efforts. Japanese scholarship was heavily influenced by Western variations of eugenics and anthropology, entangled with racial theories and Social Darwinism. As a result, the dominant rationale framed the Ainu as a biologically and culturally "inferior race" (*rettō minzoku*).[42] According to the linear national narrative, the Ainu were seen as a "dying race" (*horobiyuku minzoku*), and their extinction was framed as inevitable.[43] In this narrative, it was believed that it was inevitable because the Ainu were far too inept to compete with the Japanese, the "superior race" in the "struggle for survival."[44] This narrative made space for Japanese hegemony and delegitimized Ainu sovereignty, framing their marginalization as an unavoidable advancement of the nation rather than an act of unjustified violence.

---

[40] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 60, 65-66.
[41] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Journal of Genocide Research 8, no. 4 (2006): 388
[42] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 77, 82, 88.
[43] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 98.
[44] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 1, 76-77, 88.

The magnum opus of the Japanese government's "positive dimension" of dōka, aligning with Wolfe's "logic of elimination," was the Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act of 1899.[45] While presented as "protection," this Act intensified dōka by allocating single plots of land to Ainu households, aiming to convert the "Ainu problem" of Indigenous resistance into sedentary farmers, whose livelihoods were restricted to serving the Japanese economy.[46] Additionally, the law placed Ainu communal land under Japanese bureaucratic administration and included sections for a dōka-focused education and healthcare. This had the impact of the Japanese state reaching further into the Ainu's autonomy.

Drawing on Louis Althusser's concept of the Ideological State Apparatus, one guiding principle is that schools function as a key mechanism within this system. Building on Althusser, this paper argues that education within the dōka system was strategically designed to "Japanize" the Ainu, transforming what is typically a socializing institution into a tool of assimilation.[47] The Japanese state established "Native Schools" (*kyūdojin gakkō*) that, while discouraging the use of the Ainu language and the spread of cultural knowledge, prioritised the Japanese language, loyalty to the Emperor (oriented through "moral education"), and Japanese history.[48] However, education was only part of the sociological apparatus, and dōka encompassed all aspects of Ainu life. Societal pressure ensured that the state-sponsored dissolution of Ainu culture trickled down to the individual level, manifesting as civilian discrimination. Thus, Ainu people were pressured to adopt Japanese architecture, clothing, and names.[49] The psychological impact of this pressure is documented in testimony from

[45] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 68.
[46] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 70, 135.
[47] Louis Althusser, On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (London: Verso, 2014).
[48] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 71-72, 90-91.
[49] Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012), 62.

Ainu individuals who internalized shame for their ancestry.[50] This psychological pressure must be understood alongside the eugenicist rhetoric of Kita Masaaki, which supported Wolfe's concept of "officially encouraged miscegenation."[51] Together, these elements formed a comprehensive strategy for the Japanization of the Ainu and the simultaneous dissolution of Ainu society.[52] Through this process, Japan transforms itself by absorbing Ainu remnants, the clearest example being the presence of Ainu ancestry in the modern Japanese population. As a result, Japanese identity cannot logically be attributed to a purely Yamato ethnicity.

Dōka and Resilience

Nibutani, a small district in the Biratori town of Hokkaido, is a sign that the Ainu still exist. In 2000, Researcher Lisa Hiwasaki reported that 80% of the town population was Ainu. "This is the largest concentration of Ainu in Hokkaido, and the only place in the country where the Ainu are in a majority."[53]

In this town, one can walk to either of two Ainu museums. One is the smaller 'Kayano Shigeru Nibutani Ainu Museum', named after the politician and Ainu activist. In his obituary, Kayano is described by Professor Kazuyoshi Otsuka as "the largest memory keeper (of the Ainu people), who made Japanese society recognize the presence of the Ainu ethnic group."[54] Native in the Ainu language, there is little evidence of remaining native speakers,

---

[50] Ann-Elise Lewallen, The Fabric of Indigeneity : Ainu Identity, Gender, and Settler Colonialism in Japan (Santa Fe: School For Advanced Research Press, 2016), 99.
[51] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Journal of Genocide Research 8, no. 4 (2006): 388
[52] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Journal of Genocide Research 8, no. 4 (2006): 388
[53] Lisa Hiwasaki, "Ethnic Tourism in Hokkaido and the Shaping of Ainu Identity," Pacific Affairs 73, no. 3 (2000): 400, https://doi.org/10.2307/2672026.
[54] The Asahi Shimbun, "Tributes Flow for Prominent Ainu Activist Shigeru Kayano - ENGLISH," Archive.org, May 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20060517150759/http://www.asahi.com/english/Herald-asahi/TKY200605080101.html.

however, linguistic revitalisation efforts are ongoing, and there is much hope for the "critically endangered" language status from UNESCO to improve.[55]

The second museum is the 'Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum,' memorable for its well-developed collection of Ainu art, textiles, weaponry, and even preserved boats. I remember very clearly doing a round of the main exhibition space, when I saw a piece that made me recognise that it's not over yet.

Toru Kaizawa's collection of wood craftsmanship under the title "Identity." The last piece is installed in the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum.[56] [57] [58] [59]

[55] UNESCO, "Language: Ainu, Japan," UNESCO Multimedia Archives, January 17, 2011, https://www.unesco.org/archives/multimedia/document-1769.
[56] Tōru Kaizawa, Identity 2023 Iron Will, December 12, 2023, December 12, 2023, https://www.japanhouselondon.uk/whats-on/carving-ainu-art-with-kaizawa-toru-and-kato-hirofumi/.
[57] Tōru Kaizawa and Katsura tree Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture, Sapporo), Identity 1, 2011, 2011, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/art-and-architecture/in-pictures-see-works-from-the-ngcs-sakahan-exhibition/article8620940/.
[58] Tōru Kaizawa, Identity, 2011, 2011, https://www.flickr.com/photos/pirika-makiri/5606131508/in/album-72157623099642792.
[59] Tōru Kaizawa, Identity 4, n.d., n.d., https://yukomaru.blog.fc2.com/blog-entry-2496.html.

The "Identity" collection by Ainu master craftsman Tōru Kaizawa is a piece that speaks volumes for the contemporary Ainu identity. Connoting Bhabha's theory of hybridity, Ainu identity exists, with the transformation of suppression underneath Japanese colonisation. Nonetheless, it lives and breathes. Kaizawa successfully displays that you may put on a blazer, a zipper jacket, or regular clothes; however, you are still your ancestry. Your identity will continue to live through you, even if you decide to honour it or not (whether for self-preservation or not).

To continue to discuss the Ainu as victims would engage in "deficit discourse," a term coined by Aboriginal Australians to moniker the "disempowering patterns of thought, language and practice that represent people in terms of deficiencies and failures."[60] Rather than the patterns of resistance that followed the Ainu's colonial violence. The quiet preservation of identity from Ainu women, despite being societally pressured to intermarry with Japanese men, is a starting point for understanding how the Ainu, though victimised by the Japanese, are not just victims. This attitude is the basis of Ann-Elise Lewallen's *The Fabric of Indigeneity: Ainu Identity, Gender, and Settler Colonialism in Japan,* and is a starting point for witnessing a documented Ainu resistance.

Dōka in Close

Dōka was comprehensive in its policies in Hokkaido, the epitome of expression of Japan's settler colonial project, strategised to achieve Wolfe's "elimination of the native," through both violence and Japanization of the Ainu. The Japanese state played the role of a civilizing and protecting agent through the Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act of

[60] The Lowitja Institute, "What Is Deficit Discourse?," 2018, https://www.lowitja.org.au/wp-content/uploads/migrate/deficit-discourse-summary-report.pdf.

1899, where the state imposed sedentary agricultural practices, dōka-based education in "Native Schools" (kyūdojin gakkō), and overarching suppression of Ainu linguistic, spiritual, and bureaucratic expression. This had the intention to strip the Ainu of their distinct cultural and political identity through other means, such as promoting Japanese names, clothing, and partners, for the eugenicist rhetoric touting "racial improvement." Hokkaido's experience with dōka, as a result, became an example of Wolfe's "positive dimension" in the "logic of elimination." This internal colonization, a rigorous exercise of "Japanization" of the Ainu, became a crucial and distinct step in the Japanese "imperialising, inside-out" method. As a result of this method, Japan then transformed itself by absorbing the Ainu's biocultural coding through their dōka. Perversion of this history has been a long-standing issue in Japanese national narrative construction due to the emphasis placed on peaceful kaitaku in "virgin lands" to disguise violent structural change.

(b) Taiwan and Kōminka

Kōminka's Rise

In 1895, Japan acquired the island of Taiwan from Qing dynasty China with the initial guiding intention to manufacture a "model colony." To Japan, a model colony entailed an efficient economic exploitation, establishment of modern infrastructure, and a sweeping system of social control, notably through the repressive state apparatus (RSA). This specific RSA would be an extensive and exhaustive police toolkit, which included the *hoko* (household registration and mutual surveillance) system.[61] [62] When studying Taiwan under Japanese rule, the change when jumping to 1937 is especially eye-catching. Japan's earlier colonial policies and programming incorporated elements of incremental dōka through the

[61] Leo T. S. Ching, Becoming "Japanese" : Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1-5.
[62] Ramon H Myers and Mark R Peattie, The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945 (Princeton University Press, 1987), 213-215.

orienting of education and policing of language. The year 1937 is special for the escalation of Japanese war efforts in China, as a result, a period of *kōminka undō* (imperialisation movement) characterised the colonial project in Taiwan.

Dōka was all-encompassing. However, it was characterised by the absence of traditional forms and gradual Japanization. Kōminka in Taiwan was radical, even in its initially intended nature. The Japanese government had an intense end goal of transforming Taiwan through spiritual, ideological, and cultural means, so they may become loyal and dedicated subjects (*kōmin)* of the Japanese Emperor and devote themselves to the Japanese Empire.[63] Leo T.S. Ching describes the *kōminka undō* as "the final stage of dōka."[64] The concept to strive for pushed beyond just passively becoming Japanized and into actively participating in the Imperial Japanese struggle.

Kōminka's Mechanisms

Kōminka, as a movement, sank its teeth into every surface of Taiwanese livelihood and, exceedingly, the Taiwanese consciousness. Perhaps most notably (due to its optics) was the 1940 *kaiseimei* ("Name-Changing Campaign"), where Taiwanese families were pressured to adopt Japanese names and abandon their traditional Chinese family names. This campaign differs from Hokkaido in its time constraints and lack of awareness, despite occurring in a later period. This policy existed beyond bureaucracy; it symbolically defied Chinese ancestry and instead created a strong link to the Japanese imperial family-state.[65] Further, the linguistic policing for Japanese to be the *kokugo* ("national language") was harshly enforced. Japanese

---

[63] Leo T. S. Ching, Becoming "Japanese" : Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 135-206

[64] Leo T. S. Ching, Becoming "Japanese" : Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 11.

[65] Leo T. S. Ching, Becoming "Japanese" : Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 159-165.

was mandated in all official and public areas of life, schools, and became encouraged within the household. Japanese proficiency became a status symbol due to its connotation to imperial devotion and loyalty.[66]

Another crucial mechanism was through indoctrination for religion and ideology. Taiwanese folk religions, preserved by Indigenous Taiwanese communities, and Chinese-derived temples were either reorganised or suppressed. On the other hand, Japanese-derived ideology fared forceful inducement such as State Shintoism, with a focus on emperor worship and Japanese national mythology. Establishment of Shinto shrines (*kamidana*) in the home, participation in Shinto rituals, and reverence of the Japanese Emperor as a living deity (*arahitogami*) were all coerced onto the Taiwanese population.[67] The institutions of the state-controlled media and education system became vehicles peddling Imperial Japanese propaganda. Overarchingly and while the propaganda took many forms, it spread narratives that trumpeted the Japanese military, worshipped the sacred Emperor, and stressed that the imperial subject has a 'duty' to contribute to the "holy war" that will construct the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere." Products with cultural value (i.e., "the Bell of Sayon") would be used to manufacture emotional investment in the empire and, most importantly, encourage the exemplar of selfless sacrifice for Imperial Japan.[68]

The Japanese military would then take this indoctrination and work on the active mobilization of the Taiwanese population, including its indigenous groups (*Takasagozoku),* for the imperial war effort. Often blurring the line of voluntarism, however, these young

---

[66] Leo T. S. Ching, Becoming "Japanese" : Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 143-149.
[67] Leo T. S. Ching, Becoming "Japanese" : Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 154-159.
[68] Robert Thomas, Tropics of Savagery : The Culture of Japanese Empire in Comparative Frame (출판사: Berkeley: University Of California Press, 2010), 34–46.

Taiwanese men being recruited went through intense social and official pressure to join the military as either soldiers or auxiliary personnel. As a result of this mobilization, an example was made of the Takasago Volunteers, who most famously served in Japanese campaigns in multiple Southeast Asian countries.[69] Serving in the military in similar manners became the ultimate display of imperial allegiance. In such intense efforts by the Japanese government to manufacture consent to take part in the wartime effort as a *kōmin*, a separate Taiwanese identity was erased. However, in this inclusion, yet again, Japanese identity itself was transformed.

Kōminka's Navigation

Taiwanese identity existed in a matrix between Japaneseness, Indigenity, Chineseness, and at certain eras it leaned closer to a specific label until coming to its mix, defining itself post-Japanese colonisation. As a result, it is difficult to isolate Taiwanese identity from Japanese subjecthood during this wartime period because they are inseparable from each other. That is not to say that resistance did not exist or that it was futile. There are examples of overt armed resistance, like the 1915 Tanpani Incident or the 1930 Musha Incident.[70] There are also examples of covert unarmed resistance, which existed in the private preservation of Chinese heritage through cultural and linguistic means and civil disobedience. Beyond the private, the Taiwanese resisted in strategic collaboration to navigate oppression in the colonial system. Agreeing with Ching, the profound "identity struggle" for the Taiwanese in this era cannot be quantified; however, it is only the result of their need to negotiate and compromise despite the demands of imperial subjecthood.[71] The resulting complex, hybrid

---

[69] Lin Poyer and J Tsai, "Wartime Experiences and Indigenous Identities in the Japanese Empire," Journal of Military and Strategic Studies 19, no. 2 (January 1, 2018): 50-53.
[70] Leo T. S. Ching, Becoming "Japanese" : Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 70-79.
[71] Leo T. S. Ching, Becoming "Japanese" : Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 176-187.

identities for individuals who lived between several expectations from several external parties only prove the lack of complete passivity in the Taiwanese.

Kōminka in Close

Taiwan's experienced rendition of *kōminka undō* (imperialization movement) was an intense manifestation of Japan's colonial assimilation project due to its timing with the Pacific War, urgent needs in total war. This had the effect of requiring complete spiritual and ideological subservience to the Japanese Empire's family-state from the Taiwanese. Kōminka's mechanisms through the kaiseimei (Name-Changing Campaign), linguistic policing, imposition of Emperor worship and State Shinto ideology, and the mass mobilization of the Taiwanese for the war effort, were intentional by design in their motive to penetrate the Taiwanese consciousness for imperial subjecthood. A result of this was the Taiwanese "identity struggle," informing new, relentless guidelines for navigating cultural heritage, resulting in a complex manifestation of identity. A critical facet in Japan's "imperialising, inside-out" was, therefore, the attempt to create a monolithic imperial identity despite the diversity of Japan's colonial territories. This process displayed the totalitarian nature of wartime Imperial Japan. This paper has underscored the identity's enabling by colonial modernity through the powerful illustration of kōminka, actively redefining what it meant to be 'Taiwanese' in Imperial Japan.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that Imperial Japan's subjugation of its indigenous and colonized subjects was a multi-faceted "imperialising, inside-out" process that shaped not just the identities of the colonized but also the very cloth the modern Japanese nation-state is woven with. Dissecting these complex historical changes and continuities is best

accomplished by using the critical frameworks of settler colonialism, colonial modernity, and postcolonial theory. In order to comprehend power and identity dynamics, this approach transcends reductive narratives.

The ability of Indigenous people, such as the Ainu, to move on despite their victimisation offers a significant revision to the national historical narrative. Contemporary efforts to honour “memory keepers”, revitalise the Ainu language, and reclaim voice in the art scene like that displayed by Tōru Kaizawa, show that Indigenous identity can adapt and find its voice even when under intense colonial pressures. A serious confrontation with this “imperialising, inside-out” history is still required for modern Japan to begin building a more inclusive national narrative and achieve just and fair relations internally and with former colonial territories.

Appendix

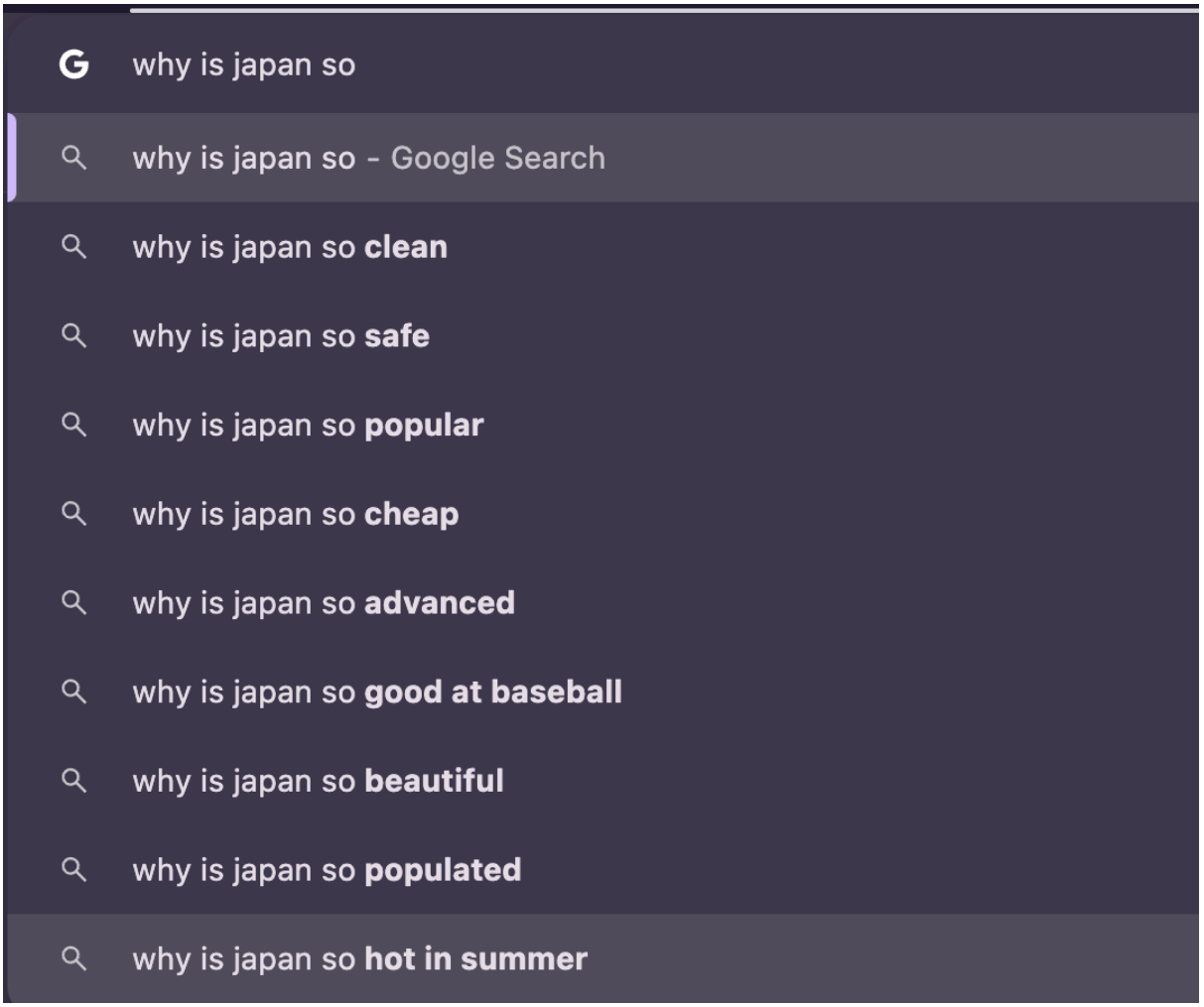

Fig. 1. Google Autocomplete Results After Search "why is japan so…"

Bibliography

Althusser, Louis. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. London: Verso, 2014.

Ann-Elise Lewallen. *The Fabric of Indigeneity : Ainu Identity, Gender, and Settler Colonialism in Japan*. Santa Fe: School For Advanced Research Press, 2016.

Barlow, Tani. "DEBATES over COLONIAL MODERNITY in EAST ASIA and ANOTHER ALTERNATIVE." *Cultural Studies* 26, no. 5 (September 2012): 624. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2012.711006.

Ching, Leo T. S. *Becoming "Japanese" : Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Fenerty, Becky. "LibGuides: Postcolonial Theory in the 21st Century: Is the Past the Future or Is the Future the Past? (February 2021): Home." ala-choice.libguides.com, February 2021. https://ala-choice.libguides.com/c.php?g=1117036.

Hiwasaki, Lisa. "Ethnic Tourism in Hokkaido and the Shaping of Ainu Identity." *Pacific Affairs* 73, no. 3 (2000): 400. https://doi.org/10.2307/2672026.

Kaizawa, Tōru. *Identity*. 2011. https://www.flickr.com/photos/pirika-makiri/5606131508/in/album-72157623099642792.

Kaizawa, Tōru *Identity 4*. n.d. https://yukomaru.blog.fc2.com/blog-entry-2496.html.

Kaizawa, Tōru *Identity 2023 Iron Will*. December 12, 2023. https://www.japanhouselondon.uk/whats-on/carving-ainu-art-with-kaizawa-toru-and-kato-hirofumi/.

Kaizawa, Tōru, and Katsura tree Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture, Sapporo). *Identity 1*. 2011. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/art-and-architecture/in-pictures-see-works-from-the-ngcs-sakahan-exhibition/article8620940/.

Kauanui, J. Kēhaulani. "False Dilemmas and Settler Colonial Studies: Response to Lorenzo Veracini: 'Is Settler Colonial Studies Even Useful?'" *Postcolonial Studies*, December 29, 2020, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2020.1857023.

Mason, Michele M. *Dominant Narratives of Colonial Hokkaido and Imperial Japan Envisioning the Periphery and the Modern Nation-State*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Myers, Ramon H, and Mark R Peattie. *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*. Princeton University Press, 1987.

Poyer, Lin, and J Tsai. “Wartime Experiences and Indigenous Identities in the Japanese Empire.” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 19, no. 2 (January 1, 2018): 44.

Siddle, Richard. *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan*. Abingdon U.A.: Routledge, 2012.

The Asahi Shimbun. “Tributes Flow for Prominent Ainu Activist Shigeru Kayano - ENGLISH.” Archive.org, May 2006. https://web.archive.org/web/20060517150759/http://www.asahi.com/english/Herald-asahi/TKY200605080101.html.

The Lowitja Institute. “What Is Deficit Discourse?,” 2018. https://www.lowitja.org.au/wp-content/uploads/migrate/deficit-discourse-summary-report.pdf.

Thomas, Robert. *Tropics of Savagery : The Culture of Japanese Empire in Comparative Frame*. 출판사: Berkeley: University Of California Press, 2010.

UNESCO. “Language: Ainu, Japan.” UNESCO Multimedia Archives, January 17, 2011. https://www.unesco.org/archives/multimedia/document-1769.

Wolfe, Patrick. “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240.

Zolghadr, Tirdad. “A Conversation with Homi K. Bhabha | Bidoun.” Bidoun. Bidoun, 2006. https://www.bidoun.org/articles/homi-k-bhahba.