

Communications to the Editor

MARK PEATTIE and RAMON MYERS respond to Andre Schmid's "Colonialism and the 'Korea Problem' in the Historiography of Modern Japan," JAS 59.4: 951–976.

As James Crowley, pointed out many years ago, "Clio is a fickle muse." The historical certainties of one generation are questioned by the next and the judgments of historians are constantly revised by those who follow after. This is as it should be, for the writing of history is a process of evolution and, in the largest sense, all good history is revisionist history. In his recent article, "Colonialism and the 'Korea Problem' in the Historiography of Modern Japan," Andre Schmid sets forth a clearly revisionist approach to the history of the Japanese colonial venture: the destruction of what he sees as the barriers limiting our understanding of the connection between Japan's internal nation-building and the nation's quest for overseas empire. He makes an interesting point when he writes that the earliest English-language studies of Japanese colonialism, such as our own, in their unidirectional perspective, failed to give adequate attention both to the perspective of the colonized and to the impact of the colonies on the metropole.

In scanning his argument, however, it is not clear to us that Professor Schmid understands the evolutionary processes of historiography or the chronological and historiographical contexts in which *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945* was written nearly twenty years ago. At the time that it appeared, it too was revisionist, for it was drafted at a time when English language historiography of Japanese colonialism, still influenced by the IMTFE version of history, saw the Japanese imperial venture as uniquely indefensible and Japanese colonial efforts entirely exploitative and not in the least developmental. Our purpose was to contribute to a more balanced view, intended neither as a grand apologia nor a blanket indictment, and to do this through investigations across a range of causes, institutions, and functions of the empire. Hence, Schmid's criticisms of the work that it is metropole-centered, that it "places colonial rule and strategy at the center of inquiry," and that its contributions "revolve around questions concerning the origins and motivations for Japanese imperialism, the process of empire building, and the ways and means of colonial administration," strike us oddly obtuse.

Of course, the focus of our work was Japan-centered. At the time that it was written there was no other single work addressed the issues, problems, and functions of the formal Japanese empire. But we did not consider that our study would provide the final judgment on the subject. We regarded our efforts then, and we still regard them today, only as the pioneering first step in the complex task of exploring the complex nature and implications of the Japanese colonial undertaking. Indeed, the Myers historiographical essay in the same volume suggested that future work which should view the Japanese colonial venture from the perspective of the colonized.

Schmid's other criticism of our work is that we have "privileged" the voice of the colonial oppressor over the colonial victims. The Peattie introduction to *The Japanese Colonial Empire* is apparently the main target of this criticism. Let us be straightforward here. Twenty years and multiple critiques of the "modernization" approach later, we would undoubtedly be chary of using phrases and assertions in the essay which now seem both too generous to Japanese colonial authority and too out of tune with current historical discussions on imperialism. That having been said, we stand

by most of the words and terms which we have used to describe the functions and capacities of Japanese colonial rule. In our view, Schmid's interpretation of many of these phrases is excessively argumentative and exaggerated. It should be clear, for example, that our assertion that the Japanese colonial empire was eventually "overtaken by disaster" refers to the demise of the Japanese-directed enterprise and cannot reasonably be read as privileging the Japanese vision of empire, as Schmid asserts.

Schmid's criticism of our use of 1931 as a turning point seems similarly misguided. We do not justify the Japanese subjugation of Korea in 1910 when we write of Japan's military aggressions of the 1930s and the Pacific War as "reckless adventurism." The Japanese extinction of Korean independence in 1910 was brutal, deceitful, and unjustified, but it certainly wasn't "reckless," as the acquiescence of the other imperialist powers to the Japanese annexation of the peninsula quickly demonstrated. Such small distortions of our argument sprinkle Professor Schmid's critique.

Schmid also fails to mention, moreover, that our appraisal of the formal empire prior to 1931 was made in a comparative context. In viewing the Japanese colonial empire against the polarities of exploitation and development we held and continue to hold the view that the Japanese colonial empire in its early and middle stages compared not unfavorably with the records of the majority of contemporary Western colonial empires. We are quick to recognize, of course, that it can be argued that *all* colonial episodes everywhere and in all times be roundly condemned *ex post facto* by the historical profession in its entirety. But that takes us into a vast sea of contention that is clearly beyond the horizons of this response.

Lastly, in response to Schmid's assertion that our work constitutes an uncritical justification of Japanese colonial rule, we would say that the totality of that work refutes that notion. An objective reader need only to scan the Peattie chapter on Japanese attitudes toward colonialism in the same *Japanese Colonial Empire*, his chapter on Japanese colonialism in the volume on twentieth century Japan in the *Cambridge History of Japan*, and his study of the interwar Japanese mandate in Micronesia, to see that Schmid's charge is unjustified.

Let us close on a note of accommodation. We welcome Andre Schmid's initiative in urging more attention be given to the mutual interactions between Japan and Korea and his suggestion that it be made it a bilingual enterprise. We would extend his suggestion to encompass the entire empire and suggest that it be a multi-lingual and multi-archival effort. While maintaining the validity of our own, earlier work focused largely on the activities of the Japanese metropole and based largely on Japanese language sources, we agree that it *is* time to move away from the island history of Japan based largely on Japanese sources. Many years ago, Ian Nish, in reviewing *The Japanese Colonial Empire*, noted that ours was essentially an analytical work, not a narrative history. Such a history, he pointed out, was yet to be written. It still is. But Professor Schmid has proposed a much more ambitious effort. Having pointed the way, perhaps he will undertake the task of writing a truly transnational history of Japan and all its colonies which privileges no single linguistic source or viewpoint, but weaves together the rich strands of Korean, Chinese, Russian,

Micronesian (oral histories), *and* Japanese archival materials. Potentially, that could be a superb contribution.

RAMON H. MYERS
MARK R. PEATTIE
Stamford University

ANDRE SCHMID responds:

At the conclusion of my review article, "Colonialism and the 'Korea Problem' in the Historiography of Modern Japan," I remarked how new developments in our understanding of the Japanese Empire would likely elicit much comment and debate. Professors Peattie and Myers' letter is a welcome addition to this much-needed discussion at the same time as it demonstrates the sensitivity of these issues.

Despite the general tone of dissent in their letter, I am struck by the fact that on most of the substantive points we are in agreement. We agree their work was an important early study of the Japanese Empire. We agree its orientation was metrocentric. We agree it offered a unidirectional vision of history with little attention to the centripetal forces of empire. We agree that in the future a transnational, multilingual approach to empire would be ideal. And we even agree that I can be "oddly obtuse," though my instinct would be to choose a less delicate turn of phrase.

In defense of their work's approach to empire, Professors Peattie and Myers note that at the time of publication in 1984 they considered their work a first step in what they hoped to be an evolving understanding of the workings of the formal empire. Although it is possible to point to literature on other empires that by the mid-1980s was already acknowledging the limits of this style of imperial history, their point is well taken. Yet revisionist works can also become dominant. Their work helped establish an approach for the study of the Japanese Empire that continues to shape our understanding of the history of modern Japan down to this day—a testament to the power of their trilogy, which Professors Peattie and Myers modestly underestimate. Indeed, it is precisely because of the continuing influence of their work that we need to highlight its historiographic tendencies and limits if the currently growing interest in empire is to lead us in new directions. Thus, it is most heartening to read that two of the architects of this foundational approach to modern Japanese history in describing their work as pioneering but not the "final judgement" suggest that nearly twenty years after its publication their work offers an approach to empire that still needs to be expanded. Yes, *Clio* is a fickle muse. Again, on this point, we agree.

Where we part company is on their defense of the developmental emphasis of their work. As Professors Peattie and Myers explain, this emphasis served their purpose of judging the developmental record of the Japanese against Western Empires. Yet there were a number of consequences to this historiographical choice, one being that they accepted too readily the civilizing claims of empire—a point they partly concede. What Professors Peattie and Myers do not fully address in their letter is that this same decision led them to reproduce within their own framework many colonial preconceptions about non-Japanese groups in the empire. My point is not just that colonized voices were left out and colonizing perspectives over emphasized. It is also that Japanese representations of colonized peoples shaped the assumptions under-

pinning Professors Peattie and Myers' own analysis of Japan's actions in the colonies. My detailed treatment of this issue for Professor Peattie's introductory essay as well as some of the other works reviewed provides ample evidence of this recurring problem.

Here I return to one of the larger points of my review article: by treating colonial discourse critically valuable histories of other empires can and have been written without a multi-lingual approach. Expecting historians to learn all the languages used in the empire in the vain hope of writing a totalizing history of empire is, of course, quite ludicrous—a point Professors Peattie and Myers insinuate in their concluding paragraph. Studies of the empire written exclusively from Japanese language sources will always exist. There is, after all, still much more to be learned from the metropole. But if we are to have a richer, more textured analysis of empire that distances itself fully from colonial ideology, historians working with these Japanese sources will necessarily have to be more chary of the self-serving claims and discursive contours of colonial archives. This will remain part of the challenge of writing histories of empire even as we combine Japanese sources with those of the colonized. On this last point, I hope Professors Peattie and Myers would agree with me.

ANDRE SCHMID
University of Toronto