



Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945 (Korean Studies of the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies)

By Mark E. Caprio

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From the late nineteenth century, Japan sought to incorporate the Korean Peninsula into its expanding empire. Japan took control of Korea in 1910 and ruled it until the end of World War II. During this colonial period, Japan advertised as a national goal the assimilation of Koreans into the Japanese state. It never achieved that goal. Mark Caprio here examines why Japan's assimilation efforts failed. Utilizing government documents, personal travel accounts, diaries, newspapers, and works of fiction, he uncovers plenty of evidence for the potential for assimilation but very few practical initiatives to implement the policy.

Japan's early history of colonial rule included tactics used with peoples such as the Ainu and Ryukyuan that tended more toward obliterating those cultures than to incorporating the people as equal Japanese citizens. Following the annexation of Taiwan in 1895, Japanese policymakers turned to European imperialist models, especially those of France and England, in developing strengthening its plan for assimilation policies. But, although Japanese used rhetoric that embraced assimilation, Japanese people themselves, from the top levels of government down, considered Koreans inferior and gave them few political rights. Segregation was built into everyday life. Japanese maintained separate communities in Korea, children were schooled in two separate and unequal systems, there was relatively limited intermarriage, and prejudice was ingrained. Under these circumstances, many Koreans resisted assimilation. By not actively promoting Korean-Japanese integration on the ground, Japan's rhetoric of assimilation remained just that.

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Editorial Review

Review

"The significance of addressing Japanese colonial rule in Korea in a broader comparative context cannot be exaggerated. Caprio had made a perceptive, innovative, and welcome contribution to expanding the scope of Japanese, Korean, and colonial studies."²Marie Seong-Hak Kim, *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 37:2 2011

"His main purpose is to show, first how the colonial rulers of Korea tried to manage the Korean population with political, social, cultural, and linguistic approaches filled with enormous internal contradictions and sophistry. His second purpose is to show how segments of Korean society collaborated with Japanese designs. . . . Caprio has fleshed out the theme of assimilation with rich detail and nuance and thrown a fresh light on the complex nature of Japanese rule in Korea and its limitations. . . ."³*American Historical Review*

"Mark Caprio's Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea is an illuminating account.... The crux of Caprio's work is that Japan, like other colonial regimes, made hollow promises related to assimilation for rhetorical ends rather than as a political or social goal.... Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea makes a twofold contribution to Korean and Japanese studies, as well as the more general field of colonial studies by first providing the global context for Japan's colonization of Korea and, second, examining the debate among Japanese in the public sphere regarding the assimilation of Korea. It is a worthwhile and quick read that I highly recommend."⁴*Korean Studies*

"Mark Caprio's recent book is a wonderful addition to the field of Korean and Japanese modern history. Its appearance is particularly timely as Japan and Korea ponder the meaning of the centennial anniversary of the 1910 annexation."⁵*The Journal of Asian Studies*

"For many years, the Japanese Empire remained hidden behind an island-centered story of the archipelago's 'modernization' and a Euro-centric bias in colonial studies. This can no longer be the case with the publication of Mark E. Caprio's new book."⁶*Pacific Affairs*

"Caprio argues that, despite the Japanese championing of full acceptance and equality of the Korean people as subjects of the Empire, Japanese policies towards the Koreans worked as contradictory roadblocks preventing complete assimilation. . . . Caprio examines his historical question through an intricate framework of definitions of colonization. . . . Additionally, his organizational choice of beginning his work with an examination of European influences on Japanese colonial thought is both interesting and appropriate considering Japan's desire to emulate the West. . . . Ultimately, Caprio delivers an impressive, solidly researched work that adds a further dimension to the complex historical problem of Japanese expansion."⁷*Journal of Military History*

"Mark Caprio, as an American scholar of Korean history teaching at Rikkyo University in Tokyo, is uniquely qualified to avoid the nationalistic extremes of the debate over the right and wrong, and the impact, of Japanese colonial rule. Using both Korean and Japanese sources, and an impartial eye, he examines one aspect of the colonial period, Japan's official policy of welcoming the Korean people into the Japanese political and cultural community, and he comes up with some startling conclusions."⁸*Monumenta Nipponica*

Review

"There is no other publication in the English language that comes close to what Mark Caprio has achieved. His book will become required reading for anyone who wants to learn about Korea's experience under

Japanese colonialism."?James Palais, University of Washington

"The most original aspect of this study is the author's effort to place the Japanese policy of assimilation in a broad comparative context. What becomes abundantly clear from this comparison is that assimilation rarely works at all, and even when pursued with some vigor by a colonial regime at first it is eventually abandoned or profoundly altered....The book also presents many new materials?- debates in the press, the views of prominent intellectual and political figures, policy documents?that will be of great interest, and often great fascination, to students of modern Japanese and Korean history."?Peter Duus, emeritus professor, Stanford University

"An exceedingly well?researched and insightful work on an important topic. It will make a strong contribution to the field of Korean studies and, because of its comparative scope, will also be important to historians and students of modern Japan."?Michael Robinson, Indiana University

About the Author

Mark E. Caprio is a professor in the Department of Intercultural Communications, Rikkyo University, Tokyo.

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