

Narrating Transpacific Imperial History

August 20, 2019

3:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Hamilton Library Rm 301

Public Lecture

Narrating transpacific imperial history: Japanese migration, settler colonialism, and the Greater Pacific as Japan's imperial space

My presentation offers a new way of narrating a transpacific history of the Japanese empire through the examination of migration-driven national expansion (“settler colonialism”). Even though imperial Japan was fundamentally a settler colonial empire where the migration of Japanese commoners and their agrarian settlement in new territories served as a basic mode of empire-building, scant attention has been paid to that dimension of Japan's imperial history in the existing scholarship. Japanese settler colonialism tended to look to Anglo-Saxon precedents for models, where the U.S. popular discourse on “frontier conquest” was most frequently referenced. I use the perspectives of migration and agricultural colonization to explore how deeply the history of Japan's state imperialism was intertwined with that of early Japanese America (Hawai‘i included). My talk sketches out the transpacific mobility of the first-generation Japanese Americans (Issei) who remigrated to various parts of the Asia-Pacific basin and refashioned their identity as “pioneers” of Japan's imperial expansion. I present examples of three such Issei, who became trailblazers and teachers of colonial development and settlement-making in Japanese-controlled Korea, Taiwan, and Manchuria on the basis of their U.S. immigrant experiences.



Eiichiro Azuma is Alan Charles Kors Term Chair Associate Professor of History and former Director of Asian American Studies at University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of *In Search of Our Frontier: Japanese America and Settler Colonialism in the Construction of Japan's Borderless Empire* (forthcoming October 2019). Azuma also published *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America*; and coedited, with Gordon H. Chang, Yuji Ichioka, *Before Internment: Essays in Prewar Japanese American History*, and the *Oxford Handbook of Asian American History*, with David K. Yoo. Azuma has served on the editorial boards of the *Pacific Historical Review*, *Journal of Asian American Studies*, and *Journal of American Ethnic History*. Since 2009, he has been a co-editor of the Asian American Experience series published by the University of Illinois Press. Azuma has authored a number of book chapters and peer-reviewed journal articles, including those in the *Journal of American History*, *Pacific Historical Review*, and *Journal of Asian Studies*.

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