Memory is infinite, yet oral memory is definitely more infinite than written memory. When I ask a question, my informant, using some portion of his or her memories, offers me a story. When I ask a similar question in a different sentence, the same informant, relying this time on someone else’s memories, which he or she heard or read, recounts for me yet another story. In this respect, the conventional definition of oral history, “the interviewing of eye-witness participants in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction” (Perks and Thomson 1998a:ix), refers to only some of what we researchers do in our fieldwork. The current state of oral history defies this definition, as this subfield has been engaged in “two major battles with the established tradition of historiography” for the past twenty years or so. First is “the struggle to ensure acceptance of the validity of oral sources . . . and to accord them the same importance as other [written] sources.” Second is “the attempt to widen the horizons of historical research, whether in the sense of including new spheres of reality (such as daily life, and the experiences of oppressed and subordinate social strata), or that of amplifying and clarifying the political aims and objectives within historical writing” (Passerini 1979/80:84). Today oral historians seem to have won both battles. In addition, they tell us that while oral testimonies, like written records, can reveal historical truth, they also reveal interviewees’ truths in their remembering—that is, their “intensive subjectivity” (Portelli 1998:67): “that area of symbolic activity which includes cognitive, cultural and psychological aspects” (Passerini 1979/80:85). Thus, while honoring memory as a depository of facts, oral historians are also expected to explore what happens to experience on the way to becoming memory. This means that we must also ask ourselves a similar question: what happens to our understanding of history on the way to transforming our informant’s memory into the history that we write?

In this chapter, keeping in mind the above history of oral history, I will discuss the oral testimonies of the returnees from Manchuria to the Ina Valley and other parts of Nagano. These people emigrated to Manchuria in the age of empire but were subsequently repatriated to Japan between 1946 and 1949. Through analyses of their oral accounts, I will try to both reconstruct the everyday life of Japanese agrarian colonists in Manchuria
in the age of empire (historical truth) and explore the subjectivity of these former colonists in remembering the power of the Japanese state (interviewees' truth in their remembering). To interpret their memories for these goals, I will first examine written sources in order to understand the history of Manchurian colonization by the emigrants from Nagano.

**Manchurian Colonization: A Product of Rural Poverty in Nagano**

In Japan, historian Louise Young argues, war booms accompanied imperial wars against China and Russia and profoundly influenced the nation’s cultural development. The publishing and entertainment industries actively cooperated with military propagandists to mobilize the nation behind the state. Such efforts, however, are by no means unique to Japan. Yet the fever that spread throughout Japan after the Manchurian Incident of 1931 needs our special attention, for it “marked a turning point from the era christened ‘Taishô demokrasii’ to what Japanese called the ‘national emergency’ (hijôji) of early Shôwa” (1998:55). Indeed, right after the “incident” on September 18, 1931, the Association of Japanese Farmers (Nihon Nômin Kyôkai) held a national rally in the city of Matsumoto in Nagano Prefecture. On the last day of this rally, the participants, mostly middle-scale farmers (chû-nô) who came to Matsumoto from all over Japan, made the following appeals to the Japanese state: (1) Let us transform Manchuria, the “life-line” (seimei-sen) of the Yamato race, into our eternal Utopia; and (2) Let us not give up the rights that we finally obtained (from the Western imperial powers) to a handful of Japanese elite industrialists. These farmers affirmed Japan’s domination in Manchuria and declared their willingness to participate in Manchurian colonization. They also asserted that if a handful of greedy Japanese industrialists, whom they called “Japanese bandits” (nippi), continued to neglect farming, they were willing to compete with them in the race to transform Manchuria into Japan’s eternal Utopia (NKJMK 1984a:99–100). These appeals reveal several aspects of Manchurian colonization in its early stages. First, such colonization represented a class-based movement of the politically motivated middle-scale farmers against the industrial elite. Second, it was a movement in which middle-scale farmers asserted their own vision of an empire based on their belief in agrarianism (nôhon shugi) (see L. Young 1998:307; Vlastos 1998).

Still, before the mid-1930s, the number of Japanese agrarian emigrants was extremely small. For example, between 1914 and 1917, thirty-four families of discharged Japanese soldiers (from the troops that had been sent to Siberia in 1917) settled on farmland within the SMR zone, but by 1937 half of them had gone home. After 1929, the Dalian Agricultural Company (Dairen Nôgyô Kabushiki Gaisha) made land available to Japanese emi-
grants. Since only seventy-two households settled on the land, however, the company stopped its recruiting three years later. Thus, before 1931, only about eight hundred Japanese households had settled in the Kwantung Leased Territory (Wilson 1995:252–253). What, then, explains the relative success of the mass emigration of Japanese farmers after the mid-1930s that resulted in the settlement of over 320,000 colonists in Manchuria?

Between 1930 and 1936, according to Louise Young, the number of tenancy disputes in the Japanese countryside rose from 2,478 to 6,804. While most early disputes were over the increase of rents, the majority of disputes in 1936 were over the eviction of tenant farmers from the land (1998:324–326). To cope with economic depression, the fluctuating prices of rice, and widespread crop failures, land-owning middle-scale farmers tried to evict their tenants from the land. In Nagano, in addition to these problems, a sharp drop in the price of silk cocoons aggravated the rural economy (see NKJMK 1984a:7, 27, 206). Hence there emerged a large pool of impoverished people who had lost both their land and their income from sericulture and thus their means of survival. Yokozeki Mitsue’s autobiography reveals the life of such farmers: “The price of raw silk plummeted. My father uprooted all the mulberry trees and began to plant nappa [Japanese cabbage], but he could no longer make money. His land was taken away by the landlord. One night he declared to his family, ‘We cannot live here anymore. Our land is gone. All that we can do is to run away to Manchuria!’” (1990:15). For Mitsue’s father, Manchuria did not conjure up an image of a glorious empire. It was simply a place where he thought he could escape from his material misery. After all, those who emigrated to Manchuria as agrarian colonists were invariably poor. They were by no means “men with capital and prestige” who dominated European colonialism in Africa and Asia (see Kennedy 1987).

To cope with economic depression, state officials designated thousands of villages throughout Japan as “special villages for economic rehabilitation” (keizai kōsei-son) (Takahashi 1976:54). Arguing that overpopulation and land shortages were the causes of rural ills, they asked village councils to initiate plans to rehabilitate localities that had been hard hit by economic depression and natural disasters. In Nagano, the prefectural government selected forty-one such villages. One of them was Fujimi, located on the slope of the Southern Alps. Describing the condition of this village, the Imperial Agricultural Association (Teikoku Nōkai), which represented the interests of middle-scale farmers, wrote the following in 1942:

Situated at an altitude of approximately 3,000 shaku [about 950 meters], only 13.8 percent of the total village land was under cultivation. Since the population was 4,735, or 951 households [in 1937], each family cultivated an extremely small plot of land. The number of families
working on a plot of less than 0.5 hectare was 220, while the number working on a plot of less than 1 hectare was 505. For this reason, the village economy heavily relied on the village residents’ seasonal migration to various destinations within Japan. In 1937, the number of men and women who worked elsewhere as carpenters, factory workers, day laborers, or itinerant merchants reached 532. (Teikoku Nôkai 1942a; Manshū imin kankei shiryô shûsei [hereafter MIKSS] 1990:221–233)

This association, then, encouraged farmers to create an alternative source of income other than sericulture and seasonal migration. In Ōhinata, the first in Nagano to be designated as a special village for economic rehabilitation, the village council tried to promote “charcoal making,” but charcoal making did not generate high incomes owing to the presence of numerous middlemen (Yamada 1978:26). Having failed in this endeavor, the council members realized that they had exhausted every means of rehabilitating the rural economy. It was at this time that the Imperial Agricultural Association recommended Manchurian colonization as an alternative that, according to it, would kill two birds with one stone: ease the village economy and “expand the Japanese Empire, thereby securing peace in Asia” (Teikoku Nôkai 1942a; MIKSS 1990:242). Thus, supported by the state, which offered grants, subsidies, technical know-how (for farming in Manchuria), and above all land, the first group of emigrants left Ōhinata in 1934 for Manchuria. Soon, encouraged by the achievements of the Ōhinata group, farmers of other villages, including Fujimi, began leaving for Manchuria. At this point the character of Manchurian colonization changed, from a class-based social movement founded on agrarianism to a state-initiated mobilization. Note that it was the middle-scale farmers themselves who mobilized the state to begin with and that in this very context of Manchurian colonization, the Japanese state expanded its empire (L. Young 1998:ch. 8). This fact is well reflected in one of the official slogans issued by the Nagano prefectural government: Emigrate to Manchuria! Let them emigrate to Manchuria! (Ike Manshū e! Ikashimeyo Manshū e!) (Nagano-ken Keizaibu 1939; MIKSS 1990:392). Those who were expected to emigrate to Manchuria were farmers who had been evicted from their rented land, and those who persuaded them to leave were middle-scale farmers.

State-initiated Manchurian colonization began modestly in 1932 with a trial period emigration project. The farmers who left for Manchuria under this project were called “armed emigrants” (busô imin). To understand why they had to “arm” themselves, let us look at the following passage from a report that was submitted in 1942 by the Manchuria Colonial Development Company (Manshū Takushoku Kôsha) to the Eighty-first Imperial Diet in Tokyo:
Even though Manchuria is a vast country, it has a history of three hundred years of cultivation by native farmers. There is absolutely no piece of land that does not belong to someone, and the laws regulating the ownership of land are extremely complex. The number of absentee landlords is substantial, and it is extremely difficult to draw exact boundaries among numerous tracts of land. We therefore find it impossible to purchase land [from native farmers] based on a thorough scientific survey. (Manshū Takushoku Kōsha 1942; MIKSS 1991:151)

As we will see below, the Nagano prefectural government advertised Manchuria as a vast empty land in order to attract local farmers. Agrarian emigrants were thus expected to settle on “noncultivated land” (miriyō chi) (Asada 1976:63). Nonetheless, the above passage demonstrates that every piece of land belonged to someone, either a local landlord or a local farmer. Hence the Japanese state had to purchase land, much of which had already been worked, from local people for a small remuneration and distribute it among the Japanese settlers.

What was it like to emigrate to a place where “there was absolutely no piece of land that did not belong to someone”? Below, based on my reading of two documents—the 1933 issue of Umi no soto (Across the seas), an official magazine of the Nagano Overseas Association, and a semi-fictional novel, Manshū imin zenya monogatari (The story of the dawn of Manchurian colonization), written by the association’s director, Nagata Shigeshi (MKJMK 1984a:166; Nagata 1952:193–210)—I will recreate how the first group of 438 armed emigrants, of whom forty-one were from Nagano, traveled to and settled near Jiamusi in 1932.

Prior to their departure, the emigrants received rigorous training in Iwate, Yamagata, and Ibaraki Prefectures. At the end of the training period, each trainee was forced to take the following oath to the Japanese state: “I shall not let my family interfere with my decision [to emigrate to Manchuria]. In case I am expelled [from the group] for my own wrongdoing, I shall not complain. I shall sacrifice my life for our colony. I shall make every effort to settle down permanently in Manchuria.” By the early 1930s, the Japanese state had already acquired twenty thousand hectares of land in the vicinity of Jiamusi, hence the group had to draw up a long-term plan on how to settle on this land. The plan was as follows. In the first year, armed emigrants would live in the houses that the Japanese military had confiscated from Chinese families. By the spring of the second year, they would complete the construction of a single dormitory building and move in there to live collectively. Also by then, they would complete the process of transforming the twenty thousand hectares to farmland. In the third year, they would complete the construction of individual houses. At this point, each colonist was expected to invite his family to come from Japan.
and start farming an individual plot of land, as the land has now been distributed equally among all the settlers. The reality, however, was harsh enough to discourage the armed emigrants. For example, on the emigrants’ route to Jiamusi on the Amur River, Manchurian bandits (*manshū hizoku*) repeatedly attacked ships carrying the emigrants. Once in Jiamusi, the Japanese emigrants discovered that only about ninety Japanese had been living in the region, most of whom were “poor enough to owe debts to Manchurians.” About fifty of them were women working as restaurant and bar waitresses. In addition to these Japanese, about ninety Koreans had been living in the region, but the whole town was filled with “strong anti-foreigner sentiments.” Over a period of two years, seven Japanese emigrants were killed, and three more were injured. Fifty-nine guns, forty-five hundred pieces of ammunition, twelve horses, and two thousand yen in cash were stolen from the offices of the Manchuria Colonial Development Company, and the building was also burned down by the thieves. The number of those who withdrew from the emigration project rose rapidly. But, without the state’s assistance, they had no means of returning home.

Records suggest that by 1941, the Manchuria Colonial Development Company had acquired 20 million hectares of land from Chinese farmers, including over 3 million hectares of cultivated land, and had distributed them among Japanese colonists (Takahashi 1976:60). Hence “strong anti-foreigner sentiments” remained in northern Manchuria for quite some time. In 1934, for example, a group of Chinese farmers organized themselves into the Northeast People’s Self-Defense Army and fought against the Japanese immigrants under the slogan of “expel the Japanese immigrants and establish local self-government” (the Tulongshan Incident). This incident, which lasted for several months, took the lives of thousands of Chinese and hundreds of Japanese (see Eykholt 1993; see also Kuwajima 1979; Suleski 1981:363–372). Thus, to promote Manchurian colonization among farmers at home, the Japanese state had to resort to every possible means to tame—or, failing that, to annihilate—the “Manchurian bandits.”

Louise Young states that to promote Manchurian colonization the Japanese state mobilized “a huge migration machine” at the national, prefectural, and local levels (1998:ch. 8). At the national level, this machine involved the Colonization Bureau, the Manchuria Colonial Development Company, the Colonial Ministry, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, training centers (for agrarian emigrants), and colonial research stations (ibid.:356–358). At the (Nagano) prefectural level, this migration machine consisted of the Nagano School Board, the Nagano Overseas Association, the Patriotic Women’s Association (*Aikoku Fujinkai*), the Prefectural Council of Mayors and Village Heads, and prefectural councils of agricultural cooperatives (ibid.:377). At the local level, the migration machine involved village and county councils, county school boards,
local chapters of the Imperial Agricultural Association, and farming cooperative organizations. It also involved school principals and teachers, heads of youth groups, women’s groups, reservist associations, neighborhood associations, credit and marketing cooperatives, firefighters, and other voluntary organizations (ibid.:376; see also Yamada 1978:24–25).

As part of this migration machine, local newspapers played a crucial role in promoting Manchurian colonization in central and southern Nagano. Generically called sonpô or jihô, they were one of the mainstays of Taishô democracy, a brief period between the two world wars when (male) citizens, energized by the post–World War I economic boom and democratic trends, were allowed to express their political views (see Katô Shûichi 1974; Minichiello 1984). Thus, in the early 1920s, the young middle-scale farmers who formed the youth groups in each village began publishing newspapers, casting criticism upon urban modernity in order to realize a pro-farming nation (see Tamanoi 1998:138). We must remember, however, that Taishô democracy was also a period in which “deviance was tested against the polestars of respect for the emperor and for private property” (Dower 1979:306). After the Manchurian Incident, repression against such deviance became more forceful and transformed the content of such newspapers so as to be more in line with the state’s imperial project. Here I read only Urazato sonpô, the newspaper of the village of Urazato, in order to understand how the poor farmers decided to emigrate to Manchuria as agrarian colonists.

All the articles on Manchurian colonization published in Urazato sonpô aim to entice farmers to emigrate to Manchuria. And yet they are of several different types. Some are so-called “public notices” that reached Urazato from the metropolitan government. Standard headlines for these notices announced that “application forms [for volunteer emigrants] have arrived” or that a “50 percent discount in train fares for those emigrating to Hokkaido, Manchuria, Karafuto, Korea, and Taiwan” was available. Others were letters sent to the editorial office of Urazato sonpô from village residents already in Manchuria. These letters vary from simple telegrams—such as “Arrived in peace,” sent by a man named Shigeharu (Urazato sonpô, March 20, 1937)—to lengthy letters describing the everyday life of the Japanese colonists. Among the latter, I noticed the following passage: “Every afternoon I see the crimson sun setting on the horizon of this vast land. Every morning I see the sun rising again from the same horizon. And every day I see rows of fields and rice paddies continuing for thousands of miles. I cherish these moments because they assure me that my decision [to emigrate to Manchuria] was by no means wrong” (ibid., November, 1936). The “rows of fields and rice paddies continuing for thousands of miles” reveal the presence of local farmers in Manchuria. That is, long before the arrival of the Japanese colonists, Chinese (and Korean)
farmers had already worked the land in Manchuria. It is unclear whether the writer of this letter was aware of this evident fact.

Another letter published in Urazato sonpô in 1939 acknowledges the presence of local people. However, these people speak Japanese and act Japanese. In other words, they are exemplary subjects of the Japanese Empire. The author writes: “The Manchurian children whom we meet on the street say sayonara and greet us in Japanese. How grateful I am for the Japanese state.” Furthermore, he apparently ate Japanese food every day, such as noodles with pork, broiled fish with sake, and sushi “by the brook in between work or, if on the weekends, on a grassy picnic site” (Urazato sonpô, June 10, 1939). While this writer’s village was located in Manchuria, it was indeed a Japanese village, well protected by the Japanese military. The sense that Manchuria was a remote and alien country is entirely missing in this letter.

In addition to the colonists already in Manchuria, village notables (including schoolteachers) who made trips of inspection to Manchuria often contributed articles to Urazato sonpô. For example, to stir up the spirits of the youth in Urazato, one schoolteacher sent the following to the editorial office: “Go to the vast land of Manchuria and Mongolia. Build a base to support the expansion of our economy and race. There you can find a solution for the ills of the [Japanese] countryside and a place for the ever-growing Yamato race” (Urazato sonpô, June 20, 1932). Other articles in Urazato sonpô exhort village youth to abandon their “island insular mentality,” instruct younger sons to cease worrying about their meager inheritances, and encourage village women to become “continental brides” (tairiku no hanayome)—that is, to marry agrarian colonists. Such articles contrast a vast, scarcely populated, promising, and youthful Manchuria with the insular, overpopulated, backward, and old village of Urazato. Still, most of these village notables (many of whom were middle-scale farmers) chose (or could afford) to stay in Urazato; their mission was to get others to emigrate to Manchuria.

In addition to contributing articles to local newspapers, village notables also wrote official reports that, according to historian Sakuramoto Tomio, contain many “lively sentences” (keiki no yoi bunshô) (1987). A prime example of such documents is the one authored by a group of village mayors who participated in a fact-finding trip to Manchuria in 1934. Their destination was Sijiafang in northern Manchuria, to which the village of Ōhinata had already sent 35 colonists earlier in the same year. Ōhinata’s plan was to send a total of 150 farm families, as well as 50 single men who would establish families in Manchuria, and to build Japan’s first “branch village” of the “mother village” of Ōhinata. Stunned by “such a heroic deed,” the mayors of other villages in Nagano tried to follow Ōhinata’s example. Immediately after their return, the members
of the fact-finding trip wrote a report in which they mentioned the following “facts” about Sijiafang.

Sijiafang is a Utopia, a place of a remarkable natural beauty. Its landscape resembles that of rural Nagano. The headquarters of the branch village of Ôhinata is located next to the office of the prefectural government of Shulan. For this reason, colonists do not have to worry about anti-Japanese rebels. About 3,000 Manchurians and 1,000 Koreans live within the branch village of Ôhinata. These local farmers are on good terms with the Japanese colonists.

The branch village of Ôhinata owns 1,400 hectares of rice paddies and 2,600 hectares of dry field. The plan is to rent out most of the rice paddies and a large tract of dry field to local farmers. A plan to build schools and hospitals is underway. Houses for individual families will soon be built. Each house will be built on a plot of 120 tsubo [1 tsubo is about 3.3 square meters], and each family will enjoy the fruits of its own vegetable garden. (Quoted in Yamada 1978:280–287)

We do not know how effective these “lively sentences” were to entice impoverished farmers to emigrate to Manchuria. What we know is that these mayors, except for the mayor of Fujimi, never returned to Manchuria before the war’s end.

Did Manchurian colonization rehabilitate the rural economy in Nagano and elsewhere in Japan proper? The first one hundred farm households that emigrated from Fujimi to Manchuria left behind ninety-seven hectares of land (about 19 percent of the cultivated land in the village) and seventy houses (Teikoku Nôkai 1942a; MIKSS 1990:262, 265). The land was then distributed “appropriately among neighborhood cooperatives for communal farm plots” (L. Young 1998:337). In addition, the village council rented fifty houses to schoolteachers (Teikoku Nôkai 1942a; MIKSS 1990:265). Note, however, that those who had emigrated to Manchuria were excluded from the economic rehabilitation plan at home. After all, they were expected not to return to Fujimi. A passage of the edict that the village council issued to the emigrants states, “Those who return to Fujimi within ten years of their emigration [to Manchuria] shall not enjoy the privileges customarily given to the village residents. If they return, they may have to repay the debts [from which they were exempted when they emigrated to Manchuria] and return the subsidies that they received [from the state]” (ibid.; MIKSS 1990:249). While middle-scale farmers were expected to create a classless Utopia in Japan proper, small-scale farmers were expected to build a colonial Utopia in Manchuria. In this respect,
emigrants were not only the vanguards of imperialism but also victims of the economic rehabilitation program at home.


Let us now return to my fieldwork site and listen to the voices of the former agrarian settlers and their families in Manchuria. All the interviews that I will present in this section were conducted in the homes of my informants in Ina and elsewhere in Nagano between 1988 and 1996. In Fujimi, the members of a women’s group often gathered in the village community center and recounted their memories of Manchuria to me and among themselves. Some narratives are parts of my casual conversations with the people in Ina on the streets and on trains and buses. To draw a better map, I have also quoted some of the oral testimonies collected and published by Yamada Shōji, who headed an oral history project team. Over the three-year period between 1971 and 1973, this team, which consisted of Yamada’s eleven students, paid four visits to former agrarian colonists who had been repatriated from Manchuria to the village of Ōhinata (see Yamada 1978:335–336). The information in parentheses at the end of each testimony includes the name (pseudonym) of the interviewee, the year in which the interview was conducted, and the name of the interviewer. Italicized sentences inserted in the testimonies are questions from the interviewer.

How Emigrants Remember the Japanese State during the Colonization of Manchuria

I go, so you go,
To the vast plain of northern Manchuria,
Which extends thousands of miles without boundaries.
The land of Manchuria awaits us. (Takayama Sumiko, 1991, Tamanoi)

Sumiko was born in the village of Mizuho in 1924. Her father, a farmer without land, was born with a weak heart, so his wife, Sumiko’s mother, was the main provider of labor on a tiny rented piece of land. When her father died after a long illness, Sumiko’s brother, her mother’s only son, joined a group of emigrants to Manchuria. A few months later, he temporarily returned to Nagano, married his classmate (“by force,” according to Sumiko), sold his house (which was built on rented land), and persuaded his sixty-two-year-old mother and Sumiko to leave with him for Manchuria. With no alternatives at hand, Sumiko left for Manchuria in 1940 with her mother, brother, and sister-in-law. The above quotation is a song that she remembered from that period. The lyric encourages poor farmers, such as Sumiko’s brother, to emigrate to Manchuria by offering one particular image
of Manchuria—a vast plain without boundaries—while “verbally depopulating” the landscapes (see Pratt 1986:145). At the time of the interview, Sumiko confided to me that she genuinely believed that Manchuria was a vast, virgin land. Consequently, before emigrating, she “did not think about the Manjin [the Manchurians].” Sumiko also remembered two poster slogans from the 1930s: “Give up unreliable seasonal migrations [within Japan]” and “Emigrate to Manchuria—the land that promises you a bright future.” The Japanese state was indeed busy creating this particular image of Manchuria to entice farmers to leave for the continent.

There were five hamlets in the village of Ōhinata, and every hamlet sent at least some families to Manchuria. Every member of the family emigrated, including small children and elderly grandparents. Some of those who owned houses or who could afford to stay [in Ōhinata] also emigrated. They were usually village leaders. They had to persuade poor farmers to emigrate to Manchuria. If they themselves had not emigrated to Manchuria, others would not have gone to Manchuria, see? They couldn’t lose face. (Anonymous, 1971–1973, Yamada; quoted in Yamada 1978:339)

We were much better off [than other families who emigrated to Manchuria], but we were four brothers and four sisters. If we had divided our land among four of us, we could not have survived. This is when we heard an unbelievable story. That is, if we went to Manchuria, each one of us would become a landowner of twenty hectares of land! That’s why I left for Manchuria because the life here was really tough. (Anonymous, 1971–1973, Yamada; ibid.:340)

These narratives suggest that in addition to poor farmers, at least some middle-scale farmers emigrated to Manchuria. Indeed, the village records of Ōhinata indicate that while more than 70 percent of the emigrants were farmers who owned either no land or less than 1.25 acres of land, the rest included the younger sons of middle-scale families who owned more than 5 acres of land (Yamada 1978:33–34). Note that these farmers were also part of the migration machine. In other words, they had to serve as “role models,” sacrificing their relatively comfortable life at home. Miyako, whom I met in Fujimi in 1988, noted, “The village head [the mayor] kept his promise [of emigrating to Manchuria] and left for Manchuria together with more than one hundred farm families. It was quite a scene when the first group of these families left the village. Those of us who had remained in Fujimi visited the houses of emigrants in our hamlet, followed them to the train station, and celebrated their departure with band music. We, the children, waved tiny [Japanese] flags. When they left the village, I remem-
ber, we wished them much luck in Manchuria” (Miyako, 1988, Tamanoi). Although the mayor of Fujimi did not have to emigrate to Manchuria to rehabilitate his household economy, he did so because his fellow villagers needed a strong leader. The Imperial Agricultural Association attributed this positive response to Manchurian colonization to “spiritual training,” the indoctrination that farmers received about the glory of the Japanese Empire (Teikoku Nôkai 1942a; MIKSS 1990:264).

You are asking me about the food we ate daily in Manchuria? Well, we ate many different kinds of meat—pork, deer, hare, and pheasant. We had an abundance of sugar and honey. Those who had stayed in Japan would not have been able to imagine how rich our life was! In spring, adonis bloomed everywhere. Our village was indeed a Utopia. We heard that the cities [in Japan] had been heavily bombed and people were running off to the countryside. I could not believe such stories. Back then, I had no doubt about Japan’s victory. (Aki, 1988, Tamanoi)

When she left for Manchuria to join her parents (who were already in the branch village of Fujimi), Aki was in her early teens. As a young woman, she seems to have had high hopes for her future in Manchuria. Yet her narrative also anticipates the ominous ending of what she called “a Utopia.”

We belonged to the fourth group of emigrants from Fujimi. When we arrived at the branch village, members of the second and third groups temporarily returned to Fujimi to bring their families back to Manchuria. The houses for individual families were still under construction, so all of us had to stay in one dorm-like building. Looking back, I think the wall of this building was not yet dry. It was very damp. But, you know, every night we returned to this dorm after many hours of heavy labor only to sleep. It started to snow already in October. The village headquarters did not distribute winter clothes among us until well into November. (Tokie, 1988, Tamanoi)

My mother used to say, “What kind of place is this? We’d better commit suicide.” She could not stand Manchuria, so she returned to Japan to join my older sister in Tokyo. After she left, we settled in our house with ondoru [ondol, a Korean term for floor heaters] built underneath the floor, but the walls were still not dry. When warm air from the floor went up, water oozed out of the walls and ceiling, and drops of water fell from the ceiling. It was as if it were raining inside the house. (Sumiko, 1991, Tamanoi)

In 1941, the mayor of Kôsha-gô (J), where Sumiko settled with her mother, brother, and sister-in-law, tried to persuade her to marry one of
her fellow settlers. She did not know this man, who was fifteen years older, except for having seen him once in Mizuho in Nagano. Nevertheless, reluctant to refuse her superior’s orders, she married the man and soon gave birth to two children. The testimonies of Tokie, Sumiko, and others whom I interviewed reveal the harsh realities in northern Manchuria: heavy labor was a daily routine; both women and men had no other choice but to marry others in the same colonies, often chosen for them by their leaders; and daily life was far harder than they had imagined it would be. Their testimonies do not contain “lively sentences.” “You know, back in those days, we could not openly complain. If we did, we would have been marked as unpatriotic citizens,” said Sumiko. Almost half a century after repatriation, the act of remembering finally offered Sumiko a chance to voice her complaints about the wartime Japanese state’s policies.

When we heard about the kokusaku, all [adult members] in my family danced a little dance of joy, but in fact, they were forced to do so. (Kazuko, 1996, Tamanoi)

The returnees from Manchuria often use the term kokusaku, “a policy implemented by the [Japanese] state.” For them, however, kokusaku means only one particular policy—the state-initiated Manchurian colonization. Although all in Kazuko’s family first “executed a little dance of joy,” Kazuko reinterpreted “the truth” after looking back on her painful journey of repatriation: they were in fact forced to dance as they had no other means of economic support for the household.

Nonetheless, evidence suggests that the majority of emigrants from Fujimi were willing to accept the colonization policy at that time. For example, a survey conducted by the Imperial Agricultural Association in the late 1930s indicates that 50 among 137 respondents said that they accepted it because they wanted to cooperate with the state and become exemplary subjects (see table 1). Another 68 responded that they had failed to restart their household economies in Fujimi and wished to do so in Manchuria. As noted, back then, they could not voice any criticism against the policy. What emerges in this survey, however, is an image of farmers who were willing not only to begin anew to sustain their households but also to be exemplary subjects of the Japanese Empire. Yet Kazuko was unable to accept that her father eagerly went along with the colonization policy. On the contrary, at the time of my interview, Kazuko expressed unrelenting anger against the Japanese state, which, she claimed, had enticed her family to Manchuria but “abandoned” it once Japan’s defeat was imminent. By focusing on “abandonment,” she could attribute her suffering solely to the Japanese state.
Looking back on those days, I can now see that the land allocated to us was someone else’s. It was land that local farmers had reclaimed and worked since time immemorial. The state-run corporation purchased their land at an extraordinarily cheap price—well, almost for free. And then the corporation gave it to us. Everyone [in Japan] believes that we worked uncultivated land in Manchuria with our own hoes, but such a story is totally untrue. (Musha Masako, 1970s, Shinano Jidō Bungaku-kai oral history project; quoted in Yamada 1978:13)

I already knew, before leaving for Manchuria, that the branch village of Ōhinata would be built on the land [that had already been] cultivated by someone else. Well, that’s the reason I joined the group [of emigrants]. (Anonymous, 1971–1973, Yamada; quoted in Yamada 1978:340)

Employees of the Manchuria Colonial Development Company had no mercy. They purchased cultivated land from local farmers and then forced them to move elsewhere, yet the confiscated land lay fallow for a long time. . . . Manchurian colonization was nothing more than Japan’s invasion. I thought the whole project would collapse some day, but I did not think it would collapse in my generation. At least in our generation, I thought, we would be just fine. (Anonymous, 1971–1973, Yamada; quoted in Yamada 1978:343)

Table 1. Reasons for emigration from Fujimi to Manchuria in the age of empire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason given by farmer-respondent</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I accepted Manchurian colonization as state policy and cooperated with the state.</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I went along with the policy to improve/restart my household economy.</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I went along with the colonization policy in order to be an exemplary citizen of Japan.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had failed to restart my household economy in Fujimi.</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a younger son, I wanted to establish a branch household in Manchuria.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had been to Manchuria before.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was invited to join my relatives in Manchuria.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was burdened with miscellaneous chores in Fujimi.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the popular image of Manchuria as virgin territory, some (or perhaps most) emigrants knew, while still in Japan, that they would be working somebody else’s land, and to have some arable land was apparently the most important reason why they ventured to move to Manchuria. Other colonists, such as Musha Masako, seem to have discovered the presence of local farmers only after they arrived in Manchuria. Sumiko, who had imagined Manchuria to be free of people, said, “Once I arrived at Kôshâgô (J), I noticed a hamlet of Manchurians within our colony. I also noticed a barracks for Manchukuoan soldiers, another hamlet of Manchurians, and yet another hamlet of Koreans (Senjin) on the other side of the river. I quickly changed my image of Manchuria. It was no longer a virgin land” (Sumiko, 1991, Tamanoi). Looking back, some settlers resented the merciless stance of Japanese officers toward local farmers. Nevertheless, once they received some land, they had no other choice but to farm it.

In order to survive in Manchuria, we had to grow cash crops. So we lied, falsified documents, and submitted them to the Manchuria Colonial Development Company. We wrote down crops we never grew. One day, the company sent us a big agricultural machine. We were supposed to use it to grow soybeans. But if we had grown only soybeans, we wouldn’t have survived. We secured a contract with the Manchuria Tobacco Company and grew tobacco. We also grew vegetables and sold them to the mining company in Shulan. (Anonymous, 1971–1973, Yamada; quoted in Yamada 1978:345)

In 1935, the Colonial Ministry published a document titled “Hoku-Man ni okeru shûdan nôgyô imin no keiei hyôjun-an” (Proposed standards for the management of collective farm immigrants in northern Manchuria). In this document, which became “sacred writ for Japanese settlements” (L. Young 1998:342), the Colonial Ministry presented its ideal vision of a Japanese settler: a self-sufficient farmer living in isolation from the market economy—that is, a “yeoman farmer” (jisaku-nô). Such a farmer would cultivate land all by himself, with the help of his family. He would cultivate a variety of crops solely for his family’s consumption. The Japanese state would provide him with all the necessities, including agricultural machines, tools, cows, horses, pigs, seed, and fertilizer, as well as free education and health care. Such a farmer would not need to earn cash, nor would he need to compete with local farmers (ibid.:343–344).

The publication of this document, however, made Japanese bureaucrats fear that if Chinese farmers (who in the view of the bureaucrats accepted a much lower standard of living than Japanese farmers) followed the same proposed standards, they would easily surpass the Japanese colonists (Takumu-shô 1939, MIKSS 1990:187). To ease such fears, the Colonial
Ministry published another document, titled “Hoku-Man ni okeru Man-jin chūryū nōka no einō-rei” (Typical work life of a middle-scale Manchurian farm household in northern Manchuria). According to this document, “a typical Manchurian farmer” had the following characteristics:

- He needed a minimum of three thousand yen in cash to cultivate twenty-five hectares, but he was unable to borrow such an amount from any money-lending institution in Manchuria.
- He needed at least a year to reclaim uncultivated land, during which he would lose any competitiveness with Japanese colonists.
- He did not grow rice.
- He was familiar with only rudimentary technologies.
- He did not purchase goods or market crops collectively with his fellow Manchurian farmers.
- His wife, as a Manchurian, did not engage in any farm work.

Oddly enough, “a typical Manchurian farmer” in this text appeared to be not only a yeoman farmer who could not rely on his wife’s help, but also an immigrant who needed three thousand yen to settle in Manchuria. In other words, the text implicitly contrasted him to “a typical Japanese settler.” The latter was able to borrow three thousand yen from the Japanese state, was familiar with high-level technologies, and purchased goods and sold crops collectively with his fellow colonists. And his wife, being Japanese, worked side by side with him in the rice paddies and dry fields. Yet the oral testimonies of former colonists suggest that neither “a typical Japanese colonist” nor “a typical Manchurian farmer” existed in reality. Rather, they suggest that the images of a yeoman farmer represented “the desires of promoters [of Manchurian colonization], not the aspirations of emigrants,” and that the Japanese advance into rural Manchuria was not as well organized as the promoters implied (L. Young 1998:349). The agrarian settlers could not have survived in Manchuria without growing cash crops (soybeans, tobacco, and vegetables) and selling them for cash. Nor could they have survived without relying on Chinese and Korean farmers.

How Emigrants Remember Their Relationships with Chinese and Korean Farmers

The people in my hamlet [in the mother village of Ōhinata in Nagano] knew only charcoal making. We did not even know how to hold a hoe. So [after I moved to Manchuria] I received instructions at the training center in Harbin, learned various skills, and taught my fellow settlers those skills. For example, it was a challenge to store vegetables. Their way [of the Chinese] was different from our way. In addition, each one of us had
to take care of ten hectares of farmland [that had been allocated to us], but the Manchuria Colonial Development Company taught us nothing [about large-scale farming]. We got some hints from the people [of our mother village] in Japan. We also tried to copy the practices of the Manchurian farmers. But worms ate our crops, and the first year was a total disaster. (Anonymous, 1971–1973, Yamada; quoted in Yamada 1978:346)

We employed many Manchurians as tenants [kosakunin]. Some of us asked them to live nearby, on the compounds of our farms. Others asked them to commute to their farms from their hamlets. (Masaru, 1988, Tamanoi)

Note first that the Japanese colonists suddenly became owners of large tracts of land but had no knowledge about the form of farming suitable for the Manchurian climate. For this reason, they had to maintain close relations with local farmers, who earlier had had to give up their land and houses for them (see chapter 5). Indeed, the colonists were always in need of “Manchurian coolies” (Manjin kûrii), and it was this relationship that troubled the colonists. Chinese farmers tended to remember coolie life as the life of a slave. In contrast, Shimaki Kensaku (1903–1945), a Japanese writer who traveled through northern Manchuria in the 1930s, quoted a Japanese settler who told him, “The problem is the wage I must pay the Manchurian coolies. If I could only keep it at a minimum or not pay at all, I feel I could succeed here” (1940:64). However, because of the acute shortage of labor among the Japanese, the wages that the colonists had to pay local farmers kept rising (ibid.:53). Furthermore, as indicated, since the Japanese were unfamiliar with the soil and climate of Manchuria, they were dependent upon the prescient skills of the Chinese farmers. Believing that the climates in northern Japan and Manchuria were similar, the Japanese state had recommended “an agricultural system suitable for Hokkaidô.” When Shimakî observed them, the colonists were indeed experimenting with such a system, but apparently they had little confidence in its success. Masaru said, “We were expected to teach Manchurian farmers superior technologies, but we had nothing to teach them” (1988, Tamanoi).

Did the Japanese settlers have the option to become absentee landlords? My answer is a definitive no. The Japanese state gave them land, houses, tools, and draft animals, but once in Manchuria, they had to survive as working landowners. Although the colonists could afford to employ Chinese coolies and eventually rented out large portions of their land to them, they could not expand their operations because (1) the cost of Chinese labor was not cheap, and (2) the Japanese state dissuaded the colonists from becoming commercial farmers. Nevertheless, we must remember that in the age of empire, the Japanese state was the largest and most powerful absentee landlord in Manchuria. We must
also remember that of the land to which the Japanese state held deeds in 1941, only 1 percent (about two hundred thousand hectares) was used by the Japanese settlers; the remaining land was simply allowed to lie fallow (L. Young 1998:401, 402, n. 8). While Chinese tenant farmers paid large rents in kind to the colonists, the latter had to give up most of them to the Japanese state. The structure of victimization was indeed complex, yet the ultimate victims were always the Chinese farmers.

Some of our informants remembered the blatant racism that they exercised toward the Chinese and Korean people and their sense of superiority over them.

Take the ration of cotton fabric, for example. The Manchurians and the Koreans received only a third of our share or perhaps none at all, so we occasionally gave away some of our share to those Manchurians or Koreans who delivered us soybeans or kaoliang [sorghum] over the quota. I was a kid then, but even a small child like me noticed [such discriminatory practices]. (Anonymous, 1971–1973, Yamada; quoted in Yamada 1978:348)

The village head was Manchurian, but the vice-head was Japanese. The section heads of the village office were all Manchurians, but the vice-heads were, again, all Japanese. (Yoshio, 1991, Tamanoi)

I knew it was bad, but we often stole [the bags of dried] pumpkin seeds from the Manchurian vendors by the roadside. (Toshiko, 1988, Tamanoi)

Manchurian kids ate such things as the peels of watermelon we had discarded on the streets. (Sumiko, 1991, Tamanoi)

Recall that most of the Japanese agrarian settlers had been impoverished farmers before emigrating to Manchuria. Yet once in Manchuria, some of them took Japanese superiority for granted. While some were sympathetic to the conditions of the local farmers, they had to side with the Japanese vice-heads, who in reality held more power than their Chinese superiors, in order to survive as agrarian colonists. Indeed, in the age of empire, Japanese children were often instructed to nurture a sense of racial superiority in both Japan proper and its overseas empire. Yamada states, “Around 1943, one of my teachers [in Japan proper] told us that the Japanese military was using chemical weapons on the battlefront in China. Yet I remember I did not feel that it was particularly wrong. In those days, we were taught not to consider the Chinese or the Koreans as humans” (1978:13). If that was the case, the acts of stealing
bags of dried pumpkin seeds from Chinese vendors or barging ahead of the Chinese to buy train tickets seem trivial. However, in the sense that the Japanese did so with little sense of remorse, these actions represented “institutional racism” against the local people.  

At this point, let me briefly go back to 1939 and quote from the diary of Sugano Masao, a member of the Manchuria Youth Brigade. Sugano was then living at one of the training centers run by the Colonization Bureau. One day, out of curiosity, he visited a hamlet of Chinese farmers near his barracks. Describing their children, he writes as follows:

Their faces, hands, and legs are all filthy. They probably have never cut their hair. I bet they do not bathe, nor wash their faces either. I saw their houses, made of dirt, grasses, and kaoliang husks. I noticed a pig carcass and the bones of a horse scattered all over and sighted several Manchurians excreting in public under the eaves and by the roadside. I then realized that harmony among the five races would not come easily. Even after I returned from their hamlet, I felt their filthy odor enveloping my entire body. Although our barracks were made of simple wood, I found them superbly clean and realized anew that we should lead them into a better future. (1939:9–10)

Sugano probably wrote this diary entry shortly after he returned to his barracks. In it, the Chinese hamlet and the Japanese training center are presented as two starkly different places, and the contrast crystallizes Sugano’s understanding of Japanese superiority. While the former is filthy and smelly, the latter is immaculate and redolent of fresh wood.

Sugano seems to have had no doubt about his superiority over the Chinese. Yet this does not mean that the Japanese racism went unnoticed. To the contrary, the Japanese settlers who committed serious crimes against the Chinese were prosecuted by the Manchukuoan judicial authorities for their overt demonstrations of national pride. The Japanese who were prosecuted, however, did not receive full punishment on the official grounds of “ethnic harmony.” This is amply demonstrated in a report issued by the Public Prosecutor’s Office of Manchukuo (Manshūkoku Saikō Kensatsu-chō) (quoted in Yamada 1978:431–518). For example, in 1939, after the nominal abrogation of Japanese extraterritoriality in Manchukuo, a man named Iwata Tatsuo and some sixty Japanese agrarian settlers assaulted a group of Chinese farmers, illegally arrested them, confined them to a shack, and injured some of them. Although these local farmers carried a certificate of permission to cut trees in the area, the Japanese, “out of their sense of superiority,” confiscated the certificate. The Japanese colonists were also criticized for failing to understand the language of the native farmers (report quoted in Yamada 1978:503–504).
Another incident took place in 1939. Suzuki Hisashi, a twenty-four-year-old Japanese farmer, was in charge of recruiting “Manchurian coolies.” As some of these coolies were dissatisfied with the daily wages paid by their Japanese employer, they did not respond to Suzuki’s attempts at recruitment. Enraged, Suzuki shot and killed one of them. He committed this crime “out of his racial pride as Japanese” (ibid.:497–478). In both of the 1939 cases, the prosecutors identified the suspects’ motives as “the Japanese sense of superiority” (nihonjin no yûetsukan). In the end, however, they dropped the cases, “honoring the ideology of ethnic harmony,” and asked the accused (the Japanese) and the accusers (the Chinese) to reach mutual agreements through the Manchukuo police office (ibid.:504).

Manchurians lived within mud walls and hung corn on the walls to dry. I always smelled drying corn, mixed with the smell of animals and their excrement. In contrast, Koreans always lived near rice paddies. (Sumiko, 1991, Tamanoi)

I remember that Koreans were rather haughty toward their Manchurian neighbors. Some of them spoke fairly good Japanese, so my father could easily communicate with them. (Aki, Tamanoi, 1988)

In Manchuria, Koreans were often quite arrogant toward the Manchurians. They also identified themselves with the Japanese. The Koreans invaded Manchuria and exploited the labor of Manchurian farmers for free, making them work in the rice paddies. We, the Japanese, did not exploit the Manchurians like the Koreans did. (Anonymous, 1971–1973, Yamada; quoted in Yamada 1978:348)

When Japan was defeated, the Manchurians did not harm the Koreans at all. The Manchurians attacked only us, the Japanese. The divide was therefore between the Japanese, on the one hand, and the Manchurians and Koreans on the other. (Anonymous, 1971–1973, Yamada; quoted in Yamada 1978:347)

In the early twentieth century, both official and popular discourses in Japan designated the Koreans as “compatriots.” At the same time, the same discourses referred to “the recalcitrant Koreans” (futei senjin), who opposed Japan’s colonial expansion. However, the Koreans, while in the ranks of the colonized in their own societies, fell into grayer, often impermanent categories when displaced to other realms of the Japanese Empire, such as Manchuria. Throughout the 1920s, historian Barbara Brooks argues, the Japanese state regarded the Korean settlers in Manchuria as Japanese subjects and encouraged them to become naturalized Chinese
so that they could purchase and own land in Manchuria (1998:29–31, 36). After the establishment of Manchukuo, however, “the Koreans” became one of the five ethnic groups making up Manchukuo’s population in the Japanese state’s discourse. Nevertheless, relations between Japanese and Koreans remained unstable. This is reflected, for example, in the fact that the official category of “Japanese” often included Koreans, but the “Korean” category never included Japanese (Tamanoi 2000a:257). Yet the above testimonies suggest that Japanese settlers clearly distinguished Koreans not only from the Japanese but also from the Chinese. At the same time, they recognized a complicated relationship between the Koreans and the Chinese. Remembering the haughty attitude of Korean farmers toward Chinese farmers, some settlers criticized the Koreans for their racism against the Chinese. Referring to the Koreans, some of my informants used such terms as Senjin or Hantôjin (people of the peninsula) perjorative terms that implicitly placed the speakers above the Koreans. For one former colonist, whom Yamada interviewed, however, the tension between the Chinese and the Koreans did not matter; what mattered was the Japanese domination over them both.

I encountered several instances in Nagano in which my informants identified themselves with the “Manchurians.” For example, in a 1991 interview, Tokie sang a song titled “A Manchurian Daughter.” It was, according to her, “an extremely popular song among the youth in my village [in Manchuria].”

I am sixteen,
And I am a Manchurian daughter.
When snow melts,
And when the yingchunhua blooms,
I am going to marry
A man living in the village next to mine.

Tokie told me that she always sang this song with her (Japanese) neighbors and to her daughter, who was born in Manchuria. I later learned that there was yet one more line to this song: “Please wait for me, Mr. Wang.” Mr. Wang is the name of the Manchurian daughter’s fiancé, who is Manchurian—that is, Chinese.

“A Manchurian Daughter” is not native to Manchuria; it is a Japanese popular song. Composed and sung by the Japanese, it became a sensation in the late 1930s in both Japan proper and its overseas territories, especially in Manchuria (Mainichi Shinbunsha 1978:85). Put another way, by identifying with the colonized subjects, the colonizers created this song
in Japanese. While the Japanese in Japan proper may have imagined an “exotic” Chinese girl while singing this song, Tokie did not need such an image. Instead, she identified herself and her child with the “Manchurian daughters.” To support my argument, I cite a passage from the autobiography of Mizoguchi Setsu, a young Japanese student who lived in Harbin from 1934 to 1946: “Harbin Higher School for Japanese Women gave us such a lot of freedom. We ignored the remark that our school principal often made: ‘Manchurian daughters must behave especially well. Otherwise, you cannot find your life partners.’ To the contrary, we acquired a mass of knowledge from our teachers [who did not place as much emphasis on the importance of a womanly disposition as the principal did]” (1997:27–28). In this passage, “Manchurian daughters” refers to Japanese schoolgirls studying in Manchuria. Its counterpart, “Manchurian boys” (manshū otoko), refers to young Japanese men who settled in Manchuria and were influenced by what the Japanese called “continental culture” (tairiku bunka). The term implies a more magnanimous and manlier character (in comparison to that of young Japanese men in Japan proper), someone who is not constrained by small worries. “Manchurian daughters” also implies a freer but less feminine character (in comparison to that of young Japanese women in Japan proper). In the above quote, the school principal advocates the virtue of Japanese women. Setsu, on the other hand, embraces the freer education she received in Manchuria. The colonists’ identification with the Manchurians, then, suggests that they once shared a common frontier spirit and that in their remembrance they still shared the same spirit to mark a certain distance from the Japanese who had never left Japan proper. Yet read the following.

Yes, I remember. I rode on a steamship [to Seoul, Korea] and then took many trains with Manchurian passengers who smelled of garlic. [How could you tell that they were Manchurians?] They were wearing black Manchurian robes. Those robes looked very grimy because, I guess, they had never washed them. When I arrived at the branch village [of Fuji] and saw the huge crimson sun setting on the horizon, I felt as if I had gotten a new life. One of the scenes I remember well, because it was so recurrent, is one in which Manchurian farmers were plowing, using Manchurian spades. They plowed hilly land, lightly whipping their Manchurian horses. I was very fond of observing them until they would disappear over the top of the hill. (Aki, 1996, Tamanoi)

In this passage, Aki demonstrates both her frontier spirit for Manchuria and her disdain toward Manchurians. Once settled, Aki recognized the Manchurians plowing near her father’s farm. She therefore began calling the spades they used “Manchurian spades” and the horses they rode
“Manchurian horses.” Indeed, the term “Manchurian” served as a descriptive term for almost everything that the Japanese settlers saw or heard for the first time, from Manchurian hoes, clothes, and pots to the Manchurian (Chinese) language and Manchurian (Chinese) people.

**How Emigrants Remember the Decline of Manchukuo**

We had to send at least 250 households more [to Manchuria], so we tried every means to persuade those who were still undecided. But we could not reach the target. Consequently, we had to expand our recruitment drive to our neighboring villages. Eventually, several families from those villages joined us. But in the official document, we did not record the names of the villages from which they came. Instead, we wrote “Ôhinata,” pretending that we had fulfilled our obligation. (Anonymous, 1971–1973, Yamada; quoted in Yamada 1978:342)

By the late 1930s, the prices of most agricultural crops (except for raw silk) had returned to pre-Depression levels. Consequently, the mother villages in Nagano began to suffer from acute labor shortages, owing not only to the active mobilization of farmers as emigrants and soldiers but also to the recovery of the agricultural economy. A severe shortage of industrial labor further aggravated the problem. Under these conditions, village notables found it increasingly difficult to recruit farmers for Manchurian colonization, to the point that one recruitment officer in the village of Yasuoka committed suicide when he failed to fulfill the state’s orders (Yamada 1978:39).

In the late 1930s, then, momentum shifted to the Manchuria Patriotic Youth Brigade. This program recruited young boys between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one who were exempted from the draft because “they elected to join other adult settlers in the farm communities” (L. Young 1998:357; see also Suleski 1981). However, as the state’s war efforts mounted, adult settlers left for the battlefields, and so did brigade members. Isao, whom I met in Ina, was one of the brigade members who was eventually drafted, arrested by the Soviets, and sent to Siberia as a prisoner of war (POW).

In Manchuria, we were able to farm for only about four months, from May to August. Around the end of July, the temperature began to drop, sometimes sharply. For those four months, we had to work frantically. In summer, when the moon shined, we worked without much sleep. Otherwise, we could not harvest enough crops. We had summers and long winters but only seven days of spring and another seven days of autumn. At the training center, every meal was exactly the same—kaoliang mixed
with a bit of rice and black beans and salty soup with dried fish and
dried radish. But we all knew that our teachers were eating white
steamed rice every day. . . . We were always suffering from starvation and
fatigue. We also suffered from the [physical] violence that our own
teachers exercised against us. This was the reality of the training center
for the Patriotic Youth Brigade. The state advertised it with all those
rosy pictures, but they were all untrue. (Isao, Tamanoi, 1996)

Although Isao would have wanted to go home, the Japanese state assidu-
ously prevented brigade members from doing so. Thus, Tômiya Kaneo
(1892–1937), one of the brigade founders, advocated the need to recruit
“continental brides” (tairiku hanayome) for brigade members. As a high-
ranking military officer who embraced the expansionist cause, Tômiya
not only “pushed hard for paramilitary Japanese settlements in north
Manchuria as a bulwark against the Soviet Union” (L. Young 1998:385)
but he also created slogans to recruit young Japanese women as wives
for single male settlers. One of the slogans read, “Girls of new Japan, marry
the continent” (Shin Nippon no shôjo yo, tairiku ni totsuge) (Ogawa 1995:68).
With such slogans, he asked young women to emigrate to Manchuria,
marry Japanese settlers, give birth to Japanese children, and become
the soil of Manchuria. Following his plan, the Japanese state built
“schools for the (Japanese) female settlers in Manchuria” (manshû jo-
juku) in Japan and in Manchuria (see Sugiyama 1996:129). Ogawa
Tsuneko reports that by 1944, there were over one thousand young Japa-
nese women studying at these training centers in Manchuria alone and
that 90 percent of them were to marry brigade members (1995:110).

Sadako, one of the continental brides recruited in 1944, recalls the
following:

The reason I emigrated to Manchuria in 1944 was the state coloniza-
tion policy; the state persuaded me to go to Manchuria. I joined a group
called the Young Women’s Brigade. We were told to work for our na-
tion. In reality, we were expected to become continental brides, but I
did not understand the meaning of that term back then. Before emi-
grating to Manchuria, I was helping my family to farm. The head of my
village and teachers at my school told us to go to Manchuria, see vari-
ous places, and, when we returned, tell stories about Manchuria to the
village residents. Then I was only eighteen years old. (Kurihara Sadako,
1996, Sugiyama Haru)²⁵

Only six months after settling in Manchuria, her teacher asked Sadako
to marry a young man of the Patriotic Youth Brigade. By 1944, however,
the state did not need agrarian colonists but soldiers. Her husband was
drafted in July 1945. At the time of Japan’s capitulation, Sadako was pregnant, and her husband’s location was unknown. Without protection, she had no way to survive other than to marry a Chinese farmer. Ten days after her wedding, she gave birth to her son. “Even though he was not the father of my child, he and his family held a big celebration for me,” said Sadako (quoted in Ôba and Hashimoto 1986:66).

When I first visited Manchuria in 1938, the Manchurians always let us cross the street first. At the train station, we did not have to wait in line at the ticket counter, the Manchurians let us buy tickets first. . . . When I returned to Manchuria and finally settled [in the branch village of Ôhi-nata] in 1943, it was a different story. The Manchurians told me to go to elsewhere [to buy train tickets] because, they said, it was their train station. Looking back, I think they already sensed Japan’s imminent defeat. I said to myself that I had come to the wrong place at the wrong time. (Anonymous, 1971–1973, Yamada; quoted in Yamada 1978:349)

After the onset of the Pacific War, rural Manchuria had been emptied of able-bodied men because of aggressive conscription. In consequence, the Japanese state continued to send agrarian colonists to Manchuria until the very end of the war. Indeed, the record shows that only three months before Japan’s capitulation, the county of Achi in the lower Ina Valley sent about two hundred colonists to a remote area of Manchuria on the border with the Soviet Union (NKJMK 1984b:482). Those who arrived in Manchuria late rarely met local farmers who were willing to let them cross the street first. In addition, they had to work much harder, as the following testimony amply indicates.

Our life got harder and harder toward the end. Particularly after 1942, the state sharply increased the quotas for this or that agrarian product that we had to deliver to local authorities. Since we had to rely on Chinese and Korean farmers to deliver us their quotas, I guess their lives must have been much harder than ours. You say that we were expected to become “self-sufficient farmers.” But we never became such farmers in Manchuria. (Masaru, 1988, Tamanoi)

Masaru also told me that around May 1945, the settlers had very little to eat except for soybeans and potatoes. It was around this time that he was mobilized into the army.

The brevity of this section does not mean that my informants scarcely remembered the end of the Japanese Empire in Manchuria. Completely the opposite was true: they had much to tell me about the end of Manchukuo. For example, in 1996, when the women’s group in Fujimi invited me
for a gathering before my departure for the United States, all the members recounted stories of their escape from Manchuria after the Soviet invasion. For this reason, I find it appropriate to dedicate an entire chapter to their memories of the Soviet invasion, Japan’s capitulation, and their repatriation journeys. Before doing so, let me conclude this chapter with a discussion on the role of the Japanese state in Manchurian colonization.

**Remembering the Japanese State in Manchurian Colonization, 1930–1945**

In *The Expansion of England*, published in London in 1883, British imperial historian Robert Seeley examines the history of England, which occupied parts of the globe that were “quite empty.” Since they were so empty, they offered unbounded scope for new settlement for the people of England (1883:46). Seeley raises the following point: “But if the State is the Nation (not the Country, observe, but the Nation), then we see a sufficient ground for the universal usage of modern states, which has been to regard their emigrants not as going out of the State but as *carrying the State with them*” (ibid.:41, my emphasis). Calling England “the Nation,” Seeley presents it as a historical community based on a common race, language, and culture. This community, according to Seeley, is destined to expand into every corner of the world. At the core of this expanding territory, called an empire, Seeley places the modern State of England. He expects British citizens to carry this state as they emigrate overseas. He also expects them to carry the mission of spreading British nationalism. Since the corners of the world into which the expansion extends are empty, Seeley states, British citizens do not have to worry about encountering aliens who may reject their mission.

After the Manchurian Incident of 1931, the promoters of Manchurian colonization often referred to Seeley as they equated Japan with England. For them, Japan was also a modern nation-state on its way to an empire. For example, in 1935, at a conference held by the Institute of Oriental Studies (Tōyō Kyōkai), Nagao Sakurō, then an employee of the SMR, made use of Seeley’s work in the following remark: “In his famous work, titled *The Expansion of England*, historian Seeley of Great Britain argues that [British] emigrants always carry the State with them. According to Seeley, only when we speak of the emigrant moving with the power of the Nation, of which he is a citizen, can we correctly say, ‘He carries the State with him’ [kare to tomo ni kokka o hakobu]” (quoted in Tōyō Kyōkai 1935:59). As the British who settled on the east coast of North America called the area “New England,” Nagao suggests, the Japanese who settled in Manchuria should call the area “New Japan.” However, according to Nagao, not every Japanese emigrant carried the state with him. Those who emigrated to South America, for example,
did not carry the state with them. Instead, they moved there “to make money” for their own selfish purposes. Hence they were not contributing to the formation of an empire (ibid.).

While the local discourses published in Nagano do not refer to Seeley, they do refer to Manchuria as an empty land. Furthermore, they refer to China as a place without a state. Japan is the only nation in Asia that has a state, and its power is destined to spread to “eight corners of the world” (hakkō ichiu). For example, in one newspaper the author, who apparently ranked among the village wealthy, writes that: “The Japanese and the Chinese [Shinajin] are different in every respect. To confuse them is to confuse the Japanese with the Portuguese. . . . The Chinese do not live beyond the household boundary. They do not have a notion of the state, and most of them are illiterate” (Urazato sonpō, June 10, 1939). Yet, he claims, “the Chinese” do not live in Manchuria; they live in China proper. Thus, along with Nagao, this writer also envisions Manchuria as quite empty and argues that the Japanese should carry the state with them.

Indeed, our informants’ oral memories suggest that when they were faced with impending poverty in rural Nagano, they emigrated to Manchuria, “carrying the state with them.” However, the notion of the state as presented by Seeley is extremely diffused. In one case, the state is the office of a branch village that was late in distributing winter clothes to its settlers. In another, it is a village mayor who has arranged a marriage for a female settler without eliciting her opinion. In yet another, it is the colonization company, whose staff was quite merciless in confiscating land and houses from local farmers. But in remembering, the informants always see Manchuria as an extension of Japan, governed by the Japanese state. Backed by this state, the poor farmers of Nagano set out, with band music wafting in the background as they boarded train or ship for Manchuria.

Upon arrival, the colonists discovered that Manchuria was a populated land; they were not there to transform virgin territory into fertile ground but to work on already cultivated land. As they had to rely on the labor provided by Manchurian coolies, the idea of “yeoman farmers” did not work. Since they had already received land, grants, and subsidies from the state, it was impossible for them to interfere in this colonial structure. In remembering, then, these former colonists criticized the ineffectiveness of the Manchurian colonization policy. At the same time, they remembered their own disdainful stance toward the Chinese and the Koreans, on whom they heavily relied as a source of labor. Most of our informants remembered their sense of supremacy in terms of Japanese racial purity. Yoshio, whom I met in Nagano in 1996, is a former agrarian colonist who emigrated to Manchuria in 1942. After mentioning “the Manchurians” (Manjin), I initiated the following dialogue. My questions are prefaced with a “T.”
T: Who are the Manjin?
Yosshio: They are those who lived in Manchuria.
T: Aren’t they Chinese?
Yosshio: I guess not, because they lived in Manchuria.
T: But I read that many Chinese had emigrated to Manchuria before Japan established Manchukuo.
Yosshio: Yeah? But many of them wore Manchurian clothes.
T: You did not call them Manchukuoans?
Yosshio: No; wasn’t that the official term?
T: So you too were a Manchukuoan.
Yosshio: No; I was Japanese because I am Japanese.

This dialogue sounds almost ridiculous as I refer only to the official, abstract categories. Yoshio cannot accept my categories for a number of reasons: they sound too formal; he has hardly ever heard them; and consequently he has rarely used them. More important, his identity as Japanese is primordial. For him, “Japanese” is the identity he never discarded nor will ever discard in the future. Yoshio remembered his teacher at the training center saying, “Manchuria is where numerous Japanese [soldiers] shed their blood. We [Japanese] must protect it with our own hands.” In 1996, he no longer believed his teacher’s words. But he seemed not to have remembered that in Manchukuo no one forced Yoshio to identify himself as Japanese, while the Chinese were daily reminded of their identity as Manchurians.

Memory map 1, then, suggests that the former agrarian settlers in Manchuria who returned to Nagano between 1946 and 1949 have been struggling with the gap between what they remember about the Japanese state and how they should remember it. In remembering, they are seldom critical of their own decisions and actions. They emigrated to Manchuria as agrarian colonists and worked and lived on land that had belonged to the Chinese, but they remember those decisions and actions as those of the Japanese state; they simply chose to follow state policy to regenerate their household economies. At the same time, however, they are highly critical of the Japanese state, which, they claim, tricked them into Manchurian colonization. Here, then, they fail to relate their own decisions and actions to the power of the Japanese state.

Shall we honor only the memories of those who reached the realization that they had victimized the Chinese? My answer is no. If we criticize our informants for failing to acknowledge their complicity in Japan’s imperial expansion, we must also criticize most of the Japanese people who never left Japan proper in the age of empire. Agreeing with some Marxist scholars, the latter began calling the former agrarian colonists “retainers of Japanese imperialism” (nihon teikoku shugi no tesaki) soon
after the war's end (Yamazaki 1972). By the same token, we must also criticize the U.S. Occupation Forces, which, understanding Japanese agrarian settlers as the retainers of militarism, did not allow the Japanese state to extend special aid to them after they were finally repatriated to Japan. We need to understand the following: while the agrarian settlers in Manchuria were complicit in Japanese colonialism, they were also the victims of not only rural poverty in the age of empire but also postwar Japanese society, which saw them only as the victimizers. Our role, then, is to detach them from their image as faceless agents of oppression and see each one of them as human beings who either enthusiastically or reluctantly participated in Manchurian colonization (Guelcher 2000:4). After all, they carried the Japanese state with them in emigrating to Manchuria, returned home to bring it back, and then relied on it to start their second lives in postwar Japan. Memory map 1 therefore should bring to the fore the power of the Japanese state by shedding light on what our informants remembered, how they remembered, and what they forgot.