

Japan's Last Colonial Frontier: Settler Migration, Development and Expansionism in the Brazilian Amazon

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In this seminar, my presentation will be based on a chapter to be published by Lexington books in September 2021.

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Recent studies on Transpacific and Global History have been exploring the entanglements between Japan's overseas migrations and its imperialism. In doing so, these studies argue that the experiences of migrants in Hawaii, the West Coast of the US and Brazil were fundamental in shaping narratives and schemes for national mobilization for expanding Japan's colonial empire in Northeast Asia since the late 1930s. Engaging with these discussions, this presentation attempts, however, a further critical exploration by analyzing how endeavors for Japanese settler migration and agricultural development in the Brazilian Amazon during the 1930s attempted to create an alternative colonial space in the "empty lands" of South America.

This presentation will focus on the Amazonia Industrial Institute, a private institution with partial public funding, which planned and managed projects of settler migration and agricultural development in the Brazilian Amazon during the 1930s. The Institute introduced jute production in an effort to secure the basis of Japan's global economic hegemony by developing the Amazon's using Japanese migrants' workforce, while performing as agents of Brazil's policies for nation-building and development. Jute production not only powered agricultural development in the Amazon, but also opened a social space in which the frontiers of Japan's imperial expansionism overlapped with and reinforced Brazil's policies of developmental nationalism. By paying attention to this case of Japanese-Brazilian partnership, this presentation advances two arguments. First, it emphasizes the necessity of closer examinations of the local conditions and implications of Japanese expansionism in Latin America beyond current understandings of a borderless expansion through migration and agricultural colonization. Second, it argues that the connections between Latin America and the Trans-Pacific World must be explored to understand the transnational and global dimensions of Latin American History beyond the traditional Trans-Atlantic framework.