Thirty Years Lost: Studies of Early American History in Japan

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Abstract. Studies of early and Native American history in Japan have been stagnant for thirty years. Despite the “aboriginal turn” in the United States, Japanese scholars have not recognized the great progress even in this era of active interactions between and integration of the academic communities in Japan and the U.S., and have continued to treat European colonial history as early American history. This essay does not discuss why this generation-long neglect has occurred but aims to point out the lag and the specific shortcomings it has caused.

Since the 1990s, the “aboriginal turn” in studies of early American history has positioned Native American peoples, who still held political, economic, and military strength in that era, at the center of early American history. As Ned Blackhawk said in his 2005 essay “Look How Far We’ve Come,” scholars have consciously proceeded with this turn as a challenge to Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis.¹ Studies of early American history in Japan, however, have almost completely ignored this trend in the U.S. How far has the academic community in Japan fallen behind? This essay does not examine the reasons for that lag (for that is a topic better explained by senior scholars). Rather, as the first step in making

¹ Ned Blackhawk, “Look How Far We’ve Come: How American Indian History Changed the Study of American History in the 1990s,” *OAH Magazine of History* 19, no. 6 (November 2005): 13–17; James H. Merrell, “Second Thoughts on Colonial Historians and American Indians,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., 69, no. 3 (July 2012): 453; Pekka Hämäläinen, “The Future of Native American History in the United States,” *Perspectives on History: The Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association* 50, no. 9 (December 2012).

up for the lost time, it measures the gap between writings on early American history in the U.S. and those in Japan. The next paragraph reviews the aboriginal turn in the U.S. After that, the studies of Japanese scholars and their problems are presented.

The aboriginal turn in the U.S. has passed through several stages. James H. Merrell's criticism of scholars' terminology in his 1989 essay indicates that Turner's paradigm remained firmly in place at that time.² However, one important revision had already been offered by Francis Jennings. His 1982 article on seventeenth-century Maryland sought to replace Turner's dichotomy of civilization and savagism by presenting multiple frontiers on which Maryland colonists confronted Virginia colonists, Susquehannock Natives, and New Sweden (later New Netherland and New York) colonists. In addition, in the same article, Jennings criticized scholars' neglect of Native Americans, much as Merrell did.³ Later, Richard White published *Middle Ground* in 1991, and Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron published borderlands studies in 1999. They examined interculturally mixed and accommodated, not sharply divided, spaces.⁴ These studies were certainly seminal but still premature. The next issue of *American Historical Review* published a critical essay by John R. Wunder and Pekka Hämäläinen, who pointed out that in Adelman and Aron's description of the borderlands, "empires are never indigenous, nor is there such an entity as an

² James H. Merrell, "Some Thoughts on Colonial Historians and American Indians," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., 46, no. 1 (January 1989): 94–119.

³ Francis Jennings, "Indians and Frontiers in Seventeenth-Century Maryland," in *Early Maryland in a Wider World*, ed. David B. Quinn (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), 216–41.

⁴ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nations-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June 1999), 814–41.

Indian nation.”⁵ This asymmetry was next addressed by Kathleen DuVal and Juliana Barr, who discussed the territoriality of Native American peoples.⁶ As a result, after the decades of the aboriginal turn—as well as another important turn, the spatial turn, which produced subfields such as Atlantic history and Continental history—scholars now view early America as “a patchwork of cultures and polities” of various peoples.⁷

The first Japanese academic article on American studies was Yasaka Takagi’s “Beikoku-seiji-shi ni okeru tochi no igi [The Significance of Land in U.S. Political History],” published in 1927. American studies (including early American history) in Japan in this era and for decades after that were solely interested in American democracy and specifically in Puritanism and land policy.⁸ After the 1960s, when scholars in the U.S. began earnestly to study the victimhood of Native Americans, these studies were introduced to Japan, especially by Torao Tomita, the pioneer scholar of Native American history in Japan. He was one of three coauthors of *America-shi kenkyu nyumon* [*Introduction to American History*], published in

⁵ John R. Wunder and Pekka Hämäläinen, “Of Lethal Places and Lethal Essays,” *American Historical Review* 105, no. 4 (October 1999): 1229–30.

⁶ Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Juliana Barr, “Geographies of Power: Mapping Indian Borders in the “Borderlands” of the Early America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., 68, no. 1 (January 2011): 5–46; Matthew Babcock, “Territoriality and the Historiography of Early North America,” *Journal of American Studies* 50, no. 3 (August 2016): 515–36.

⁷ Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett, “On Borderlands,” *Journal of American History* 98, no. 2 (September 2011): 346; Juliana Barr and Edward Countyman, eds., *Contested Spaces of Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

⁸ アメリカ学会高木八尺先生記念図書編集委員会編『アメリカ精神を求めて：高木八尺の生涯』（東京大学出版会、1985年）、127頁[America gakkai Takagi Yasaka sensei kinen tosho henshu iinkai, ed., *America seishin wo motomete: Takagi Yasaka no shougai* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1985), 127].

1974, and this book targeted as its readers those who were concerned about U.S. oppression of and discrimination against African-Americans and others. In the section “Indian History,” the authors stated that this field of study was still “wild,” but they recognized the significance of revising American history, which had originally been written as white people’s history. They also included a substantial list of publications in English.⁹ Tadashi Aruga’s 1987 book *America-shi gairon* [*Introduction to American History*] also dealt with the fate of Native American people on the frontier, though as a minor topic.¹⁰ At that time, the Japanese approach to early American history was not much different from the U.S. one.

Since the 1990s, however, studies of early American history in Japan and those in the U.S. have sharply diverged. Despite the aboriginal turn in the U.S., Japanese scholars have not followed it; indeed, their interest in Native Americans in early American history may have even receded. In the third edition of *America-shi kenkyu nyumon* [*Introduction to American History*], published in 2009, Daizaburo Yui, one of the three editors, stated that the first edition was issued in the post-Vietnam War era, in 1974, and that that edition leaned too far toward the imperial perspective; thus, this third edition adopted an editorial policy that included diverse topics. However, according to the introduction written by another editor, Eisaku Kihira, the third edition puts aside relations between Native people and European newcomers in early America and focuses on “U.S. history.” Mitsuhiro Wada, in the chapter “The Colonial Period,” and Kikuyo Tanaka, in “From the Revolutionary War to the Civil War,” said almost nothing about Native Americans; and Yoshiyuki Kido, in “Race, Ethnicity, and Class,” dispensed with the Native Americans of the entire period in only two paragraphs. Wada explained that colonial historians established the subfield of Atlantic history and bade farewell to the national framework that considered the colonial period as the

⁹ 清水知久、高橋章、富田虎男『アメリカ史研究入門』（山川出版社、1974年）、i、15–24頁 [Tomohisa Shimizu, Akira Takahashi, and Torao Tmoita, *America-shi kenkyu nyumon* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1974), i, 15–24]。

¹⁰ 有賀貞『アメリカ史概論』（東京大学出版会、1987年）、186–193頁 [Tadashi Aruga, *America-shi gairon* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1987), 186–93]。

prehistory of the U.S. He eloquently proclaimed that this departure was “irreversible” and that colonial historians would not return to the “same harbor.”¹¹ The spatial turn is certainly the most significant event in this generation, but the aboriginal turn should be considered comparable to it. Wada should also have said the same thing about the aboriginal turn, though it would be hard to expect this of the leading Japanese Atlanticist. By the time Blackhawk published “Look How Far We’ve Come,” historians had already advanced too far to return to the same wilderness. Wada’s neglect of Native Americans indicates the difference between scholarly trends in the U.S. and Japan.

Strictly speaking, the fact that Japanese researchers stated they treated diverse topics without referring to Native Americans, which should have been the central theme of early America, is not only a reflection of the difference between the U.S. and Japan but also a violation of the principles set down by Donald L. Fixico in his 1996 essay “Ethics and Responsibilities.” Fixico wrote, “To write a history of the Anglo-American experience is not wrong, but to claim that it represents the entire history of the American experience is a gross mistake.”¹² This policing is necessary because there is a long history of unconscious violation.

Other history books by Japanese researchers have a similar tendency. Wada also wrote a section on the colonial and early republic periods in *America kenkyu nyumon* [*Beginner’s Guide to American Studies: With Introductory Essays on Themes, Approaches, and Resources*] and omitted any mention of Native Americans.¹³ In 2014, he edited a book titled *Daigaku de manabu America-shi*

¹¹ 有賀夏紀、紀平英作、油井大三郎編『アメリカ史研究入門』第三版（山川出版社、2009年）、5、17、46頁 [Natsuki Aruga, Eisaku Kihira, and Daizaburo Yui, eds., *America-shi kenkyu nyumon*, 3rd ed. (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2009), 5, 17, 46]。

¹² Donald L. Fixico, “Ethics and Responsibilities in Writing American Indian History,” *American Indian Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 30.

¹³ 五十嵐武士、油井大三郎編『アメリカ研究入門』第三版（東京大学出版会、2003年）、32–42頁 [Takeshi Igarashi and Daizaburo Yui, eds., *America kenkyu nyumon* [*Beginner’s Guide to American Studies: With Introductory Essays on*

[*History of the United States*], in which Takeo Mori wrote a chapter on the colonial period. Mori gave an overview of Native/European conflicts and accommodations but mainly described the development of the English colonies.¹⁴ Tomoharu Washio in 2013 and Eisaku Kihira in 2019 also reproduced the traditional narrative centered on the thirteen English colonies.¹⁵

One exception is *America no rekishi wo shiru tamen 63 sho* [*History of America in 63 Chapters*]. This book has three editions: the first was published in 2000, the second in 2009, and the third in 2015. The editors of all three editions are Torao Tomita, Yusuke Uzuki, and Madoka Sato, experts on Native American history, though this book deals with American history as a whole. In the introduction, the editors criticized the fact that scholars had tended to write American history from the viewpoint of white men and to ignore the perspectives of ethnic and social minorities. In chapters on the colonial period, authors Tomita and Yoko Shirai described Native/European relations, often from Native American perspectives, in Virginia, New England, and Pennsylvania. Other chapters on the colonial period cover slavery, the First Great Awakening, the mercantilism of the British Empire, and the imperial wars between Britain, France, and Spain. The chapters on Native/European relations account for about a half of the total. This book is more balanced than any other book written in Japanese.¹⁶

Themes, Approaches, and Resources], 3rd ed. (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2003), 32–42].

¹⁴ 和田光弘編『大学で学ぶアメリカ史』（ミネルヴァ書房、2014 年）、第 2 章 [Mitsuhiro Wada, ed., *Daigaku de manabu America-shi* [*History of the United States*] (Kyoto: Minerva shobo, 2014), chap. 2].

¹⁵ 鷲尾友春『20 のテーマで読み解くアメリカの歴史：1492～2010』（ミネルヴァ書房、2013 年）[Tomoharu Washio, *20 no theme de yomitoku America no rekishi: 1492–2010* [*Twenty Historical Episodes That Featured American society and Politics*] (Kyoto: Minerva shobo, 2013)]; 紀平英作編『アメリカ史』改訂版、上下巻（山川出版社、2019 年）[Eisaku Kihira, ed., *America-shi*, rev. ed., 2 vols. (Tokyo: Yamakawa shuppansha, 2019)].

¹⁶ 富田虎男、鶴月裕典、佐藤円編『アメリカの歴史を知るための 63 章』第三版

Most scholars of Native American studies (including history) in Japan, however, specialize in the modern and contemporary periods. In 2016, *America senjumin wo shiru tameno 62 sho* [*Native Americans in 62 Chapters*] was published. According to the introduction, this handbook covers the “entirety” of history, social problems, and cultures of Native Americans from European colonization through U.S. independence to this day. Nonetheless, this book omitted the colonial period and explained history as federal/Indian relations. The colonial period is distinct in that Native American people maintained their power and, with Europeans, co-produced a space that has since been called “middle ground.” Without the two centuries of the early modern era, Native American history as a whole cannot be understood.¹⁷ Its editor, Juri Abe, an anthropologist, and many authors, including Yoshitaka Iwasaki and Izumi Ishii, have publications on early America, but the early period does not seem to be in their comfort zone.¹⁸

The scarcity of Japanese academic conference presentations on Native

(明石書店、2015 年) [Torao Tomita, Yusuke Uzuki, and Madoka Sato, eds., *America no rekishi wo shiru tameno 63 sho*, 3rd ed. (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2015)]。

¹⁷ 阿部珠理編著『アメリカ先住民を知るための 62 章』(明石書店、2016 年) [Juri Abe, ed., *America senjumin wo shiru tameno 62 sho* (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2016)]。

¹⁸ 阿部珠理「作られる「インディアン」：「高貴なる野蛮人」の系譜」『聖徳大学言語文化研究所論叢』7 号 (2000 年)、321–305 頁 [Juri Abe, “Tsukurareru “Indian”: “Kouki naru yaban-jin” no keifu,” *Seitoku daigaku gengo bunka kenkyujo ronsou* 7 (2000): 321–305] ; 岩崎佳孝「白いインディアンになったイギリス人：18 世紀の北米大陸におけるインディアン・トレーダーに関する一考察」『英米文化』30 号 (2000 年)、127–140 頁 [Yoshitaka Iwasaki, “Shiroi Indian ni natta igirisu-jin: 18 seiki no hokubei tairiku ni okeru Indian trader ni kansuru ichi-kousatsu [An Englishman Who Became a White Indian: A Study of an Indian Trader in Colonial America],” *Eibeibunka: Studies in English Language, Literature and Culture* 30 (2000): 127–40] ; Izumi Ishii, *Bad Fruits of the Civilized Tree: Alcohol and the Sovereignty of the Cherokee Nation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

Americans of early America reflects the inactiveness of that field. There are three main nationwide associations relating to early American history: the Japanese Association for American Studies (JAAS), the Japanese Association for American History (JAAH), and the Japanese Association of Early Americanists. The last one is an interdisciplinary organization that covers not only history but also literature, politics, economics, religion, and so on, from the colonial period to the nineteenth century. It has held regular meetings since 1997 and most recently held its eighty-third meeting in December 2020. Of those, presentations apparently related to Native Americans were very few: puritans' view toward Native Americans (by Jun Iwai at the fourth meeting in July 1997), Haudenosaunee's religion (by Takeshi Kimura at the fifth meeting in September 1997), Roger Williams and intercultural coexistence (by Yasuo Kubota at the fifteenth meeting in December 1998), the Pequot War (by Mikayo Sakuma at the forty-fourth meeting in October 2004), and "Pocahontas's Two Rescues and her Fluid Loyalty" (by me at the eightieth meeting in July 2019). The Early Americanists also gather at the annual meetings of JAAS, but their interest in Native Americans is low; their neglect of the aboriginal turn contrasts sharply with their accommodation to the spatial turn. JAAS and JAAH are not organizations only for early America, and their journals contain relatively few articles on early America, of which works on Native Americans of early America are remarkably rare.¹⁹

One leading Japanese scholar on Native Americans of early America during these thirty years is Yoko Shirai. Shirai submitted her dissertation, titled "The Indian Trade in Colonial Pennsylvania, 1730 – 1768: Traders and Land Speculation," in 1985 and received a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania. After that, she published multiple articles in Japanese, mainly on relations between the Iroquois and Delaware and other Native peoples in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania. She is prominent in publishing works of that field in the authoritative Japanese-language journals of JAAS and JAAH, and her works are

¹⁹ See the official websites: <http://earlyamericanists.jp/>; <http://www.jaas.gr.jp/>; <http://www.jaah.jp/>.

essential reading for Japanese students today.²⁰ However, even though her works on gender and colonization were apparently inspired by Francis Jennings, she did not absorb the “middle ground” and other new concepts that came after Jennings in early American indigenous studies during the aboriginal turn. Her focus on U.S. military aggression often diverted her from the topic of early America to that of the Vietnam War.²¹

After the thirty-year time lag, the year 2020 produced two valuable publications. The first is Shuichi Wanibuchi’s review essay, and the second, which is not without its problems, is a translation of Alan Taylor’s *Colonial America: A Very Short Introduction*.²² This book reflects not only the spatial turn but also the

²⁰ 白井洋子「北米先住民のみた「新世界」：17世紀前半期の先住民社会とキリスト教布教活動」『アメリカ研究』26号（1992年）、27–48頁[Yoko Shirai, “Hokubei senjumin no mita “shinsekai”: 17 seiki zenhan-ki no senjumin-shakai to Christ-kyo fukyo katsudou [“The New World” in the Eyes of North American Indians: Native American Society and Christian Missions in the First Half of Seventeenth-Century North America]” *America kenkyu* [*American Review*] 26 (1992): 27–48]; 同「インディアン戦争という暴力：ペンシルベニアの先住民虐殺事件をめぐって」『アメリカ史研究』36号（2013年）、3–23頁[idem, “Indian sensou to iu bouryoku: Pennsylvania no senjumin gyakusatsu jiken wo megutte [The Indian Wars as Racial Conflicts in Late-Colonial Pennsylvania],” *America-shi kenkyu* [*American History*] 36 (2013): 3–23]。

²¹ 白井洋子「戦争とジェンダー：ベトナム戦争とアメリカ社会」『アメリカ研究』33号（1999年）、37–57頁[Yoko Shirai, “Sensou to gender: Vietnam sensou to America shakai,” *America kenkyu* [*American Review*] 33 (1999): 37–57]。

²² 鰐淵秀一「ポスト共和主義パラダイム期のアメリカ革命史研究」『立教アメリカン・スタディーズ』42号（2020年）、101–120頁[Shuichi Wanibuchi, “Post-kyouwashugi paradigm-ki no America kakumei-shi kenkyu [The Post-Republican Paradigm of the History of the American Revolution]” *Rikkyo American Studies* 42 (2020): 101–20]; アラン・テイラー（橋川健竜訳）『先住民 vs. 帝国興亡のアメリカ史：北米大陸をめぐるグローバル・ヒストリー』（ミネルヴァ書房、2020年）[Alan Taylor, *Senjumin vs. teikoku kobo no America-shi: Hokubei tairiku wo*

aboriginal one, unlike the Japanese works mentioned above. However, even though Taylor wrote a great deal about Native Americans, his focus was still on the European colonies: the book's table of contents references, among others, "New Spain," "New France," "Chesapeake colonies," "New England," and "West Indies and Carolina." This breakdown is European-centered, but it is not problematic in itself if the author wants to write from the traditional perspective. The problem is, as Fixico's "Ethics and Responsibilities" points out, that the Japanese title *Senjumin vs. Teikoku* [*Native People vs. Empires*] only pretends to adopt a more balanced view. Another problem with the Japanese title is, as is mentioned in Wunder and Hämäläinen's 1999 criticism, that the wording suggests that Native Americans did not have their own polities. Leading scholars of the aboriginal turn intentionally use such words as "empire" and "nation," the same terms used for Europeans, to shed Turner's civilization-savagism binarism.

Satoshi Nakano states in 2010 that, by the decade of the 2000s, trends of studies of American history in Japan and the U.S. had greatly "synchronized," and distinct Japanese standpoints had receded and been abandoned. Japanese graduate students increasingly tend to enter PhD programs in the U.S., and according to his essay, the positionality that once had been collective among the Japanese as a nation was becoming more individualized.²³ Strangely, this general synchronization seems not to apply to early American history. Of course, it does not matter that Japanese individuals do not study the Native Americans of early America, because not all U.S. scholars in the field study them either. It is, however, problematic that Japanese scholars as a whole do not understand the centrality and significance of Native Americans in early American history. We must begin with the uncomfortable realization that our writings are biased and old-fashioned.

meguru global history [*Colonial America: A Very Short Introduction*], trans. Kenryu Hashikawa (Kyoto: Minerva shobo, 2020)].

²³ 中野聡「アメリカ史研究の現状と課題」『立教アメリカン・スタディーズ』32号(2010年)、9-20頁 [Satoshi Nakano, "America-shi kenkyu no genjou to kadai [The Current State and Issues of American History]" *Rikkyo American Studies* 32 (2010): 9-20].