REVIEW ESSAY

Bringing Class and Indigeneity In, but Leaving Japaneseness Out

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Jeffrey Paul Bayliss. *On the Margins of Empire: Buraku and Korean Identity in Prewar and Wartime Japan*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013. 437 pp. $45 (cloth).

Mark K. Watson. *Japan's Ainu Minority in Tokyo: Diasporic Indigeneity and Urban Politics*. New York: Routledge, 2014. 189 pp. $145 (cloth).

Buoyed by waves of labor migration into Japan from Asia and Latin America, the field of Japan studies has seen a renewed interest in Japan's minority groups. Much of the new scholarship has focused on debunking notions of Japanese uniqueness found in political discourse about the nation, known as Nihonjinron. In particular, this work has focused on Japan's supposed ethnic, racial, and class homogeneity, examining the experiences of newcomers, oldcomers, and native others in Japan. From this academic work, two key analytical foci—social class and indigeneity—have tended to be missing. *On the Margins of Empire: Buraku and Korean Identity in Prewar and Wartime Japan,* by Jeffrey Paul Bayliss, and *Japan's Ainu Minority in Tokyo: Diasporic Indigeneity and Urban Politics,* by Mark K. Watson, address this shortcoming in their respective analyses of Burakumin and Koreans from the Meiji Restoration to the end of World War II, and of present-day Ainu residing in Tokyo. All three of these groups have faced a similar dilemma—as Bayliss puts it, "how to restore and maintain a sense of pride and self-worth within a society that denied human dignity to those it imagined as irredeemably different" (111). The two texts offer important insights into these groups' battles for self-definition and recognition, highlighting issues that fall outside the mono- or multi-ethnic Japan paradigm that has dominated

recent research. However, their focus on the three minority groups' identity issues tends to exclude the dialectic relationship between these groups' identities and the ethnic identity of majority Japanese.

Bayliss reveals in great detail the prevailing Japanese views of Burakumin and Koreans in the late nineteenth- to mid-twentieth century, showing how both groups were defined as "debaucherous, violent, and lacking the will for self-improvement—in other words, the antithesis of the ideal Japanese imperial citizen/subject" (383). The parallels between these cases and more recent debates over integrating immigrant or minority populations are striking. The Japanese state's depictions of life in Buraku and Korean communities read like the 1965 Moynihan Report, which claimed that a "tangle of pathologies" existed in African American families. Bayliss highlights the point that majority Japanese society saw the problems facing Burakumin and Koreans as coming from defects within the groups themselves, and not from prejudice and discrimination. This view informed Japanese state policy, which turned its efforts to "correcting" the deficiencies in the Burakumin population and assimilating the Korean minority. From this perspective, the burden was on the Burakumin and Koreans to make themselves acceptable to majority society; if they did not, the logic went, they were themselves to blame for their marginalized status.

Similarly, the public reaction to the Meiji emperor's official granting of commoner status to the Burakumin in 1871 foreshadows the demands placed on present-day immigrants in Japan. One town council declared at the time that the Burakumin could gradually gain the acceptance of majority society only by not becoming "self-important and impudent" (34). Rather, the Burakumin were encouraged to be thankful for the gift that Japanese society was giving them. Along these lines, daily encounters with majority Japanese remind current immigrants in Japan that their cultural and linguistic differences are welcome only to the extent that they do not inconvenience any majority Japanese, and that they should express gratitude for being allowed to be in Japan. But, as Bayliss notes of the quandary the Burakumin faced nearly 150 years ago, these groups are in an unwinnable situation, as it is unclear how to appropriately express gratitude. If they are unable to raise their economic status, are they failing to appreciate the opportunities majority Japanese have given to them? If they become successful, are they acting too uppity?

Moreover, no matter what the Burakumin or Koreans did, their actions would inevitably reinforce some stereotype, as the stereotypes they faced were contradictory. For example, members of both groups were depicted simultaneously as dullards and deviants, as both lazy and built for—and not even bothered by—hard labor. Just as present-day stereotypes of Latin American factory workers and Filipino women are familiar to many Japanese, the stereotypes of Burakumin and Koreans were broadly familiar to majority Japanese, including those who had never met a member of either group. Even the complaint by Japanese that the Burakumin were too sensitive to innocent slips of the tongue (i.e., slurs) (68) resembles majority-minority discourse in many societies today.

In addition to insights of majority-minority relations at the interactional level, Bayliss offers a look into group organizing and minority-state relations. Bayliss's analysis reveals the state as a key actor in shaping majority-minority relations, from creating the Burakumin by unifying lower-caste minority groups to produce a "uniform and unified citizenry" (40), to deciding who may enter the country and how that minority will be integrated economically and socially. The granting of commoner status to the Burakumin also had the effect of inspiring Buraku loyalty to the emperor. This loyalty existed alongside strong Buraku indignation at being subject to discrimination in Japan. However, as Bayliss notes, the Buraku desire to claim full membership in Japanese society by showing commitment to the state's national and war efforts risked co-optation by the state. It also weakened the group's ability to claim an autonomous critical stance against the state.

Beyond claims made based on citizenship or ethnicity, class-based critiques dominated Buraku and Korean dissent, with both groups at various times seeing themselves as the vanguard of the proletariat. This class critique has been largely absent, not only from not more recent minority organizing in Japan but also from the scholarship, which has focused more narrowly on the ethnic and racial dimensions to the marginalization of non-Japanese. Bayliss's foregrounding of class makes its present-day absence all the more striking. Bayliss asserts that class never completely replaced other group-based critiques for the Burakumin and Koreans, and group leaders were often more stridently class-focused than were most members of their groups. For these group leaders, promoting the broader proletarian struggle took precedence over addressing the discrimination Burakumin and Koreans faced.

Social class also shaped the divide between the Buraku and Korean bourgeoisie and their lower-class group members, as the wealthier members promoted assimilation and blamed the lower class for their impoverished state and for their alleged refusal to alter their behavior and integrate into Japanese society. The attitudes of Pak Chun'gŭm, a wealthy Korean entrepreneur in Japan, reveal the complex nature of in-group and out-group ties and attitudes in this case. On the one hand, Pak argued that Koreans should be seen as loyal to the emperor and equally Japanese, and he promoted notions of multiculturalism when describing Koreans' place in Japanese society. On the other hand, Pak also viewed lower-class Koreans as lazy, violent, immoral, and a threat to more successful Koreans like himself.

Bayliss provides deep historical detail on Buraku and Korean exclusion in Japan; however, he offers little insight into or critique of ideas of Japaneseness. While Japanese identity is currently depicted as pure, homogeneous, and monoethnic, Bayliss notes that state efforts to promote harmony (*yūwa*) between groups depicted Japaneseness as malleable and a product of "blending and assimilation" (247). Bayliss also details Japanese efforts to allege foreign origins to the Burakumin, as many argued that the Burakumin were so different from majority Japanese that they must have distinct ethnic origins. These important insights show the long-standing challenge of minority inclusion in Japan, and they should have been sustained throughout the book. Given that self and other are defined simultaneously, the Japanese self is largely absent from these analyses.

Although Bayliss tends to focus on Burakumin and Koreans separately, he offers some insight into the tensions in relations between the two groups. Despite their shared status at the bottom of Japanese society, and in some cities their residence in the same neighborhoods, the two groups generally failed to find common cause. While Burakumin sought inclusion in majority Japanese society, including access to the privileges accrued to majority Japanese in Japan's colonial empire, Koreans attempted to distance themselves from the Burakumin, repeating stereotypes that the Burakumin were lowly, lazy, spendthrift, and capable of performing only the lowest-level manual labor. The existence of the *paekchŏng*, a lower-caste group in Korea similar in status to the Burakumin, provided Koreans with ready stereotypes, with which to deride the Burakumin.

Only toward the end of his book does Bayliss touch on how and why the Burakumin and Koreans did not join forces more often. This issue could have been a guiding question for the entire book—focusing not just on each group's experiences but on the ways in which a pan-group alliance was avoided, discouraged, or deemed impractical. Also, engagement with theories on intergroup relations, panethnic group formation, or nationalism could have significantly expanded the book's analytical insights. Bayliss briefly connects the efforts of Burakumin and Koreans to elevate their status to the struggles of nineteenth-century Irish immigrants to claim a white racial identity in the United States. The parallels between these cases are intriguing; however, Bayliss's focus is more on documenting history than on building new social theory. What could have been an important theoretical contribution—linking the shifting racial identities of the Irish in the United States to the racialization of Burakumin and Koreans in Japan—is instead little more than a passing reference. In the concluding chapter, Bayliss also offers a cursory look at the psychological theory of codependency, arguing that "everyone needs someone to feel better than" (393), but the applicability of individual-level psychological theory to the actions of social groups is unclear.

In his ethnographic analysis, Watson examines the seeming contradiction of present-day Tokyo Ainu—not just those who have moved from Hokkaido to the nation's capital, but also those who now consider Tokyo an extension of Ainu Mosir, the Ainu homeland. As Watson notes, the vast majority of these Ainu emigrated from Ainu territory with the goal of abandoning their ethnic roots and passing as Wajin, or ethnic Japanese. Over the generations, these Ainu descendants have largely forgotten the Ainu language and stopped practicing the Ainu religion and culture, as they concealed their ancestry, intermarried with Wajin, and assimilated into majority Japanese life. As Watson explains:

> Ainu in the capital readily acknowledge that the majority of Ainu who left Hokkaido may well have done so in order to leave their ethnic heritage and experiences of discrimination associated with it behind.… For the majority of Ainu in the capital, life as a mother or father, factory worker or businessperson, wife or husband, etc., often overshadows social attachment to one's ethnic background especially in a city as vast and busy as Tokyo. (38)

In this setting, how do Ainu descendants reconnect with their Ainu roots? What does being Ainu mean to them in their daily lives? How do they balance Ainu and Japanese identities? What does

it mean to be Ainu if someone can reclaim an Ainu identity generations after the identity has been lost or abandoned?

Watson contends that the notion that "one can learn to become Ainu contravenes the essentialist assumption that in laying claim to rights as a member of an Indigenous community one is simply (born) Ainu or not" (90). He challenges this essentialist idea, noting the many ways in which Ainu can make Tokyo their home and still be Ainu, in all the religious, spiritual, psychic ways that Ainu in Hokkaido and elsewhere define their group identity. However, the broader "Ainu diaspora" is "an imagined construct" (84), in that a self-conscious sense of Ainu-ness outside Hokkaido does not really exist. Thus, Watson argues for a less "essentialist position on diaspora" (38) to better understand how and when being Ainu, including being part of an Ainu diaspora, matters to people.

As there are no Tokyo neighborhoods with concentrations of Ainu, Watson uses as his field site particular gathering points, like Rera Cise, an Ainu restaurant in Tokyo, and the Ainu Cultural Preservation Center. In these places, Ainu come together, participate in ethnic rituals, and reconnect with coethnics and with their indigenous roots. Watson focuses on the meanings of these gatherings, the rituals performed during them, the relationship between place and identity for Ainu, and the expansion of the definition of Ainu land to include Tokyo. In this analysis, Watson makes the case for studying urban indigeneity—that an indigenous people can be off the homeland and still be indigenous. Watson presents this concept as a renewed way of understanding native life as existing not only in the rural homelands but also in the metropole. This expanded sense of indigeneity highlights the linkages between physical place and indigenous identity, revealing the plasticity of such linkages even as popular understandings, social theory, and government policy often restrict them to the official homelands. While the Japanese government tallies only those Ainu who live in Hokkaido, and thus all Ainu outside Hokkaido officially cease to be Ainu, Watson argues that indigenous people can remain indigenous wherever they reside. Ainu descendants can reclaim their ties to the homeland and their ancestry by refamiliarizing themselves with Ainu rituals and coming out of the closet, as it were, to claim an Ainu identity.

Watson dedicates one chapter to claiming the validity of urban indigeneity, and in general his text is quite heavy with theory. However, perhaps because Watson is successful in making

his point, the appropriateness of urban indigeneity comes across as fairly obvious and may not have required the dedication of an entire chapter. Instead, the argument might have been better served by a broader engagement with social theory, in particular with theories on assimilation, migrant incorporation, and racial and ethnic identity. Specifically, an analysis of identity performance, passing, and ascription versus self-assertion might have better fleshed out the differences and similarities between how Ainu and other minority groups adapt to life in urban areas. Along these lines, Watson's discussion of how the Ainu use religious rituals to connect themselves to particular places highlights a relationship to place that is generally missing from migrant incorporation models. However, Watson does not make this point explicitly because he does not engage with theories on migration and adaptation. This was a missed opportunity to contrast the Tokyo Ainu case with other theoretical perspectives.

Watson argues that Tokyo Ainu rituals are not "a set of learned traits tied to a historical identity and geographical location but rather the embodied and, therefore, lived experience of being Ainu which includes Ainu life anywhere (and however) it is lived" (150). For example, the Ainu *icarpa* rituals that commemorate the lives of ancestors are about "the construction of collective belonging in the context of the city" (120) and of the group's historical struggle for belonging. Watson examines in detail the meanings attached to the rituals, and how the Tokyo-specific adaptations reveal the indigenous efforts to connect past and present, the homeland and the new land. However, in an era in which millions of people are migrating across the globe, it would seem that many, if not most, migrants develop new rituals and practices to adapt to their new locations. Thus, it remains unclear what, if anything, is particularly indigenous about these issues, and what is shared more broadly with other groups. Also, by focusing narrowly on the Ainu who participate in these rituals, Watson misses the far more numerous Ainu in Tokyo who no longer participate in them. If Watson is saying that those people are also Ainu, then leaving their notions of Ainu identity out of the equation seems problematic.

In detailing his experiences at Rera Cise, Watson makes two points about Ainu identity that warrant greater theoretical grounding and analysis. In one instance, he notes that "Ainu is not an either/or status in opposition to being Japanese, an identity, in other words, that one simply adopts, but rather a social and relational experience intensely reliant on the social presence of others" (99). This point needs greater elaboration, as all ethnic identities are social

and relational. In a second instance, Watson also points out that being Ainu is one of many identities that Ainu people hold in their daily lives, and that "people can negotiate [these identities] in their lives, if they so choose" (107). Watson ought to have explored the broader identity landscape in which this choice might or might not be exercised to clarify the extent to which he is talking about imagined, invented, or symbolic identities.

Watson further notes that "one cannot escape the fact that to discover more about or simply live and identify as being Ainu is a personal decision" (100). This decision is made by individuals and is related to their personal identity; however, the decision also involves a group identity that is informed by the social context. He elaborates the views of Resunotek, a daughter of a prominent Ainu elder, that one's open expression of being Ainu in the city is subsumed under other identities, such as family or friend, that take precedence over an Ainu identity. Thus, establishing an Ainu collectivity in the city is made more difficult because people can choose not to take part. Engaging this point in more detail might have revealed how this connection between individual agency, identity expression, and collective action is different for the Ainu, compared to the Burakumin, Zainichi Koreans, or any other invisible minority. Is being Ainu any more optional than other identities? If so, how?

Watson also writes of Ainu rituals as evoking "blood memory," with a "strong spiritual presence" and "definitive echoes of … Ainu ancestry" that can "remain latent within one's body-experience" (116). These spiritual and ancestral "echoes" make participating in the rituals constitute "what feels right" (116). This analysis essentializes what it means to be Ainu, reducing Ainu-ness to something seemingly encoded in DNA. A more fruitful approach could have been to examine the rituals from a constructionist perspective, much as American sociologist Howard Becker (1953) examined how people learn to become marijuana smokers. Watson could have explored the social construction of particular practices as rituals, including how Ainu learn to experience them as innate, focusing on how Ainu are taught to recognize particular physical sensations, connect them with rituals, and see them as having particular meanings.

Watson's heavy emphasis on theory also leaves the reader wanting more ethnographic detail. While he writes that "one should not underestimate the psychic weight that knowledge of one's Ainu heritage can have on a person's life" (90), he misses the opportunity to explore in more detail precisely how this "psychic weight" plays out in the daily lives of Tokyo Ainu. We

get brief introductions to people, but no deeper sense of their lives. For example, he describes an encounter in which a Japanese man comes to an Ainu ritual in Tokyo and is told that he looks Ainu and encouraged to reconnect with his Ainu roots, but there is no follow-up on that case. Watson notes that "first and foremost, are the ways in which Indigenous people actually live and experience the city and the strategies of negotiation and co-operation they employ" (108); however, he does not provide ethnographic insight into those strategies. Watson focuses so heavily on telling the reader the meaning of various gestures and rituals that he doesn't provide enough ethnographic detail to support his analysis.

The reader is further left wondering how many Ainu are assimilating and how many are resisting. Watson writes that, "for Tokyo Ainu, cultural practice itself assumes, at some level, an act of resistance against regionalization and the confinement of an Ainu identity to the isolated, rural landscape of Hokkaido" (142); however, he notes an estimate that 95 percent of Ainu do not participate in cultural preservation efforts. This raises questions about the extent to which Watson can generalize from his small sample to a broader Ainu population in the Tokyo area.

By incorporating discussions of class and indigeneity, Bayliss and Watson both offer perspectives that have been lacking in the literature on diversity in Japan. However, missing from both texts is a connection to discourses on majority Japanese identity. If people of Buraku, Korean, or Ainu ancestry do not self-identify as having one of those identities, then they are likely claiming to be Japanese. Without a theoretical scaffolding with which to understand the balancing of, and movement between, these identities, the full analytical purchase of the data has not been extracted. So much more could have been made of minority identities, going beyond merely describing informants as "(Japanese and yet) Ainu" (Watson 2014, 107) to analyze their identity work. Both Koreans in the early twentieth century and present-day Ainu are conquered peoples who were brought to Tokyo by an expanding Japanese empire, and for whom passing as Japanese has been the dominant strategy for social mobility. Despite this important connection, both Bayliss and Watson underanalyze these groups' identity work. Connecting these groups' identity strategies to the broader literature on race and ethnicity, migration, and nationalism could have offered a richer interpretation of these scholars' data and given readers a fuller sense of the ways in which minority and majority identities have interacted in Japanese society.

The literature on Japan's minority groups is well served by the focus on class and indigeneity presented by Bayliss and Watson. Their additions complement the existing scholarship and shed new light on majority-minority relations in Japan. Bayliss's work in particular raises questions about how a class analysis might alter our thinking regarding issues facing Japan's present-day foreign migrants. However, the dialectical relationship between minority and majority identities remains missing. While class and indigeneity have been brought in, Japaneseness has unfortunately been left out.

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References

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