

Conquering the Tropics

Collaborative Settler Colonialism in the Amazon

“Controlling the Amazon is controlling the world,” declared Uetsuka Tsukasa in 1931, the same year that the Manchurian Incident broke out. As founder and director of the Amazonia Industrial Research Center, a landmark Japanese enterprise in the region, Uetsuka’s view reflected that of many Japanese political leaders and business elites of the day. In their imagination, the white colonizers were incapable of colonizing this rich and vast land because they were physically unprepared for its tropical climate, nor were there enough Indigenous people laboring for them. The Japanese, on the other hand, were uniquely qualified to civilize this tropical land thanks to their special racial characteristics. They would turn the Amazon into an endless source of natural resources that would sustain the Japanese empire’s worldwide expansion.¹

A few years later, the Estado Novo, headed by Getúlio Vargas, rolled out its landmark program to speed up its own colonization of the Amazon with an influx of U.S. investment and technical aid. Dubbed “the March to the West,” this government-led program built medical facilities in the region and created a host of state agencies at both the central and local levels to advance land distribution, agricultural development, and the transportation system.² The regime also established a series of codes to regulate the utilization of water, minerals, and forests.³ “The Speech of the Amazon River,” which Vargas made during his visit to the region in 1940, illustrated the settler colonial logic behind this program. What his regime would achieve, he claimed, was bringing order and progress to this savage land by conquering “valleys of the great equatorial torrents, transforming its blind force and extraordinary fertility into disciplined energy.” For Vargas, this was “the greatest task for civilized man” that the Brazilians, people of an expanding power, were destined to accomplish.⁴

This chapter examines the often-overlooked history of Japanese colonization of the Brazilian Amazon by focusing on its connections with Japanese colonial expansion in the Asia-Pacific region. It also situates Japanese presence in the Amazon in the context of Brazil's own settler colonialism as well as U.S. expansion in the region.⁵ Similar to the process of Japanese community making in São Paulo, the development of Japanese settler villages in the Amazon exemplified the nature of collaborative settler colonialism and was a joint product of the migration states of Japan and Brazil. The chapter begins with a brief history of Brazilian colonization of the Amazon before Japanese migration, then examines the early phase of Japanese expansion in the Amazon during the 1920s, which went hand in hand with Japanese colonization of German Micronesia following World War I. While the 1930s following the outbreak of the Manchurian Incident have been commonly understood as a decade of escalated Japanese expansion in Northeast Asia, as this chapter shows, the same decade was marked by the further growth of Japanese colonial presence and investment in the Amazon. This development was jointly stimulated by geopolitical changes in Asia and the Brazilian government's renewed push for its own settler colonialism in the Amazon. The chapter concludes by discussing a resurgence of Japanese migration to the Amazon after World War II, emphasizing the transwar continuity of Japanese and Brazilian settler colonialism in the region.

A SHORT-LIVED RUBBER BOOM

Lying between the Andes and the Atlantic Ocean, the Amazon Basin encompasses 2,700 square miles of tropical forest that spans the territories of Venezuela, Colombia, Bolivia, and Brazil. Most of the basin is located in Brazil, primarily inside the state of Amazonas in the upper basin and Pará in the lower. From the sixteenth century on, leaders of colonial and imperial Brazil launched various campaigns to colonize the land by military and religious means. Other than causing a sharp decline in the Indigenous population, none of these campaigns was successful.⁶ Due to the region's unique ecological features and climate, it does not support the cultivation of common cash crops like tobacco, coffee, cocoa, or sugar. As a result, it was relatively insulated from the influences of global capitalism until the rubber boom in the mid-nineteenth century.⁷

The Paraguayan War and the rubber boom in the second half of the nineteenth century motivated the Rio government to commit more resources to the Amazon region, leading to its economic and political integration into the country. The devastating war that the Brazilian empire and its allies fought with Paraguay pushed Brazilian leaders to take serious measures to secure the empire's northwest. Through a series of maneuvers, Brazilian diplomats led by José Maria da Silva Paranhos made the Brazilian empire the ultimate winner of what Susanna Hecht called the "scramble for the Amazon" in the late nineteenth century.⁸ The

imperial and later republican governments alike sponsored Rondon to survey the Amazon and construct telegraph lines that would connect the Amazon inland with the southeastern metropole.⁹

The rubber boom was another reason for strengthened connections between the Amazon and other parts of the country during the late nineteenth century. Starting in the 1850s, crude rubber came into huge demand in Europe and North America as a basic material for making tires. It was primarily taken from a plant native to the Amazon called the Pará rubber tree (*Hevea brasiliensis*). Between the 1850s and 1910s, Amazon rubber dominated the global market. In the 1890, the region supplied as much as 90 percent of the crude rubber in the world. Rubber quickly became Brazil's second most important cash crop after coffee, accounting for 40 percent of the total value of its exports by 1910.¹⁰ The rubber boom attracted a historical wave of migrants from northeastern Brazil to the region looking for economic opportunities. Manaus and Belém, the capitals of Amazonas and Pará, respectively, saw rapid demographic growth and modernization.¹¹

The rubber boom attracted countless settlers from various parts of Brazil to the upper Amazon in pursuit of prosperity and success. However, this movement had catastrophic consequences for the local Indigenous populations. The new settlers overhunted the area's wildlife and spread deadly diseases such as measles, leading to a significant loss of life among the native people. The settlers also waged violent campaigns, known as *correrias*, against Indigenous communities, resulting in the razing of villages, the killing and displacement of inhabitants, and the seizure of their territories.¹²

In 1876, the British smuggled *H. brasiliensis* seeds out of Brazil and transplanted the crop to its Southeast Asian colonies. Due to heavy capital investment, state subsidies, modernized transportation, and cheap labor, rubber produced in British Southeast Asia was more competitive in both price and quality than its Amazonian counterpart, which was produced in a more traditional setting. As a result, the Amazon's global domination of rubber production collapsed. By 1932, the share of its rubber in the global market had shrunk to 1 percent.¹³ The end of the rubber boom brought rapid economic decline and a decrease in public and private investment in the Brazilian Amazon. The harm inflicted on the Indigenous cultures and populations was irreversible.

RESOURCES, POPULATION, AND COLLABORATIVE SETTLER COLONIALISM IN THE 1920S

To reverse this course of events, the states of Amazonas and Pará adopted aggressive policies to attract foreign capital and immigrants by granting free land. Both Japan and the United States responded enthusiastically to this development. Ascendant after World War I, both were hungry for additional raw materials and further economic expansion. The Amazon, therefore, became a competing ground

for these two Pacific empires. With a booming U.S. automobile industry and its growing demand for tire-making materials, Washington, DC was particularly eager to secure rubber suppliers that were alternatives to Southeast Asia in order to bypass the British monopoly. In the 1920s, it sponsored a number of investigative trips to the Amazon and sent positive reports to American business leaders that portrayed the region as a lucrative opportunity. In 1927, Henry Ford acquired 2.5 million acres along the Tapajós River in Pará. There he built a U.S. settler town named Fordlândia with the goal of cultivating *H. brasiliensis* and experimenting with mass production of rubber.¹⁴

Japanese investment and settler migration to the Amazon took place at around the same time. The Japanese expansionists' growing interest in the region was stimulated by a national anxiety over the lack of resources (*shigen*) in the archipelago, which became a central concern for Japan's policy makers due to the impact of World War I. As the first total war in human history, the Great War demanded each participating nation to thoroughly mobilize both human and material resources, blurring the line between battlefield and home front. Recognizing the decisive role that resources played in the outcome of the war, the Japanese government established the Bureau of Resources (Shigenkyoku). Reporting directly to the cabinet, the bureau took charge of investigating and collecting information on material resources throughout the archipelago and assisted the cabinet in making policies and plans to utilize them.¹⁵

Japan's annexation of German Micronesia during World War I turned the South Seas, including the South Pacific and Southeast Asia, into a potential resource supplier for the empire.¹⁶ Taking a well-read page from Western colonial discourse, Japanese expansionists argued that the North was the world of humankind, home to progress, technology, and civilization; in contrast, the South was merely the world of materials, home to abundant natural resources but precious little else.¹⁷ Not only did this North-Human/South-Material discourse (*hokujin nanbutsu ron*) undergird Japanese colonial expansion in the South Seas since the 1920s, it also encouraged Japan's colonial ambitions in the Amazon at around the same time. Japanese expansionists began to look at the rainforest in northern Brazil through the lens of tropical colonialism, as they had done in the South Seas.

The colonial imagination of the Amazon, spurred by the fear of scarce natural resources, developed alongside a growing anxiety regarding overpopulation and food shortage in the archipelago. They became the two main justifications for Japan's capital exportation and emigration to the region. The formation of the Kansai-based Japan-Brazil Association (Nippaku Kyōkai / Associação Nipo-Brasileira) in 1926 symbolized the alliance between Japanese business elites and the advocates for Japanese migration to Brazil, particularly the Amazon. With business elites and politicians as its board members and the governor of Hyōgo Prefecture as the president, the association vowed to tackle the issues of overpopulation and resource shortage that plagued the archipelago by promoting migration



FIGURE 22. This image appeared in the popular journal *Shokumin* (Colonial Review) in Japan in 1930. It contrasted an overpopulated Japan with an empty and resource-filled Amazon.

Source: *Shokumin* 9, no. 8 (August 1930): 113.

to Brazil and bilateral trade.¹⁸ It published a journal, *Burajiru: ishokumin to bōeki* (Brazil: Colonial Migration and Trade), to disseminate information about opportunities for migration to and investment in Brazil as well as advice for Japanese investors and migrants. For the same purpose, it also launched a series of lectures and events, including an exhibition on Brazil titled *Burajiru jijō tenrankai* (Exhibition of Brazil's Situation) in the Mitsukoshi Department Store in Kobe.¹⁹ The exhibition, demonstrating a variety of material outputs ranging from diamonds and precious minerals to exotic animals and tropical plants, presented to the Japanese public a Brazil that had boundless empty land and unlimited natural wealth waiting for the Japanese to occupy and make use of.²⁰

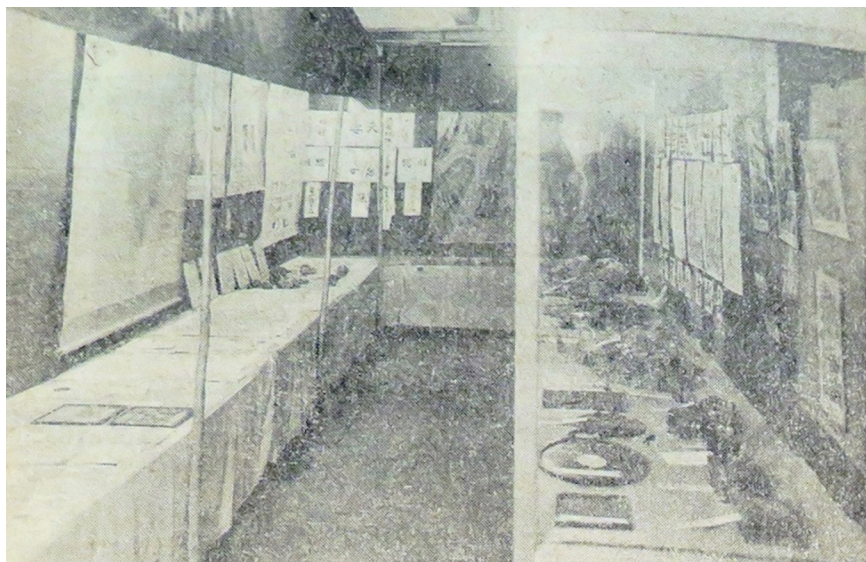


FIGURE 23. A section of the exhibition “Burajiru Jijō Tenrankai” at the Mitsukoshi Department Store in Kobe in 1927. It aimed to showcase the abundance of Brazil’s mineral deposits. Source: “Burajiru Jijō Tenrankai: Kobe Mitsukoshi Gofukuten ni okeru,” *Burajiru: ishokumin to bōeki* 1, no. 9 (October 1927): 95.

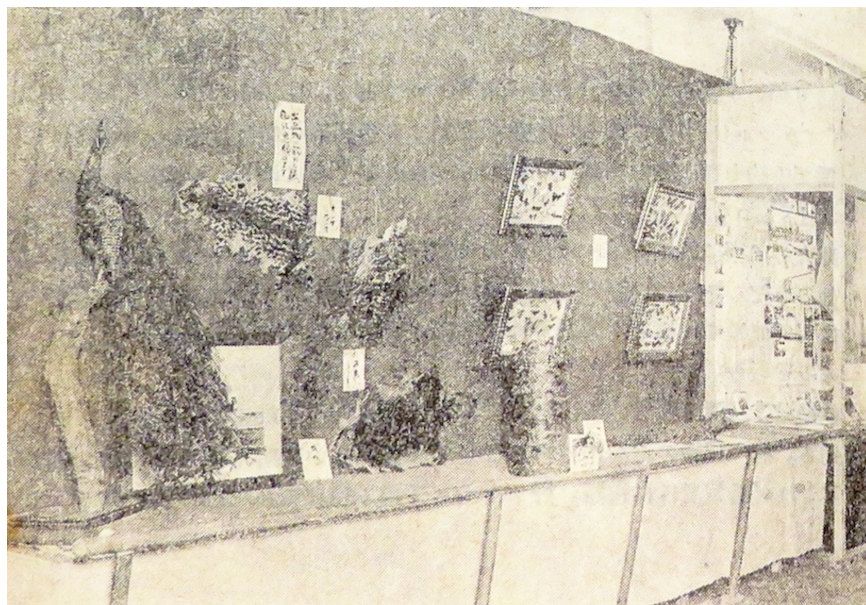


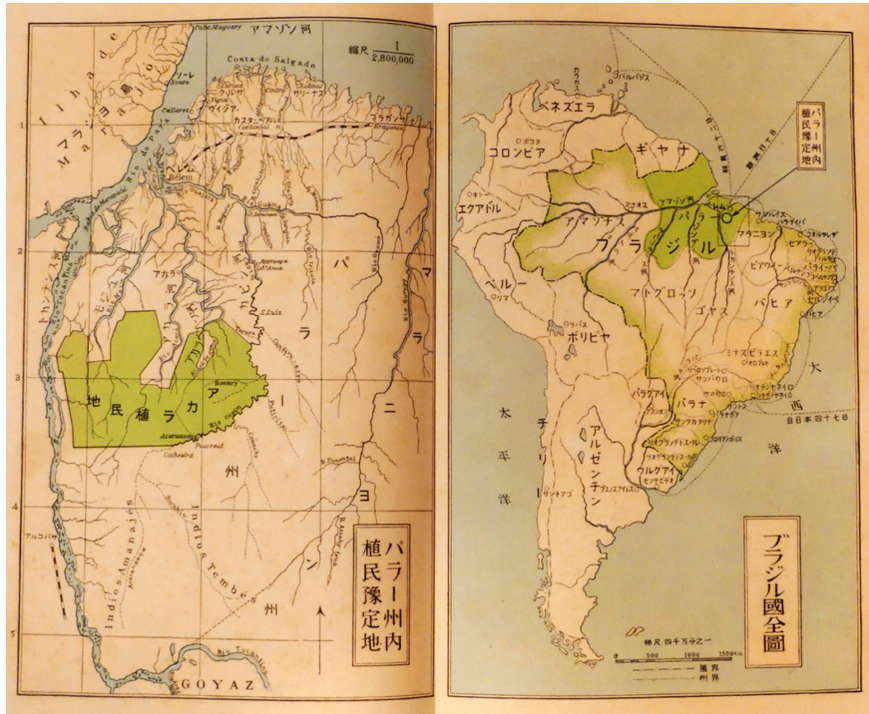
FIGURE 24. Another section of the exhibition “Burajiru Jijō Tenrankai” at the Mitsukoshi Department Store in Kobe in 1927. This one shows Brazil’s primitive nature by displaying its exotic animals and insects. Source: “Burajiru Jijō Tenrankai: Kobe Mitsukoshi Gofukuten ni okeru,” *Burajiru: ishokumin to bōeki* 1, no. 9 (October 1927): 95.

Japanese settler colonialism in the Amazon was managed by Japan's migration state using the Kaikō model (see chapter 4). In other words, Tokyo oversaw the migration and community-making processes through companies that provided assistance for both migrant recruitment and settlement. For Japanese business elites in the 1920s, the most attractive region in Brazil was the Amazon because of its abundant natural resources and local governments' policies that encouraged foreign immigration and investment. The formation of the Nanbei Takushoku Kabushiki Gaisha, or Nantaku (South American Colonization Company serves as a good example. After the Japanese ambassador to Brazil, Tazuke Shichita, obtained the promise of a free 500,000-hectare land grant from the governor of Pará, Tokyo sponsored a tour to the state in 1925 to evaluate local conditions for establishing Japanese colonies.²¹ The tour was funded by the Kanebo Textile Company, the biggest textile company in Japan, as it was searching for raw cotton suppliers outside of Asia. The delegation was headed by Fukuhara Hachirō, a director of Kanebo, and included several government bureaucrats as well as experts in agriculture and medicine.²²

Based on his investigation in Pará, Fukuhara concluded that Japanese capital exportation and migration to the region was indeed full of promise. The land of the Amazon was not only ten times cheaper than that of São Paulo but also boasted abundant natural resources. Fukuhara observed that while civilized people in other parts of the world were busy competing for resources to survive, Brazilians, due to the abundance of resources in their land, enjoyed a slow pace of life. For the same reason, the Indigenous peoples in the Amazon, he argued, were especially mild-natured, obedient, and easy for the Japanese to manipulate (*oshi-yasui*). Because of the local residents' lack of diligence and the small size of their population, he argued, the Amazon remained largely a virgin land waiting for the Japanese to explore.²³

Fukuhara urged Japan's business elites and investors to become trailblazers in the empire's expansion in the Amazon. The failure of Japanese migration to the United States, he reasoned, was because the migrants did not have a solid economic foundation in the host society. Land, manpower, and capital were the three indispensable pillars of successful migration. Although the Brazilian land was full of natural wealth and the Japanese settlers were incredibly diligent, they still lacked a solid economic foundation. Accordingly, Fukuhara urged Japan's business leaders to act on behalf of the empire by joining Japanese expansion into the Brazilian Amazon.²⁴

Encouraged by Fukuhara's report, Prime Minister Tanaka Gi'ichi hosted a meeting with over sixty Japanese business leaders in March 1928. From this meeting, Nantaku was born. Kanebo took on Nantaku's principal financial and managerial responsibilities by holding 25 percent of Nantaku's stocks. A few other big companies also purchased substantial stocks. Fukuhara himself became the first president of the company. At the end of that year, he arrived in Pará again and established the Japan Plantation Company of Brazil (Companhia Niponica



MAP 5. The location of the Japanese Acará Colony managed by Nantaku in Pará. Source: *Burajirukoku Parā shū shokumin nannai* (1930), in Gaimushō Gaikō Shiryōkan, *Honpō imin toriatsukainin kankei zakken: Nanbei Takushoku Kabishiki Gaisha*, vol. 2, J120. J 3-2.

de Plantação do Brasil) as a local agent of Nantaku. He also signed a concession agreement with the state government of Pará, securing the land in Acará, Monte Alegre, and three other areas for Nantaku.

Nantaku established Japanese colonies in both Acará and Monte Alegre, where it built a host of public facilities such as clinics, schools, playgrounds, warehouses, and grocery stores. The company recruited migrants in Japan and settled them in these two colonies as farmers. It provided each migrant family with free housing and inexpensive leases on the land, promising to transfer the land's ownership to the farming families at a low cost later on. In addition to managing migration and community building, the companies established laboratories in the colonies to experiment with new technologies in farming and pest control and to provide professional guidance to the farming settlers. The company's profits mainly came from the sale of crops produced in the colonies, such as cotton and rice, which it encouraged the migrants to cultivate.²⁵

Fukuhara's investigation also paved the way for the formation of a few other Japanese settler colonies in Pará and Amazonas in the same decade. Encouraged by the investigation, a group of Japanese Americans founded a company called

South American Business Co. Ltd (Nanbei Kigyō Kabushiki Gaisha) in Delaware. They contracted with Fukuhara to secure a tract of land in Castanhal, where they established a settler farm staffed primarily with Japanese American remigrants. In 1929, the farm merged with the Acará Colony, which was managed by Nantaku.²⁶ Ōishi Kosaku, a participant in Fukuhara's investigation, obtained a land grant in the state of Amazonas and established a Japanese settler colony near Maués.²⁷ In a move facilitated by Tazuke Shichita, the Tokyo business owner Yamanishi Gensaburō and the former Japanese diplomat Awazu Kinroku jointly secured a free land grant of 100 hectares in the state of Amazonas. With the financial support of his allies, Awazu established the Amazon Business Co. Ltd, or ABC (Amazon Kōgyō Kabushiki Gaisha), to manage the community and its related businesses.²⁸

Yet, at the same time, Japanese settler elites in São Paulo greeted Tokyo's efforts in the Amazon with doubt and resentment. They asserted that the anchor of Japanese expansion in Brazil should be in the Southeast, which enjoyed far better infrastructure and a more pleasant climate. As the Japanese settlers were still on the way to securing their foothold in São Paulo, it was unwise for the empire to waste resources trying to explore the wild Amazon. Miura Saku, editor of one of the three most influential Japanese settler newspapers in Brazil before 1945, was firmly in this camp. After investigating the Amazon region in person, he penned a series of articles and published them in *Asahi shinbun* in Japan. By arguing that expanding into the Amazon was too hasty, Miura tried to sway public opinion in order to stop Tokyo's efforts.²⁹

Nevertheless, despite competing for resources and migrants from Japan, the settlers in the Amazon and São Paulo were linked on the leadership level. Tatsuke Shichita, the first Japanese ambassador to Brazil (1923–27), played a central role in obtaining a Japanese land concession in the state of Pará.³⁰ Tatsuke was also a primary planner of Fukuhara's investigative trip that led to the formation of Nantaku.³¹ After his post in Rio de Janeiro ended, Tatsuke became the founding director of the Federation of the Overseas Migration Cooperative Societies, which was in charge of recruiting and transporting Japanese migrants bound for southeastern Brazil.³² The federation's board of directors included Inoue Masaji, president of Kaikō during the height of its Brazilian migration and settlement programs in southeastern Brazil from 1924 to 1937, as well as Mutō Sanji, head of Kanebo, which financially backed Japanese expansion into the Amazon.³³

UETSUKA TSUKASA AND A NEW DISCOURSE OF JAPANESE TROPICAL COLONIALISM

As the 1930s progressed, the dramatically changing political landscape in East Asia and South America presented both challenges and opportunities for Japanese collaborative settler colonialism in the Amazon. On the one hand, Japan's intensified expansion in Northeast Asia and China proper dulled its elites' appetite for Brazil. On the other hand, deteriorating relations between Japan and the

Anglo-American powers meant that the empire was subject to an increasing number of trade sanctions. This forced the Japanese elites to consider the Amazon region more seriously as an alternative supplier of raw materials.

Compared to the 1920s, Japanese presence in the Amazon in the 1930s saw both continuities and changes. The number of settlers in the region kept growing, and Japanese investments continued to pour in to sustain and expand the colonial projects first started in the 1920s. However, although the discourse of a resource-hungry Japan stayed constant throughout these decades, the underpinning ideological timbre had changed. Whereas Japanese leaders initially saw their foray into the Amazon as the empire's participation in the Anglo-American-led mission to civilize the region, by the 1930s, they increasingly described their efforts as a challenge to the Anglo-American world order and global white supremacy.

The logical foundation of this new discourse of Japanese expansionism were the self-proclaimed racial characteristics of the Japanese as the ideal colonizers. First, it described the Japanese as uniquely benevolent among the colonizers in the world. Different from the selfish Westerners who only knew how to exploit the colonized, the Japanese wanted to cooperate with local peoples and share the fruits of progress. As explained in chapter 5, this idea mirrored the collective identity of the Japanese settlers in São Paulo that took shape around the same time. It was also echoed by the new discourse of Japanese expansionism in Asia in the 1930s and 1940s that undergirded the rhetoric of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

These "special characteristics" of the Japanese included an unmatched capacity to survive in and explore the tropics. Japanese expansionists embraced the existing popular belief among Westerners that white people were unsuccessful in colonizing the tropics because they could not adjust to the climate. *Shizen no kankyō to hakujin jinkō mondai* (Natural Environment and the Problem of the White Population), a book by Kaikō's director, Inoue Masaji, published in 1929, offered a good example of this argument. White colonizers were unsuccessful in the tropics, Inoue argued, for two reasons. First, because of their European racial origin, they were naturally unprepared, both physically and mentally, to live in the tropics. Compared to other races, they were not only more vulnerable to local diseases but also suffered from low fertility and productivity in the hot climate. To make matters worse, such disadvantages forced them to rely on the locals as the primary labor force. Inoue claimed that the Indigenous peoples in the tropics were hopelessly inferior in terms of their intelligence and physical strength, making them an unreliable source of labor for the white colonizers.³⁴

In contrast, Inoue claimed, the Japanese had unmatched adaptability to the tropics thanks to their mixed racial origin. As some of their ancestors were from tropical regions in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands, the Japanese were naturally immune to tropical diseases and physically prepared to work in hot temperatures. Blessed with their exceptional productivity in the tropics, the Japanese did not need to depend on the Indigenous population as the main source

of labor. These two factors, for Inoue, together ensured Japanese success in their colonization of the tropics.³⁵

The symbol of Japanese presence in the Amazon in the 1930s was the Amazonia Industrial Research Center, the activities of which fit perfectly in this new colonial discourse. The center's founder and director, Uetsuka Tsukasa, was a cousin of the São Paulo community leader Uetsuka Shūhei.³⁶ Uetsuka Tsukasa had been a supporter of Japanese expansion to both South America and Asia since his university days, when he led a study group focused on South America. After graduation, he spent eight years working for the Southern Manchuria Railway Company (Mantetsu), investigating the natural deposits and geography of Manchuria, China proper, and the Korean Peninsula for the company and the imperial government. He then returned to Japan and became a member of the Imperial Diet in 1920.

In 1928, Uetsuka Tsukasa took over the rights to the one-million-hectare concession in Amazonas from Yamanishi Gensaburō, who had failed to establish a settler colony there due to the bankruptcy of his own business.³⁷ Uetsuka sent out two survey teams, both of which were jointly funded by the imperial government and a group of business tycoons. Once the investigation concluded, Uetsuka and his followers purchased land near Parintins City and named it Villa Amazonia. There they established the Amazonia Industrial Research Center, an institution in charge of settler community building, land exploration, and agricultural research and development.³⁸

A key feature that separated Uetsuka's Amazon venture from previous programs of Japanese emigration was its emphasis on education. He established the Kokushikan Colonization School (Kokushikan Kōtō Takushoku Gakkō, or Kōtaku) in Tokyo, a private school that trained migrants before their departure. It partnered with the Kokushikan Academy and shared its facilities and campus. Kōtaku required that its students complete a middle school education before enrollment.³⁹ Its one-year curriculum combined ideology with concrete skills, offering courses such as national morality (*kokumin dōtoku*), history of colonialism and colonial policies, Portuguese, South American geography, agriculture, animal husbandry, and construction.⁴⁰ By design, Kōtaku's mission was to cultivate colonial leaders who would bring the unique blessings of the Japanese empire to South America. For this reason, a highlight in the curriculum was the course, "History of Colonialism and Colonial Policies," taught by Uetsuka himself. By studying the failure of Western colonial powers such as the Portuguese, Spanish, British, and French, the course aimed to send a clear message to students: the Japanese should learn from the selfish Westerners' mistakes and conduct their own colonial expansion with benevolence.⁴¹

Similar to Uetsuka's endeavor in the Amazon, which combined the practice of settler colonialism with education, was that of Sakiyama Hisae. Sakiyama established the Overseas Colonial Migration Academy (Kaigai Shokumin Gakkō) in Tokyo in 1918 in the hope of training vanguards to realize the empire's overseas

ambitions. After investigating the Amazon in 1929, he decided to participate in Japanese expansion in the region himself by moving to the Maués Colony and turning it into a migration destination for his followers.⁴² Two years later, Kaikō reproduced this model in São Paulo and formed its own colonial school, Emeboi Agricultural Practice Farm (Emeboi Nōji Jisshūjo / Instituto de Prática Agrícola de São Paulo). Its students were unmarried migrants who received full subsidies from the imperial government; the school provided them with two years of training in order to turn them into future leaders of Japanese settler colonies.⁴³

While these schools promoted the idea of Japan's "benevolent" colonialism, Japanese elites celebrated the settlers' agricultural achievement in the Amazon as evidence.⁴⁴ The Amazonia Industrial Research Center's jute cultivation was particularly illustrative. As the primary material for making coffee bags, long fiber jute was in huge demand in Brazil, yet the crop was only cultivated in India and its production and sale was monopolized by the British. Given India's and the Amazon's shared tropical climate, as well as the crop's economic potential, Uetsuka saw transplanting it to Brazil as a critical mission of the center.⁴⁵ Through years of experiment in different locations in the Amazon, the center successfully brought the Amazon-grown long fiber jute to the international market in 1937.⁴⁶ Japanese settler elites described this success as a triumph of Japan's "benevolent" colonialism. As they saw it, while the British stole the seeds of rubber trees from the Amazon and caused the collapse of Brazil's rubber industry, the Japanese benefited Brazil by transplanting jute from India, unselfishly sharing the rewards of this venture with the local Brazilian people.⁴⁷

In reality, however, the Amazonia Industrial Research Center and Japanese settlers in the Amazon in general were the immediate beneficiaries of jute production and trade. Jute quickly became a stable source of profit for the center because it maintained a monopoly on jute seeds, and the crop helped the center survive a major setback in the mid-1930s. It also became a major source of income for Japanese settlers in the region in general. Unlike its predecessor, the regime of Getúlio Vargas emphasized central control over state governments by banning them from granting land parcels larger than 10,000 hectares without the federal senate's permission. Though the concession of one million acres was given to Uetsuka before the constitution took effect, he had to apply for an extension because of delays in meeting the conditions of the concession. In 1934, when he applied to extend the concession for the second time, the federal senate vetoed it on the grounds of national security. As a result, Uetsuka was only allowed to keep the research center's existing properties and lost all unclaimed land. With the promising development in jute cultivation, the Japanese government took action to secure the center's existing properties by providing necessary financial assistance to turn the center into a stock-issuing land developing company renamed Amazonia Sangyō Kabushiki Gaisha (Amazonia Industrial Company, or AIC) in 1935. Its four primary

shareholders were Tokyo-controlled Japanese companies, Mitsubishi, Sumitomo, Yasuda, and Tōtaku.⁴⁸

Most Japanese enterprises in the Amazon suffered from both the immigration quota imposed by Brazil and a decrease in financial support as the Japanese empire shifted its focus to the Asian continent in the second half of the 1930s. However, the Amazonia Industrial Company continued to grow thanks to its success in jute cultivation. In 1938, it expanded its business to Pará. The state government granted the company 10,000 hectares and allowed it to build two new laboratories to experiment with jute cultivation in Breves and Santarém.⁴⁹ In 1940, it took over the Maués Colony, established and previously managed by the Japanese American-funded ABC and turned the primary crop of local Japanese settlers from guarana to jute.⁵⁰

Another crop that the Japanese settlers successfully transplanted to the Amazon from Asia was pepper (*koshō*), which was achieved in the 1930s by Nantaku-affiliated Japanese settlers in Tomé-Açu. Similar to the case of jute, Japanese elites celebrated the success of transplanting pepper as evidence of the benevolent nature of Japanese settler colonialism. In their imagination, both achievements also served as proof of the unmatched capacity of the Japanese race to harness the tropics.⁵¹ Moreover, the transplantation of pepper was a chain in the link between Japanese colonial expansion in the South Seas and the Amazon. The idea of transplanting pepper originated with Takaki Saburō, a Japanese agricultural specialist who was based in Southeast Asia before Nantaku hired him to head the administration of the Acará Colony. His observation of the Chinese settlers' pepper cultivation in Southeast Asia inspired him to experiment with the crop in the Amazon.⁵²

TRANSWAR JAPANESE COLLABORATIVE SETTLER COLONIALISM

The new discourse of Japanese tropical colonialism in the Amazon in the 1930s was matched by an unexpectedly similar approach of Brazilian expansionism in the same region. Mirroring Japan's expansion into Manchuria since the beginning of the decade, the Vargas regime strived to increase its geopolitical influence in the Amazon, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. Like Japanese empire builders who embraced Malthusian expansionism and justified their military campaigns in Northeast Asia as protecting the "lifeline" of the empire, Vargas and his supporters saw their efforts as the means to secure the lebensraum of the Estado Novo.⁵³

For Brazilian expansionists of the day, the Amazon Basin was critical to securing the nation's northern and western borders and establishing Brazil's geopolitical hegemony in Latin America. They imagined that Brazilian success in "civilizing" this savage land would also demonstrate the Brazilians' racial superiority to their colonial competitors. Like their Japanese counterparts, Brazilian elites

embraced the popular claim that the white colonizers were naturally incapable of managing tropical land and asserted that their hybrid racial origins made them uniquely suited for the task. Gilberto Freyre, widely known as the architect of the Brazilian discourse of racial democracy, praised military expansion into the Amazon as proof of the extraordinary capacity of the Brazilian *mestiço* to harness the tropical land.⁵⁴

The Vargas regime also considered the full integration of Indigenous peoples vital to its expansionist policies in the 1930s and 1940s, promoting them as national symbols in its propaganda. The state celebrated their perceived positive attributes, such as valor and generosity, culminating in the establishment of April 19 as the Day of the Indian in 1943, officially recognizing the Indigenous importance to Brazil.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, this facade masked the government's true intentions to assimilate Indigenous peoples and harness them for national progress, portraying them as noble yet inherently flawed individuals in need of transformation into productive citizens. This allowed the government to systematically ignore Indigenous voices, downplay atrocities, and appropriate Indigenous land.⁵⁶

Collaborative settler colonialism in the Amazon in the early twentieth century brought catastrophic consequences to the Indigenous peoples. The story of the Karajá, who built their community along the Araguaia River, was especially illustrative. The Karajá have a distinctive language and are famous for their inventive feather ornaments and clay pottery. Their religion involves a mask cult, in which shamans dance in conical straw capes. Wary of outside visitors, the Karajá were described as "dignified and independent." In 1927, the government had created a post in Santa Isabel and sought to establish a museum and a football field and also hold workshops. But when the journalist and traveler Peter Fleming visited Santa Isabel, the main village of the Karajá people, in 1932, the culture and the community of the Karajá were gone. Referring to the government's programs to "civilize" the Karajá, Fleming lamented, "Good work was done while the funds lasted; but when we arrived there were only the labels left to show how zeal had been expended. . . . The outposts of culture had been evacuated. Only the brave green and yellow notices [the national colors of Brazil] remained."⁵⁷

Growing tensions between the United States and Japan during this decade further motivated the Brazilian government to intensify its expansion into the Amazon. Japan's growing influence in Southeast Asia, the primary supplier of raw rubber, pushed U.S. policy makers to explore alternative rubber sources. The Brazilian Amazon emerged as an ideal substitute. In 1937, the same year the Japanese empire embarked on a total war with China, the Brazilian government launched its "March to the West" campaign to escalate its colonization of the Amazon. Vargas's colonial project was marked by its pragmatism. To achieve its goal, the regime strategically utilized both external and internal resources. It took advantage of the growing rivalry between the United States and Germany over access to the Brazilian market and natural resources: Brazil received low-interest loans and a variety

of technical aid from the United States in exchange for restricting its exports to Germany.⁵⁸ Similarly, though surging ethnic nationalism led to widespread anti-Japanese sentiment and an immigration quota, Vargas nevertheless saw the Japanese settlers as valuable resources. In another pragmatic move, not only did Rio postpone the quota from taking effect on Japanese immigration for a few years, but it also continued to support the economic activities of the Japanese settlers in general and those in the Amazon in particular.

Vargas believed that Japanese settlers and enterprises in the Amazon were well matched with his vision for the region's development. He met twice with Uetsuka Tsukasa, head of a Japanese flagship enterprise in the Amazon, during his 1940 visit to the region. Their first meeting took place in Villa Amazonia where Uetsuka, accompanied by the mayor of Parintins, explained to Vargas the Japanese success in transplanting jute and laid out his plan to increase jute production in the region. They met again a few days later, after Vargas reviewed Uetsuka's written appeal for the Brazilian government to establish regulations on jute rating. The president promised to continue his support for the Japanese settlers' cultivation of jute and their related businesses in Villa Amazonia.

Vargas kept this promise. In early 1941, he granted the Amazonia Industrial Company the exclusive right to jute rating and packaging. By supporting the Japanese settlers, Vargas aimed to promote domestic jute production in the Amazon and decrease the nation's dependence on imports from India.⁵⁹ Stimulated by support from both the central and local administrations, Uetsuka made bold plans to expand jute cultivation and increase the company's capacity for packaging and processing raw jute. He also envisioned the formation of an industrial center based in Villa Amazonia, which would manage a variety of other businesses such as sugar and food processing.⁶⁰

The outbreak of World War II, however, doomed Uetsuka's efforts, as well as those of other Japanese settlers in the region. While the Vargas regime did not declare war against Japan until near the end of the war, it was quick to categorize Japan as an enemy country. It banned Japanese immigration completely and confiscated properties owned by Japanese businesses or the Japanese government. A majority of the Japanese employees of the Amazonia Industrial Company were forced to resign and returned to Japan. When Brazilian soldiers raided the company's headquarters in September 1942, they arrested the eight remaining Japanese employees, who were accused of being spies.

Nantaku and other Japanese enterprises in the region met a similar fate. The Brazilian authorities turned Tomé-Açu, Nantaku's headquarters in Pará, into a detention center for enemy aliens. The detainees in Tomé-Açu included both the first generation of Japanese immigrants and the second generation who lived in nearby cities and spoke fluent Portuguese.⁶¹ They were joined by German and Italian detainees who had previously lived in northern Brazil.⁶² The forced relocation of these so-called enemy aliens was a part of the Vargas regime's larger wartime

campaign to populate the region and redistribute its labor resource. To this end, Rio also relocated nearly fifty-five thousand free migrants from northeastern Brazil to the Amazon as rubber laborers by offering them attractive subsidies.⁶³

Although World War II brought catastrophe to the Japanese settlers in the Amazon, it did not end the process of settler colonialism in the region. With a quick surge in the Amazon's working population due to the Brazilian government's wartime relocation campaign, Vargas was able to speed up the process of colonization. He temporarily stepped down from the presidency amid the growing wave of democratization immediately after the war but won the national election in 1951 with a nationalist agenda and returned to the presidential office. His settler colonial project in the Amazon resumed, and the Japanese settlers continued to play a role in his blueprint for the region.

The Empire of Japan collapsed at the end of the war, and the archipelago was occupied by the United States for seven years. However, when the occupation came to an end, old and new Japanese expansionists again began to promote overseas emigration, reviving the connections established during the imperial era. Armed with the Cold War discourse of modernization, they looked to the Amazon once more as a destination for Japanese emigration. This time around, they saw emigration as a means for Japan to reenter the world as a member of the Western Bloc. In 1951, the same year Vargas returned to power, Uetsuka Tsukasa lost his election campaign for the governorship of Kumamoto Prefecture and returned to the Amazon. After meeting with political leaders in Amazonas and Pará, he flew to Rio de Janeiro with his onetime colleague and Amazonian resident, Tsuji Kotarō, to meet Vargas, who was eager to increase raw material extraction in the Amazon. Uetsuka and Tsuji persuaded the president to reopen Brazil to Japanese immigration by promising that it would substantially increase jute production in the region.⁶⁴ Tsuji then obtained an official agreement from the Agency for Immigration and Colonization under the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, which allowed him to bring eighteen migrant families from Japan in 1953 to join the Japanese settlers already in the Amazon. The Tsuji emigration marked the beginning of Japanese migration to Brazil after World War II.

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In 1939, Takaoka Kumao, the doyen of Japanese colonial policy studies at Hokkaido Imperial University and a longtime supporter of Japanese migration to Brazil, was invited to deliver a speech at the graduation ceremony at Tōhoku Imperial University.⁶⁵ In this speech, titled "The Japanese as Tropical Colonizers," Takaoka provided a systematic explanation of why the Japanese were more competent than white people as colonizers in the tropics. In addition to having a more advanced civilization, he reasoned, successful colonizers in the tropics should be able to cooperate and share the fruits of progress with Indigenous peoples; they also needed to maintain high fertility and labor productivity. Whereas white

men failed to meet either of these requirements, there was ample evidence that the Japanese could accomplish both. Echoing Tokyo's overall strategy of expanding south into Southeast Asia, Takaoka urged the young empire builders to shift their gaze from the temperate zone to the resource-rich tropics, where Japan's true manifest destiny lay.

Takaoka Kumao's speech also pointed to the decades-long connections between Japan's migration to the Amazon and the empire's expansion into the South Seas. Not only did the former emerge in tandem with the Japanese occupation of Micronesia, the expansionists also held up the Japanese experience in the Amazon as evidence of Japan's success in colonizing the tropics and used it to justify the empire's expansion in Southeast Asia. Nantaku, a flagship Japanese enterprise in the Amazon, moved its migration and agricultural businesses to Southeast Asia after the Brazilian government cut off its diplomatic relationship with Japan in 1942.⁶⁶

In addition to its intellectual and institutional connections with Japanese expansion in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific, Japanese presence in the Amazon evolved along with Brazil's own expansion in the region. The convergence of these two brands of tropical colonialism led to the formation and prosperity of Japanese settler enterprises such as Nantaku and the Amazonia Industrial Company. The Vargas regime's ambition to speed up the colonization of the Amazon and its pragmatic approach enabled Japanese settlers to have even greater success in the 1930s.

Decades later, as both Japan and Brazil strived to reemerge as regional powers by reviving and revising their colonial past during the Cold War, the colonization of the Amazon once again proved to be in their mutual interest. Indeed, the Amazon became the restarting point of postwar Japanese migration to Brazil. The 1953 Tsuji emigration in Pará was joined by another migration project led by Matsubara Yasutarō, a Japanese Brazilian farm owner and a friend of Vargas's, which brought twenty-two families to Mato Grosso, a state that shared the Amazon Basin with Amazonas and Pará. These two projects were followed by many other programs that relocated Japanese farmers, agricultural trainees, and technicians to São Paulo and other Brazilian states in the 1950s and 1960s, the golden period of Japanese Brazilian migration in the postwar era.