Traditionally, the study of transpacific Japanese migration has suffered from the conventional, spatially organized way of learning in academia, which artificially divides the Asia-Pacific basin into the domains of Asian American Studies and Asian Area Studies. Since the 1970s, the former has monopolized studies of transpacific “immigration” into the United States (or the Western Hemisphere in general) with little regard for its sustained connections to Asian origins and histories.1 The latter has created its own realm of research by disowning transpacific migrants, since they left the physical boundaries of the “area” it is supposed to study.2 Consequently, in existing scholarly

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1 Japanese Americanists and other ethnic studies scholars have not yet looked at migration as intrinsic to colonialism, or vice versa. Even when they adopt a “diasporic” perspective, it usually means they extend their gaze from the United States to the Western Hemisphere as a whole. Asia is still simply the origin—the beginning of the domestic ethnicization of migrants and their descendants in the Americas. On examples of these hemispheric ethnic studies, see Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, Akemi Kikumira-Yano, and James A. Hirabayashi, eds., New Worlds, New Lives: Globalization and People of Japanese Descent in the Americas and from Latin America to Japan (Stanford, 2002); and Wanni W. Anderson and Robert G. Lee, eds., Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas (New Brunswick, N.J., 2005). Bringing together the Americas, Asia, and the Oceania, some scholars try to envision the entire “Pacific Rim” as an integrated space for research and conceptualization. Heavily influenced by globalization theories, however, this movement tends to focus on the present articulations of “late capitalism” and lacks substantive historical analysis. The pre-World War Two era is thus largely absent in these “Rim” studies. See essays in Arif Dirlik, ed., What Is In a Rim?: Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea (Lanham, Md, 1998); and Evelyn Hu-DeHart, ed., Across the Pacific: Asian Americans and Globalization (Philadelphia, 1999).

2 A notable exception is Louise Young, a historian of Japan, who has shed light, albeit briefly, on the nexus between “emigration and expansionism,” which encompasses labor migration to the Americas and Manchurian colonization. See her Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism (Berkeley, 1998), 310–321. Recently, historian Tessa Morris-Suzuki has also published an internet-based article that links transpacific migration with Japan’s colonial expansion in terms of its nationality policy: “Migrants, Subjects, Citizens: Comparative Perspectives on Nationality in the Prewar Japanese Empire,” The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus (http://www.japanfocus.org/-Tessa-Morris_Suzuki/2862) accessed on September 30, 2008.
works, the intersecting trajectories of global Japanese migration have been compartmentalized discretely and studied as two ostensibly unrelated streams of human movements: primarily a labor movement to the Americas on the one hand and a by-product of colonial expansion within imperial Japan’s sphere of influence, on the other. Given this arbitrary dichotomization, the re-mapping of global Japanese migration requires more than new research or spatial reorganization. It first and foremost demands a paradigm shift and cross-disciplinary efforts on the part of researchers. If not for these intellectual moves, the overlapping nature of labor migration and colonialism in the pre-war Japanese diaspora is hard to grasp. In an attempt to re-vision the interconnectedness of the Pacific Ocean and the Asian continent through migration, I will first discuss what can be termed a “two-empire paradigm.” The rest of this essay will tell a story of Japanese migration as a varied but unified human experience within that interconnected space.

New Paradigm for a Study of Transpacific Japanese Migration before 1941

In English-language scholarship, discussions of transpacific migration have generally unfolded in the context of understanding the historical development of North America as “nations of immigrants.” According to this perspective, whether from China, Japan, or the Philippines, Asian migrants participated in national formation in the United States (or Canada) through their contributions to economy and society—including their resistance to exclusion, which allegedly compelled these nations to subsequently confront and overcome perilous internal racism. In helping to multiculturalize the host societies, the immigrants became the very backbone of the kind of inclusive democracies that the “Old World” would never have. In this view, the exceptional and