

Part I: “Expanding the Contours of the Japanese Empire”

The articles included in Part I challenge traditional understandings of Japanese empire, approaching the issue in three different ways. Brett Walker’s article counters the conventional thinking that the roots of Japanese imperialism began as a response to the 1853 arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry and his black ships, which forced the opening of Japan in the form of the unequal treaties he imposed upon Japan. Walker instead argues that the Tokugawa government was aware of many threats to its national defense in the early 19th century, and its attempt to map Sakhalin—a territory whose borders were already contested between Japan and Russia—was a way to claim sovereignty, backed by one of the traditional tools of empire, cartography. The next article, by Vivian Blaxell, examines how the colonization of Hokkaido was aided by efforts to naturalize and Japanize both its urban and rural space. Blaxell’s article does two things: first, it acknowledges that Hokkaido was the Japanese empire’s first colony; second, it treats nation-building and empire-building as twin forces that fed into each other and were often inextricable. Finally, Prasenjit Duara’s article points out that Manchukuo maintained the façade of a legally sovereign nation while it was in reality under the ultimate economic and political control of another power, Japan. Duara argues that Japan’s new kind of imperialism set the precedent for countries like the Soviet Union and the United States, who later adopted similar practices.