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## Book Review

### Asia

Brett L. Walker. *The Conquest of Ainu Lands: Ecology and Culture in Japanese Expansion, 1590–1800*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 2001. Pp. xii, 332. $40.00.

At the start of the seventeenth century, most Ainu were politically autonomous and economically self-reliant. They occupied areas beyond the pale of Japanese military or political control: most of the island of Hokkaidō as well as lands farther north. Two centuries later, most Ainu lands had fallen to de facto Japanese conquest, which sometimes took the form of overt military action. More commonly, however, coercive force remained in the background, enabling the shrewd manipulation of trade conditions. Brett L. Walker closely examines this two-century period of Japanese expansion into Ainu lands, explaining its mechanisms and logic. In the process, he also casts new and useful light on the nature of Japan's early modern state. 1

A secondary aim of Walker's book is to confer upon the Ainu some measure of agency. Walker takes the common nineteenth-century image of Ainu as a passive, primitive, backward people in need of Japanese assistance and points out that it was exploitative Japanese policies backed by military force that reduced this once thriving people to poverty and dependence. He argues that Ainu resisted Japanese conquest, sometimes even at the cost of their lives, and thus places great emphasis on Shakushain's War of 1669. On the whole, however, I was struck more by the comparative lack of overt Ainu resistance during the period of Walker's study. I am not suggesting that Ainu willingly acquiesced to Japanese encroachment but rather that Japanese methods of subjugation proved so effective that overt military action was minimal. 2

Unintended circumstances ended up augmenting these methods of subjugation, with disease being the most important example. Epidemic diseases from contact with Japanese contributed to a substantial reduction in the total Ainu population during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, weakening their ability to resist encroachment. The spread of disease was a direct result of the increasing scope of Japanese commercial activities in Hokkaidō. The southern tip of Hokkaidō was the traditional *wajinchi* or area of Japanese residence. At the start of the seventeenth century, trade between Ainu and Japanese took place on a relatively small scale in the vicinity of Fukuyama castle. By the nineteenth century, Japanese trading posts and other commercial ventures operated throughout *ezochi*, as the Ainu-occupied bulk of Hokkaidō was known to Japanese. These commercial operations were part of a complex network that included trade fiefs in *ezochi* (which served as stipends for certain Matsumae vassals), the emerging commercial networks of urban Japan, and, indirectly, even such far-flung lands as parts of the Qing Empire or Russia. The key to 3

Matsumae commerce in Hokkaidō was the labor of the Ainu, who hunted, fished, gathered, and sometimes traded for animal and plant products valued in the markets of Japan.

By incorporating the Ainu into Japan's commercial economy, Matsumae officials, their vassals, shogunal officials, trade managers, and other Japanese were able to gain substantial control over Ainu activities. Largely by design, Ainu became dependent on Japanese goods and on the income from trade with Japanese merchants. Their traditional self-sufficiency gave way to an economy of dependence. Even their worldview began to change as Ainu increasingly saw the useful products of nature not as deities to be revered but as commodities to be harvested. There were other dimensions to the Japanese conquest, such as the manipulation of ritual and protocol, but incorporation into Japan's commercial economy was most fundamental. 4

Walker situates this process of Japanese expansion in the broader context of early modern foreign relations, building on the pioneering work of Ronald Toby. The old notion that the Tokugawa *bakufu* was an inward-looking, isolationist government takes a further beating from Walker's work, for he demonstrates strong *bakufu* interest in expansion into Ezo. But the Ainu lands did not constitute a state as, for example, did the Kingdom of Ryukyu at the southern border of this expansive Japanese polity. How, then, should Ainu lands be characterized? To answer this question, Walker makes effective use of New Western historian Richard White's idea of a "middle ground"—a place "In between cultures, peoples, and in between empires and the nonstate world" (p. 8). 5

Throughout the book, Walker inserts arguments and ideas from historians of the North American West to add a comparative dimension. My own preference would have been to relegate most of these comparisons to the endnotes, but this is a minor quibble. Walker's book is an excellent work of solid scholarship that should be read by historians of Japan as well as historians with an interest in minority groups and borderlands. 6

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