

Japan: The Incorporation of Hokkaido

Minako Sakata

From 1881-1908, under the penal code drafted by French jurist Boissonade, Hokkaido was Japan's only penal colony. Regarding its geopolitical position in modern Japan, Hokkaido has been often called *Naikoku shokuminchi*, which translated literally is "internal colony." This notion, however, does not necessarily have the same roots as the notion of internal colony in the context of a postcolonial agenda. Rather, the term *Naikoku shokuminchi* in Japanese historical terminology seems to be an expression of domestic inequity between Hokkaido and the mainland, without problematizing the historical process of actual colonization or incorporation of new territory. Thus, this concept has a somewhat ahistorical resonance, with the effect of blurring the historical position of Hokkaido in relation to Japanese nation state building. This terminology suggests that, even among historians, there is recognition that Hokkaido was a frontier which the Japanese, without question, had the right to own, occupy, and use, rather than a foreign land which became a Japanese periphery through a particular historical process.

On the other hand, it is obvious that Hokkaido lay outside Japan in the early modern period. Much of the area of Hokkaido was called Ezo. "Ezo" literally means "barbarian," and it was used to refer to the Ainu. Thus "Ezochi" means the Ainu land. However, it is also true that Japanese administrators believed, even in the early modern period, that Ezochi was land rightfully ruled by the Japanese. Conversely, in Ainu oral tradition, they never represent the Japanese as a ruler but neighboring people who are sometimes good friends, sometimes evil.

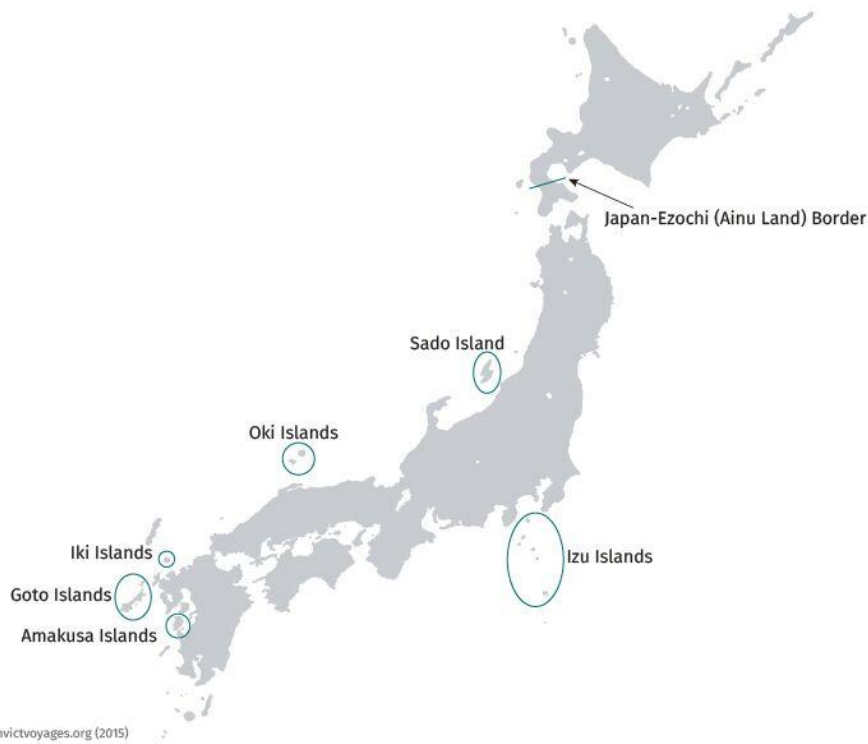
Exploring the history of convict transportation from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century, I examine the transition of the Japanese periphery and the process by which Hokkaido became Japan.

Destination of Exile in Early Modern Japan

In the early modern Japan, exile (*Ontō*) was the second most severe punishment next to death penalty. The destinations were small islands relatively close to the mainland, such as Izu Islands, Gotō Islands, Amakusa Islands, Iki Island or Oki Islands (Map 1). A person who was sent there was not confined in a special facility, but made a living by himself under the watch of the leaders (*Kumigashira*) of the village.

Other than exile, there was another system under which Tokugawa government sent former minor criminals, gamblers or vagrants to Sado Island (in the present Niigata prefecture) to use them as labourers in silver and gold mines. It was not a penalty against crime. Rather, the purpose of this system was to isolate vagrants in big cities such as Tokyo and Ōsaka, and prevent them from committing a crime. When a person transported under this system repented of his behaviour, government made plans to facilitate his return to his hometown. There were also people who remained in the island and became commoners.

The number of transportees in the early modern period is not clear. However, for instance, Hachijojima in the Izu islands received 1823 convicts from 1610 to 1866. Interned persons in Sado was approximately 2,000 during the 100 or so years from 1778 to the late nineteenth century; so, an average of around 20 people per year. In both cases, as compared with transportation to Hokkaido in the late nineteenth century, the scale is quite small.



Border Issues and the Russian Threat in the Mid-nineteenth Century

The Tokugawa Shogunate opened Japan to international commerce and communication in 1854, and concluded a treaty with Russia in 1855, which for the first time confirmed the border in the Kuril Islands; between Iturup Island and Urup Island. However, even after this treaty, Sakhalin continued to be an island of mixed Japanese and Russian residence. The Tokugawa Shogunate began to regard transportation as a means of colonization. In 1856, an Elder (*Rōju*) of the Tokugawa government suggested the Hakodate magistrate office (*Hakodate Bugyō*) send vagrants and criminals to Sakhalin to prevent Russian expansion to the island. In 1866, with reference to the Western penal system, and the labour of Russian convicts in Siberia in particular, officials in the Hakodate magistrate office discussed the transportation of condemned criminals to the border islands of Hokkaido, such as Itorup, Kunashir, Shikotan, Rishiri and Rebun. However, before realizing these plans, the Tokugawa Shogunate collapsed in 1868.

Planning Penal Colony in Hokkaido

In 1875, the Meiji Restoration Government concluded the treaty of Saint Petersburg with Russia. Japan, instead of possessing the whole Kuril Islands, gave up Sakhalin. As a result, the land of Hokkaido became Japan's northern border.

From 1874-1877, rebellions by the warrior class, mainly in the area of Kyūshū, occurred successively. The Japanese government faced a shortage of prison space and began to discuss the introduction of transportation of political offenders to Hokkaido. This idea was first proposed in 1876 by the Ministry of Justice, Takatō Ōki. In 1877, the Home Minister, Toshimichi Ōkubo also submitted a proposal on this issue. In his report, he argued for the establishment of a system of exile and servitude. The best destination for transportation was Hokkaido. He contended that convicts should be sent there and to engage in land clearing or fishery. After completing their term, they should settle there instead of being allowed to return to the mainland. Hokkaido was a far and strange place, he argued, and convicts would be frightened and lose their motivation to escape; they

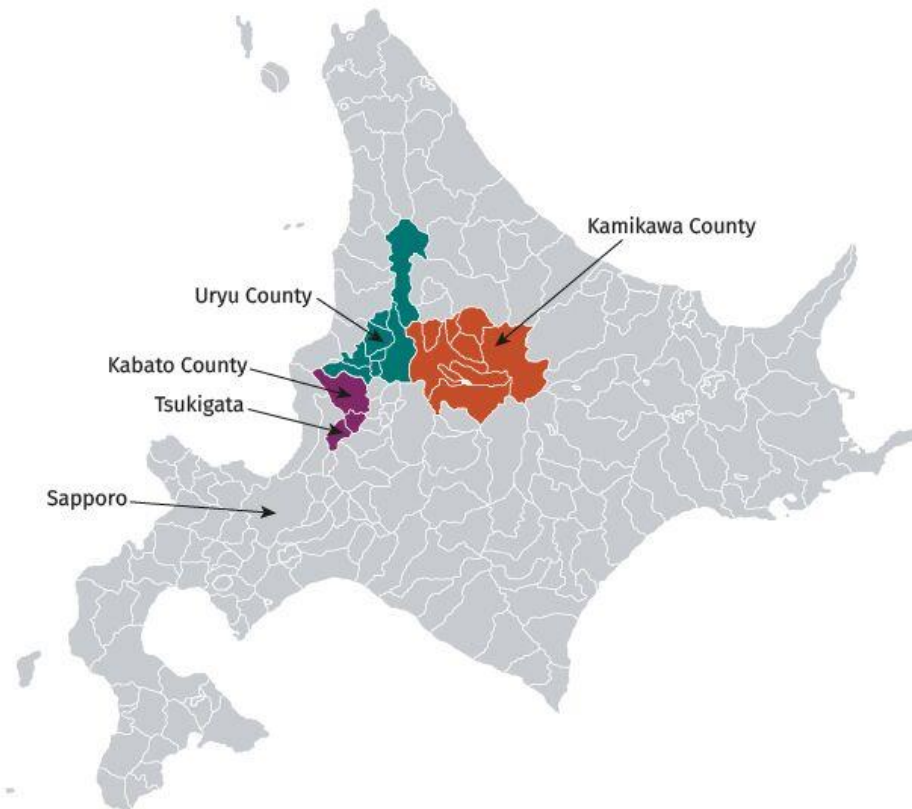
would therefore work diligently. He presented this as a plan not only to isolate political offenders, but also as conducive to the national interest. This idea is obviously influenced by Western-style penal systems and stands in contrast to the practices of early modern exile in Japan.

Prior to Ōkubo's proposal, the Japanese government had begun to study Western penal systems. The government became most interested in the French penal code, and in 1873 reached out to the French jurist G. E. Boissonade who drafted the Japanese penal code issued in July 1880, which included exile and servitude as punishment. The introduction of a Western-style penal code was a part of the government's efforts to revise the unequal treaty that the Tokugawa Shogunate had concluded with Western countries. In other words, it was one of the efforts made by Japanese governments to be recognized as a civilized country. The idea of convict transportation and its destination was discussed in step with the making of this new penal code.

After Ōkubo's first proposal, his successor of the home minister, Hirobumi Itō submitted the proposal for the destination of transportation again in 1879. In his proposal, he argued that, by revision of the penal code, the number of convicts would increase. In the Tokugawa period, islands near the mainland were the destination of exile. Such islands are small and there was not enough land for the prisoners to become permanently settled or self-sustaining. Besides, by sending huge number of convicts, public safety might be threatened. Hokkaido is immense and fertile. There are significant labour needs for land clearing and mining. If prisoners were settled after being released, the population of Hokkaido would increase. Ito's proposal was accepted by the government in February 1880. Between 1881 and 1895, 5 prisons were built in Hokkaido for the confinement of felons and political offenders.

Tsukigata's Plan and Changing Policy

The Kabato central prison was the first central prison built in Hokkaido. Located in relative proximity to Sapporo, the capital of Hokkaido, it played a key role in the prison administration in Hokkaido. *Tengoku* (the director) of Kabato central prison also held the position of mayor of three counties such as Kabato, Uryū and Kamikawa since 1889 (Map 2). Kiyoshi Tsukigata, the first director of the Kabato prison, submitted proposals to the government about a policy of Hokkaido development during from 1883-85. In this period some government officials visited Hokkaido, seeking ideas for the reformation of the policy of Hokkaido development. They inspected Kabato central prison during their trip. Although Tsukigata retired in 1885, most of his ideas were realized by the Hokkaido government office (*Hokkaidochō*).



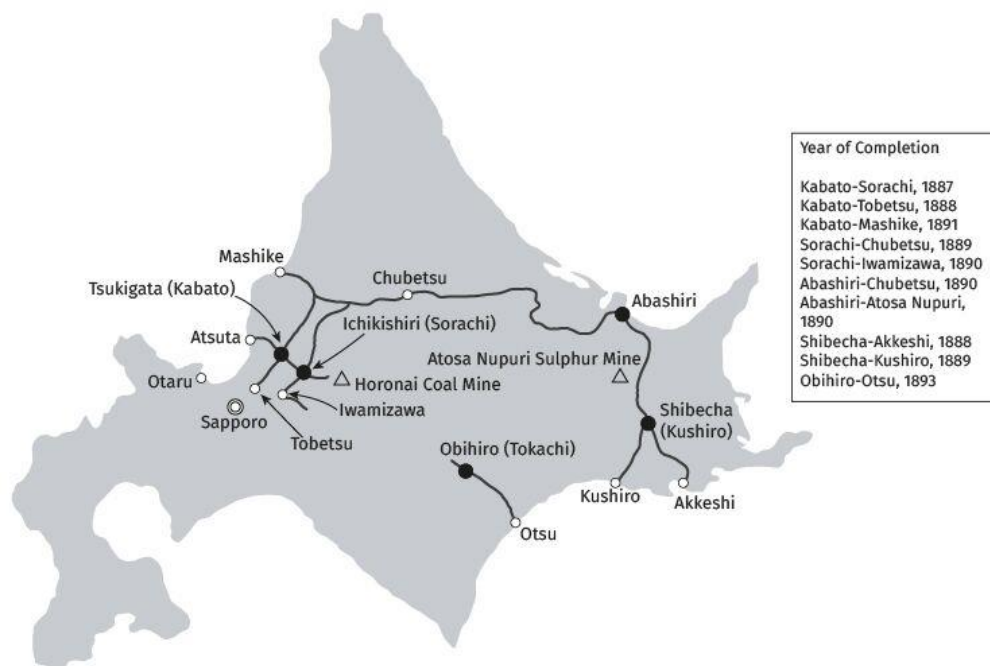
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Tsukigata proposed four items: 1) Sale or grant of the land which convicts cleared; 2) Road construction by convict labour; 3) The establishment of farms invested and managed by members of the nobility. He had the opinion that the nobility should have responsibility for development of Hokkaido, and; 4) The establishment the colonial troops (*tondenhei*) around the prison site. Among them, items 1, 3 and 4 are concerned with the uses of land which convicts cleared. In short, Tsukigata's proposal is about how to utilize convict labour.

In referring to the Western penal colony system, Tsukigata asserted that the central prison should use convict labour for land clearing, settling them there after they concluded their term. However, there were only 15 convicts or so who released every year. On the other hand, there were 500 hectares of land that has been already cleared, and 1,000 hectares more land that would be cleared in the near future. Under the legislation of that time, it was not permitted to sell this land to settlers. However, if land was only to be given to convicts, it would 30-60 years to assign all cleared land. To utilize both the land and convict labour, it became desirable to sell land to immigrants. In upper Ishikari river, there is still more immense and fertile lands. Even after selling all of the land around the Kabato prison, it was possible to establish a prison branch upstream to clear more land for both immigrants and released convicts.

Prior to this proposal, Tsukigata explored the upper Ishikari River in October 1884 looking for ideal sites for cultivation. He and 8 prison officials went up to Kamuikotan (an area in present Asahikawa city). He found some places suitable for agriculture. In this exploration, he came across some Ainu villages. Six years later, in 1890, these Ainu villages in upper reaches of the prison area, from Urausu to Fukagawa, were relocated to an Ainu allotment in Ushisubetsu (an area of present Shintotsukawa town). Although it is unclear how this relocation occurred, 22 households were provided 4.5-9 hectares of land.

In the same year, the lands from which the Ainu villages were banished became an immigrant settlement and the nobles' cooperative farm. From 1887-90, Kabato prison returned its land property to the Hokkaido government. This was the process by which land was sold to immigrants. In 1887 and 1889, 2 prison farms were also sold. In 1890, 1,168 hectares of undeveloped land were returned to the Hokkaido government. This land was afterward loaned to immigrants. Departing from Tsukigata's original idea, most of the upstream land was returned without being cleared. This may have been because, from 1887 onward, convict labour became used intensively in public construction rather than land clearing (Map 3). Instead, land clearing and cultivation were entrusted to settlers or tenant farmers recruited by private companies and nobles' farm. Regarding the colonial troops, between 1891 and 1896, 18 military villages were established in Kabato, Uryū and Kamikawa counties. Houses in some villages were built by convicts. The troops in this region were expected to act as a labour force for clearing and cultivation rather than in a military capacity.



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In 1889, 50,000 hectares land of the Uryū plain was loaned to the nobles' cooperative consisting of 6 peers; duke Sanetomi Sanjō, marquis Mochiaki Hachisuka, marquis Yukisue Kikutei, count Koei Ōtani, viscount Yasuhiro Toda and viscount Okitomo Akimoto. Importing agricultural machinery and livestock from America, they attempted to establish a Western-style farm. Convicts were used as labour force in the first year. From the second year, tenant farmers were recruited from the mainland. In the prospectus of this farm, it is asserted that development of Hokkaido is urgent as it is equivalent to national defence. Russia is sending colonial troops and convicts to develop Sakhalin, which is separated from Hokkaido by only a narrow strip of water. Members of the nobility, as the bulwark of the Imperial family, had the responsibility to invest in Hokkaido and manage a model farm. Although this cooperation was dissolved for financial reason after 4 years, Hachisuka, Kikutei, Toda and Ōtani continued to own their farms in this region.

The Abolition of Convict Transportation

In the 1890s, as the number of settlers increased, criticism against convict labour appeared. Some complained of the inhumane nature of forced labour. Some protested crime committed by escaped convicts in neighbouring villages. At the Imperial Diet in 1892, some members of the House of Representatives criticized convict labour as an obstacle to the development of Hokkaido. From 1894 onward, it was decided not to release convicts in Hokkaido. 300-400 convicts were transported every year to one of the central prisons on the mainland before completing their term on Hokkaido. As a result, the number of convicts released in Hokkaido averaged around 10-20 every year. However, in 1897, on the occasion of the Empress' Dowager's demise, 2,473 convicts received mitigation of their penalty under an amnesty and were sent to the mainland. Probably because of this, 439 convicts were released in Hokkaido. Among 106 convicts who were released from the Kabato prison, 20 settled in the northern outskirts of Tsukigata village (present Urausu village). The prison seemed to have a plan to make an ex-convicts village there. However, this event led to the independence movement of other settlers to avoid this. In 1899, they succeeded in separating their settlement from Tsukigata village, and formed a new village called Urausu.

In 1901, Sorachi and Kushiro central prisons were closed. Since the amnesty in 1897, the number of convicts in the central prisons in Hokkaido decreased year by year (Table 1). Hence convict outdoor labour was also reduced. In 1903, the central prison system was abolished. In 1904, for financial reasons, the policy of convict release was changed, and convicts in Hokkaido were to be released in Hokkaido from 1905. In 1907, the penal code was revised and the convict transportation system was finally abolished.

Year	Kabato	Sorachi	Kushiro	Abashiri	Tokachi	Total
1886	1,434	2,003	772			4,209
1887	1,383	1,966	790			4,139
1888	1,454	2,163	860			4,477
1889	2,365	2,975	1,117			6,457
1890	2,317	3,048	1,409			6,774
1891	2,357	2,630	663	1,200		6,850
1892	2,338	2,549	1,291	769		6,947
1893	1,497	2,502	1,943	1,288		7,230
1894	1,449	1,953	2,285	1,272		6,959
1895	1,393	1,713	1,383	1,220	1,313	7,022
1896	1,561	1,561	1,172	1,371	1,176	6,841
1897	1,028	1,003	965		797	3,793
1898	897	847	895		679	3,318
1899	945	893	922		699	3,459
1900	?	?	?		?	3,174
1901	?	?	?		?	2,763
1902	969			704	817	2,490
1903	825			1095	772	2,692

Table 1. Population of Convicts in the Central Prisons in Hokkaido, based on *Hokkaidocho tokeisho. Hokkaido shujikan nenpo*.

Conclusion

The history of Hokkaido as a penal colony is very short: It lasted only 27 years. Thus it has been regarded as a transient system of labour during the labour shortage of the early period of the development of Hokkaido. However, it can be said that it was over in a short time because it was the system introduced to transform Hokkaido, which was once outside of Japan, into a periphery of the Japanese nation state, competing with Russian expansion. As Hokkaido was a new territory, convict transportation could be introduced.

In early modern period, the Japanese periphery as the destination of exile was remote islands off of the mainland. The Tokugawa Shogunate has considered introducing it to Ezochi in the mid nineteenth century to deal with the border issues with Russia. However, it was the Meiji Restoration Government established in 1868 that finally realized this idea.

After the Meiji Restoration, Hokkaido was the only place where the government could introduce a Western-style penal system that was also a system intended to colonize a new territory. However, paradoxically, the more plan proceeded and the number of immigrants increased, the more difficult it was to create and maintain a penal colony. Convicts came to be regarded as obstacle to Hokkaido's development. They were seen as mere labour force, and not accepted as settlers.

Convict transportation was essentially a transient system of colonial labour and that ended sooner or later in any empire. In Hokkaido's case, it is true that this process progressed more rapidly than in other empires. However, it is also true that introducing a penal colony system in Hokkaido meant into new territory, without other specific efforts to claim control, was neither an obvious nor a stable Japanese possession at that time.

Further Reading

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