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The Making of Japanese Settler Colonialism

This innovative study demonstrates how Japanese empire builders invented and appropriated the discourse of overpopulation to justify Japanese settler colonialism across the Pacific. Lu defines this overpopulation discourse as “Malthusian expansionism.” This was a set of ideas that demanded additional land abroad to accommodate the supposed surplus people in domestic society on the one hand and emphasized the necessity of national population growth on the other. Lu delineates ideological ties, human connections, and institutional continuities between Japanese colonial migration in Asia and Japanese migration to Hawai‘i and North and South America from 1868 to 1961. He further places Malthusian expansionism at the center of the logic of modern settler colonialism, challenging the conceptual division between migration and settler colonialism in global history. This title is also available as Open Access.

SIDNEY XU LU is Assistant Professor of History at Michigan State University.

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*Malthusianism and Trans-Pacific Migration,
1868–1961*

Sidney Xu Lu

Michigan State University



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To Eileen, teacher and best friend

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Note on Names, Terms, and Translations

Except for names of scholars and historical figures who have written and published their works in English, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese names in this book are in the original order, with family names first. The romanization of Japanese names and terms follows the revised Hepburn system. Exceptions are given to terms that already have standard English expressions, such as Tokyo, Hokkaido, Sapporo, Kobe, and Osaka. Chinese names and terms follow the Pinyin system. All translations in the book, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

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