

*Race Beyond Borders: Japanese Migration to Chile, 1900-1950*

In the early twentieth century, thousands of Japanese individuals migrated to various countries in the Americas hoping to find work as agricultural laborers. These migrants traveled to various states in Latin America and arrived in the largest numbers in Peru, Brazil, and the United States. Japanese migrants also arrived in Chile. Yet, the history of Japanese in Chile receives little attention among scholars. I travelled to Santiago, Chile this summer to investigate further the histories of these migrants and discover more about their role in Chilean history. After conducting documentary research in various Chilean archives, including the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Relations, the Chilean National Archive, and the National Library of Chile, it was evident that there is a lot that we can learn about Latin America by approaching the continent within the context of migration from East Asia.

I set out with the goal to recover some of the experiences of these Japanese individuals in Chile. The most interesting story I found was that of a Japanese migrant named Eduardo Makiti Yano. In 1919, Yano was living in Tocopilla (a city far in the north of Chile) when he was violently assaulted by a group of Chilean men. Yano reported the incident to police in Tocopilla who dismissed and even further assaulted him on account of Yano being Japanese. While this was a horrible occurrence, it unfortunately was rather common for the period as racism, and particularly anti-Asian racism, was rampant in Latin America in these years. After being dismissed by the police in Tocopilla, Yano set off to the capital in Santiago to bring his case before the national courts and justice system. Upon arriving in Santiago, Yano also turned to the Japanese legation for protection and aid in finding justice for the assaults committed against him.

Unfortunately, the paper trail quickly goes cold once Yano arrives at the Japanese legation and does not reveal how Yano's plea ended. However, this story is nonetheless loaded with information that helps us better understand the history of Japanese migrants in Chile. For instance, in the documents I did encounter in which Yano relates his story to the Japanese legation, he details how, throughout his arduous journey between Tocopilla and Santiago, numerous other Japanese migrants assisted him. Whether it be through offering Yano a place to stay, or even traveling with him so that he was not left alone, the friendly actions of these Japanese suggest that Japanese immigrants in Chile lived in very close, supportive, and insular social networks. Moreover, the fact that Yano could travel to Santiago to bring his case before the national justice system also reveals that Japanese immigrants, while inhabiting a lower social status, still could seemingly use the Chilean justice system. Migrants could therefore assert some sort of agency through the state at a time when Chilean social society excluded and discriminated against the Japanese. Yano's story thus offers fresh insights into the way Japanese lived and related among each other and with the Chilean state and populace in the early twentieth century.

Another central element of this story is the tension between Chilean state actors in the capital of Santiago and in smaller and more distant towns such as Tocopilla. The early twentieth century in Chile witnessed intense bureaucratic centralization. This process forced state officials around the country who could previously act at times outside of national laws, to be more accountable to the federal government. In my research, I encountered various records in which Tocopilla police declared that they hoped that Yano would not go to Santiago to argue his case against his assaulters in Tocopilla. I believe this was because they knew that in front of a more institutionally accountable justice system in the nation's capital, Yano's assaulters, including the

police, would easily be found guilty for their assault and neglect. In examining the relationship between state actors in the center and periphery of Chilean society, we see how Yano's story also sheds light on the forces unraveling within Chile in the early twentieth century.

To conclude, researching in Santiago this summer has taught me a lot about the relationship between race, migration, and society in Chile in the first part of the twentieth century. I am hoping to continue developing Yano's story into a larger article project about these themes. Research in Chile also introduced me to a lot of the methods and practices necessary to do historical research in Latin America as my work hopes to participate in the new field of examining Latin American history from a global perspective with international actors. I am very thankful for the Tinker in helping develop my initial dissertation work in this way. Upwards and onwards to more research!

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