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Passport regulations and the cross-border mobility in the Japanese empire

The idea that Tokugawa Japan was in the state of 'sakoku' (closed country) has received much critical revisiting in the past few decades. However it remains true that the ban on Japanese overseas travel lasted until 1866 and made overseas travel an anomaly at best before the emergence of the Meiji state. In the following decades, countless Japanese travellers and migrants crossed the seas, building by 1945 a population of around six million living and/or fighting outside the archipelago. This outward mobility developed in tandem with the expansion of the Japanese colonial empire, but it was not a simple one-way move. The geographical proximity between the colonies and the metropole has resulted in the situation under which many settlers were, paradoxically, also frequent travellers. With the analysis of passports, passport laws and relevant official records, this study attempts to illustrate the way in which imperial subjects of Japan encountered legal institutions on cross-border movements and how they negotiated their own mobility.