

The Forging of Alien Status of Koreans in American Occupied Japan

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Introduction

Declarations made before and immediately following the cessation of the Pacific War pledged the United States mission of the occupation of Japan, after disarming the erstwhile enemy of its military capacity and purging those responsible for the war, to be the introduction of democracy. The same Potsdam Declaration that demanded Japan's "unconditional surrender" appended the notion that through occupation the democratic ideals of "[f]reedom of speech, of religion and of thought, as well as respect for the fundamental human rights shall be established." This article considers the application of these principles to Japan's minorities. These peoples not only were denied political consideration as "Japanese" but also faced severe discrimination and at times non-recognition during the postwar period. In particular, given its size, its organization, and historical complications, this article examines the plight of Japan's Korean population.

Conflict between the Japanese and Korean peoples, of course, originated long before the Occupation forces arrived on Japan's shores; thus they are not merely a direct result of this seven-year period. Animosity between the two Northeast Asian neighbors predates Japan's Meiji Period (1868-1912). The striking fact is that the occupation authorities imposed a

policy that resembled (and even exceeded) the discriminatory policies practiced by the Japanese over its thirty-six year period of colonial occupation of Korea. Koreans residing in Japan were strongly encouraged to return to their "homeland;" if they chose to stay they would be subject to Japanese legal codes while remaining ineligible from participating in its society as Japanese citizens. Contrary to the optimistic ideals expressed in its rhetoric, occupation policy excluded them from participation in the Japanese democratic experiment.

Wartime Images of Koreans and United States Preparation for Occupation

Documents from the Occupation period repeatedly reveal the US conviction that the majority of the Koreans living in Japan had been brought to the islands by force to perform war-related labor. Thus, reports argue, it was reasonable to expect that the majority of this people wished to be repatriated. In fact many Japan-based Koreans had migrated to Japan before the outbreak of war.[1] Even during the war years (1939-45), when Korean labor recruitment and conscription became policy, Japan brought a little more than 724,000 Koreans to the archipelago. This represents roughly 35 per cent of the 2.1 million Korean residents that welcomed the Allied Occupation forces in 1945. In addition to wartime forced labor, a large number of Koreans, drawn by relatively favorable wages and working conditions, migrated on their own to the Japanese islands, so much so that in 1942 the Japanese found it necessary to refuse entry to 5,000 potential Korean immigrants.[2]

Up through the end of the war, the Korean resident population in Japan faced discrimination in a number of areas. Forced to maintain their family register in Korea, they were never expected to completely assimilate as Japanese even though they were taxed as such. They were, however, allowed suffrage rights in accordance with Japanese law. Korean labor provided Japanese industry with a cheap and reliable pool of labor.[3] Those recruited during the early 1940s primarily replaced Japanese laborers conscripted into the military during the Pacific War. Korean residents protested many of the measures (such as making them Japanize their names) implemented to facilitate their assimilation as Japanese; for this and other reasons, local police maintained a vigilant eye.[4]

United States images of the Korean people had historically mirrored the prejudicial attitudes held by the Japanese. By the end of the nineteenth century the US Government, under the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, had all but written off the Koreans' ability to govern themselves. This negative attitude prevailed as the United States prepared to occupy the Korean peninsula following the war's end. The wording in the Cairo Communiqué, compiled by the United States, China, and Great Britain in December 1943, reinforced these images particularly in the decision of the powers to defer Korean independence for an unstated period. Korean sovereignty would follow allied occupation "in due time." The US justified delay by repeating an argument frequently used by the Japanese to justify their occupation of the peninsula: the Korean people's inability to govern themselves.

When the occupation of the Korean peninsula began in September 1945, Japanese officials (including the governor-general) and their Korean supporters were ordered to retain their posts until Koreans could be trained to replace them. Japanese influence prevailed even after Korean protests forced the United States to

rescind this order and replace officials of the former colonial bureaucracy. Commanding General John Hodge admitted, for example, that he kept an ear directed toward the Japanese more often than toward the Korean.[5] One letter written by a Korean but intercepted by the occupying forces complained that Korean political parties found it necessary to find Japanese girls for officers of the American Military Government and noting that the military government still relied on Japanese, rather than Koreans, as interpreters.[6]

Documents written during the time that the United States was preparing for the occupation of Japan reveal a fairly sophisticated understanding of the diversity among the archipelago's Korean residents. Indeed, there was mention that members of this people, as liberated victims of Japanese oppression, could play a positive role in the occupation. These same documents, however, reveal the goal of return all non-Japanese to their country, even while acknowledging the difficulties.[7] Preparation to repatriate non-Japanese began soon after the Cairo meeting. Then the United States began gathering information on the Korean people by reading materials published by the Japanese and by conducting interviews with Koreans. Those interrogated included Koreans living in the United States and Korean soldiers who had been captured by US military forces. The interviews particularly focused on inter-ethnic relations among Japanese and Koreans, as well as Korean behavior following liberation—would they retaliate against their colonial occupiers. The negative portrayals of the Japanese that surfaced in these interviews only confirmed United States views that the Korean and Japanese could not live together as neighbors either on the peninsula or the archipelago. Thus, Koreans in Japan and Japanese in Korea would have to be quickly repatriated.

The Office of Strategic Services authored in

late June 1945 one of the first position papers to address occupation policy toward minorities. "Aliens in Japan" estimated that there were over two million Koreans, 40,000 Formosan-Chinese, and 40,000 persons of other nationalities presently residing throughout the Japanese islands. In short, almost 95% of all Japan-based foreigners were Korean.[8]

"Aliens in Japan" depicted the Koreans as a people of low social and economic position, a people that had failed to assimilate into Japanese society. The authors of the report emphasized the Korean people's transitory existence in Japan: they did not go to Japan with the idea of settling there; they sent back a rather large percentage of their earnings to family members in Korea. Japanese policies, as well, have curtailed any desire they may have had to make Japan their permanent home.[9] The report envisioned the image that the Japanese held toward the Korean as follows:

The Koreans, with few exceptions, are a distinct minority group, with a low social position The Japanese attitude towards Koreans arises, in part, from the characteristics of the Koreans. Those who go to Japan are, in the main, very poor, uneducated, and unskilled, even by low Korean standards. Their language, culture, and manner of life are quite different from the Japanese, and the Koreans have attempted to maintain their old way of life, separate and distinct from the Japanese community. Koreans do not possess the Japanese fever for hard work, and to the energetic Japanese Koreans appear to be slow moving and lazy. The brevity of their stay in Japan makes them seem shiftless and lazy It is also said that Koreans are not as

conscious of cleanliness as the Japanese and that the Koreans live under miserable conditions in Japan because they know nothing better in Korea. On the other side, it should be borne in mind that Koreans remit or save a high percentage of their earnings and that Japanese prejudice and restrictions seriously limit housing possibilities.[10]

Such reports provided rationalization both for Korean peninsula occupation and separate treatment of Korean residents in the archipelago occupation. "Aliens in Japan" concluded with a postwar "course of action." It estimated that about two million foreigners would be "in need of liberation, protection, or segregation from the Japanese." A more immediate problem, though, would be to take action against those aliens who constituted "a menace to Allied military operations." Such people, it advised, should be incarcerated. On the other hand, those who had endured a longer residence in Japan could be used to assist in the operations of the Occupation forces. After screening for war criminals it advised that all foreigners who opted for repatriation be permitted passage to their homeland and that all those who wished to remain in Japan be granted liberty to stay. US occupation policy would later oppose forcing non-Japanese repatriation.

All non-Japanese were not, however, to be accorded equal treatment. "Aliens in Japan" recommended that for administrative purposes the Japan-based alien population be categorized into the following groups: Allied Prisoners of War (POWs), members of the Diplomatic Corp, imprisoned Allied citizens, and remaining foreigners. These categories, which were revised once the occupation operations commenced their duties, determined not only repatriation priority but

also food rations (amount and kind) and legal status (whether they were to be accorded extraterritoriality privileges).

Asian migrants were particularly open to suspicion. “Asiatics,” the report noted, “may be either friendly or enemy; even those who became citizens might be either pro- or con-Allied; others might have collaborated with the Japanese.” Every case, the report advised, must be investigated individually before their status was finalized.[11]

The report was rather generous in its recommendations for treatment of those foreigners who chose to remain in Japan rather than be repatriated. It concluded that in many cases the situation in such people’s homeland might necessitate their continued residence in Japan. Discrimination against such people, it cautioned, must be eliminated. Indeed, the authors advised that migrants be given priority of job opportunity over the Japanese. Specifically mentioned was the case of the White Russians who would probably be the group with the least desire to return to their homeland.[12]

Late June 1945, a mere month and a half before the war’s end, was still too early to anticipate the geo-political structure of postwar East Asia. In particular the situation of the peoples of Japan’s Northeast Asian colonies, the Taiwanese and Koreans, would be most affected by postwar developments, namely the defeat of the Chinese Nationalists by the communists and the division of the Korean peninsula at the 38th parallel. The plight of the Korean people was particularly complex due to their large numbers in Japan and the political division of their country. To the contrary, the plight of the Taiwanese population in Japan was settled with relatively ease thanks to the Nationalist Chinese’ siding with the Allied forces. Both the Korean and the Taiwanese populations were a source of concern for the Occupation and Japanese police.

Occupation Policy and Korean Behavior

Within two months of Japan’s surrender the State, War, and Navy Departments issued to the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) a key occupation directive. “Basic Initial Post-Surrender Directive to Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers for the Occupation and Control of Japan,” contained ambiguities surrounding the general status of the Korean population as well as the most direct statement regarding their specific status vis-à-vis the Japanese. The directive read in part:

You will treat Formosan-Chinese and Koreans as liberated peoples in so far as military security permits. They are not included in the term “Japanese” as used in this directive but they have been Japanese subjects and may be treated by you, in case of necessity, as enemy nationals. They may be repatriated, if they so desire, under such regulations as you may establish. However, priority will be given to the repatriation of nationals of the United Nations.[13]

Ambiguity rested in the lack of a decisive statement regarding the Korean and Taiwanese as people to be liberated or incarcerated—they were not “Japanese” but they could be treated as such (i.e. as enemy). Among the problems in coming to a conclusion on this issue was the fact that a substantial number of these colonized peoples had participated directly in Japan’s war efforts as soldiers or in subordinate roles with the military and police. Indeed, as many as 44 Koreans and Taiwanese would later be sentenced to death, and over 270 imprisoned, as war criminals.[14]

That Japan-based Koreans and Taiwanese residents would not be considered as “Japanese” after the war was not a significant change from their prewar and wartime status as subjects of the Japanese Empire—the Japanese government and people would have agreed with this classification as Japan’s colonized minorities were never granted Japanese citizenship during their homeland’s occupation. On the other hand, if not “Japanese,” then what was their political category? Many adults had resided in Japan for the majority of their lives; others knew of no other “homeland.”

Nationalist China’s early recognition as a member of the United Nations, and as one of the five Security Council Members, greatly simplified the status of Japan’s Taiwanese-Chinese population. Regardless of their opinion on the matter, they would be considered the responsibility of the Chinese government and thus entitled to all of the benefits that UN membership provided nationals of member states. As early as October 1945 the Chinese government ordered all Japan-based Chinese to register with this government to recover Chinese nationality. It also established a Mission in Japan. Recognition as Chinese not only allowed them food rations as Allied Nationals, but also exempted them from paying capital taxes to the Japanese government.[15]

The complications facing the Korean resident in Japan intensified while those of the Taiwanese resident waned. The United States never considered the overseas Korean Provisional Government as a wartime ally or as a postwar legitimate representative of the Korean people. This non-recognition prevented the Korean population from attaining a status of Allied national following the war. Moreover, the division of the peninsula into US and Soviet zones blocked Koreans from attaining United Nations status even after 1948, when legitimate governments were established in the north and the south. (Veto rights in the Security

Council allowed the the US and the Soviet Union to block entry of each other’s Korean client state.) It was only after this time that the Occupation forces recognized the Korean government’s right to establish a representative office in Japan to care for this people’s needs. This office, however, represented the interests of but a portion of the Korean population in Japan. Previously, from 1946, SCAP entrusted the Japanese with the task of registering this population under the terms of the Alien Registration Act promulgated that year.

The division of the Korean peninsula particularly complicated the status of Korean residents in Japan who were sympathetic to the left. Richard B. Finn, who served in the Diplomatic Section of SCAP and compiled a major “staff study” on Koreans in Japan, wrote that by 1948 at least half of this population favored Japan’s leftist elements.[16] Indeed, Occupation documents demonstrate that US administrators explained as “leftist” or “communist” any Korean activity that they felt interfered with the Occupation’s administrative policies.[17] These generalizations were probably not far off the mark; the Japanese Communist Party was one of the few politically organized groups that lent the Korean people’s plight a sympathetic ear. Korean leftists organized soon after the war’s end; a meeting held on 15 October 1945 that gathered together 5,000 delegates organized the Chaeil Chosonjin ryonmeng (League of Koreans in Japan, or Chongryun for short).[18] The December 1945 demand issued by Kim Ty-yon [Kim Taeyon]—that Koreans be allowed to form a “People’s Republic” in Japan—further estranged Korean relations with Occupation authorities. In September 1949 SCAP ordered the Japanese government to disband the organization.

Communist activity on the Korean peninsula inflamed fears in Japan of the threat posed by Korean participation in Japan-based leftist

activity. Japanese occupiers of the peninsula began reporting communist activity in Korea even before United States occupation forces arrived. Soon after arriving, commanding officer John Hodge noted in his "Conditions on Korea" that the "situation in the South Korea (sic) makes extremely fertile ground for the establishment of Communism." From the autumn of 1946 the southern half of the peninsula was overrun by what the US military interpreted as uprisings directed by leaders in P'yongyang and Moscow.[19] Occupation authorities viewed the reverse flow of "repatriated" Koreans who illegally returned to Japan as activities by the North, and by extension the Far East communist network, endeavoring to plant agents on Japanese soil.[20]

Another thorn in Occupation officials' sides (but in their minds not necessarily divorced from communist intentions) was Japan-based Taiwanese and Korean participation in black market activities that began to spread soon after Japan's defeat. One 1946 report estimated that there some 20,000 Taiwanese were engaged in the black market. This "unruly element," which included Koreans as well, was so powerful that in one black market section of Tokyo "Japanese police are afraid to enter unaccompanied by [US] military police." When arrested, Taiwanese were tried as foreigners by a commission that included Chinese and United States personnel; Koreans, on the other hand, were tried as Japanese in Japanese courts as they qualified neither as Allied nationals nor United Nations citizens.[21] Koreans saw this as an example of American insensitivity to the harsh treatment they endured under Japanese colonial rule.

United States Occupation authorities and Japanese government officials united in the view that the best place for the former colonized aliens, and particularly those from Korea, was back in their homeland. The large numbers of people involved limited occupation

policy to encouraging—rather than forcing—their repatriation.

SCAP policy initially reflected the view that Korean and Taiwanese would inevitably return to their homelands. The Japanese population would then revert to the homogeneous state it had enjoyed during the "isolation policy [it] held for [the] centuries" leading up to the time when Japan opened its borders to the Western world, in 1854.

SCAP directed the Japanese government to bear the financial responsibility for repatriation. Japan also was to ensure that repatriates received safe passage to their homes. As predicted, the majority of Japan-based aliens did return to their homeland. Yet SCAP did not foresee that eventually as many as 600,000 Koreans would opt to remain in Japan, and that some who returned to Korea would attempt to return. One of the biggest barriers that Koreans wishing to repatriate faced was the material limitation that SCAP officials imposed on the amount of property with which they could return. Most damaging was the 1000 yen limitation on monetary possessions, an amount that officials calculated to be insufficient for one person to "exist for more than a few days, and...extremely inadequate to enable him to begin life anew." [22] All goods or cash in excess of these limitations were impounded by Occupation authorities. In January 1946, SCAP revised this policy to allow Koreans to bring with them financial documents such as postal savings and bank passbooks, with the idea that their financial estate could be transferred to them at a later date. However, as Changsoo Lee points out, this revision proved useless as financial transactions between the two countries remained suspended from the end of the war.[23]

SCAP officials faced a dilemma: while preferring that Japan-based Koreans return to their homeland, SCAP insisted that they be

allowed to choose whether they wished to leave. Occupation authorities refused (as Japanese officials no doubt wished) to force Koreans to repatriate. In May 1948 SCAP's Diplomatic Section submitted its "Staff Study Concerning Koreans in Japan" [hereafter "staff study"] that reevaluated the situation of Korean residents in Japan with the intention of advising a long-term policy designed to encourage repatriation. This report initiated a lively debate regarding Occupation policy on the status and treatment of Koreans in Japan.

The "staff study" borrowed aspects of the wartime "Aliens in Japan" view of Koreans in encouraging their repatriation. It noted that Koreans presented a number of problems to both the Occupation and Japanese authorities. They are intent on establishing political autonomy. They also participate in communist activities and thus strengthen ties linking communism on the Asian continent with that in Japan. Economically, the study continued, Koreans are infamous for their illegal black market transactions "beyond the control or tax authority of the Japanese Government." Finally, socially the people represent a group that does not readily assimilate with the Japanese "both because of the long-standing prejudice of the latter and because of [their] uneducated and generally underprivileged character." [24]

Japanese wishes for Korean repatriation, the study continued, were not out of line with US interests. Both felt it best that "as many Koreans in Japan as possible return to Korea." The "staff study" supported this idea but contradicted its pejorative image of Japan-based Koreans by adding that their repatriation could contribute to Korean society "in manpower as well as in skilled training and financial means acquired in Japan." Their presence in Japan was "for the Japanese an almost complete liability" because they draw heavily from the Japanese economy and contribute little in taxes.

The compilers of the study, however, emphasized the need to continue SCAP's fundamental policy: encouraging, rather than forcing, repatriation. Requiring Koreans en masse to return to their homeland would cause major problems for the soon to be inaugurated ROK government. It would also create ill feelings on the part of Koreans toward the United States, to say nothing of the major financial and social adjustments it would require in both countries.[25]

The study offered several policy recommendations. One important suggestion was to raise the limits of financial property with which Koreans could repatriate up to 100,000 yen. This adjustment would allow all but the wealthiest Koreans to return to Korea with their income intact. It further advised that the United States protect all assets in excess of this limit by depositing them in the owner's name for safekeeping. It also advised that Occupation policy relax the rules governing the transfer of currency and property between Korea and Japan.[26]

The study further held that Occupation policy must reassess the position of Koreans who opted to remain in Japan. It centered this discussion first on whether these foreign residents should be accorded United Nations member status, and second on the position they should occupy in Japanese society. Its compilers warned that Koreans would demand (as they had in the past) United Nations privileges. However, since Soviet opposition offered the recently formed ROK little hope of gaining UN membership, their demands held little chance of gaining acceptance. The Korean people, the study further warned, would no doubt interpret this as discriminatory given that Japan's Taiwanese residents had been granted this status. The primary difference, it explained, was that the Republic of China held UN membership and Korea did not.

In the absence of UN membership, the "staff

study” offered several options for re-categorizing Japan-based Koreans. If, for example, SCAP were to allow the soon to be established ROK government permission to designate an official representative for residence in Japan, Korean residents could register and establish their Korean nationality (but not the status of foreign national) as a first step toward repatriation. It would be ill advised, the study cautioned, for the ROK government to offer blanket Korean nationality to this population. This would only increase the “threat of exaggerated claims by Koreans in Japan.”[27]

The study did acknowledge that even reform of repatriation procedures would not convince all Japan-based Koreans to return to their country. Those who refused to register as Koreans, it advised, would retain the status of “Japanese nationality [as determined by] Japanese law,” and thus remain subject to Japanese legal codes and court system. The only exceptions would be those Koreans who had been granted entry into Japan as foreign nationals, a select group chosen by the ROK government for their technological or scholastic potentials.

An important consideration that the study noted was that Koreans requesting repatriation were largely limited to returning to the southern half of the peninsula (the ROK). This limitation alone dissuaded a large number of Koreans from returning because of their ties with communism and other leftist ideologies.[28] To date, the study noted, the Occupation forces had managed to return only 351 Koreans to their homes in northern Korea. This repatriation occurred at an early stage, before northern and southern Korean relations deteriorated.[29] Even with policy reform the study’s authors did not anticipate doing much better. Recommending that US officials inform the ROK government “of the records and activities of all Korean communists who returned to Korea so that necessary measures can be taken” surely was not a policy that

enhanced the chances of the plan attaining its stated goal: “to rid Japan of as many Korean communists as possible and prevent their re-entry to Japan.”[30]

The “staff study” received compliments for its efforts—it was the most comprehensive review of the problem to date. However, a number of its recommendations were criticized. In particular, many found the idea of Korean registration troubling. Would this action not hinder Occupation—and by extension Japanese—efforts to encourage Korean residents to leave? Even if they registered but chose to remain in Japan, how would their status and treatment differ from that of Koreans who did not register?

William J. Sebald, the United States Political Advisor to SCAP, offered his comments to the report on February 1949. Reiterating the ultimate goal of this inquiry— “reducing the size of this difficult minority group”—he argued that “making them all Korean” would trigger the opposite effect: it would remove their incentive to return to Korea. Not only would this deprive Korea of the “industrial and commercial skill it so eagerly desires,” it would also “aggravate ... the worst source of friction” between Koreans and Japanese, the tendency of Japan-based Koreans to assert the privilege of non-Japanese status. The “ultimate solution,” Sebald averred, was for the United States to leave the matter for the Japanese and ROK governments to settle after both states established sovereignty.[31]

A second issue concerned the ROK government’s registration of Japan-based Koreans. The United States, Sebald stressed, must take measures, including the use of international law, to prevent the Rhee regime from inappropriately altering the status of these people en masse. The effect of a *carte blanche* registration of all Japan-based Koreans as “Korean nationals,” even for those who do not state an intention to return, he admitted,

would mean little in legal terms as the ROK was not a member of the United Nations. It would, however, give these residents an “undeniable psychological validity in the face of the present weak law enforcement in Japan and the ineffectual position of the country’s disarmed police.”[32] Sebald fortified his arguments by pointing to Koreans’ blatant black market and other illegal activity. Sebald’s characterization of Koreans as criminals reflected the attitude of many Occupation and Japanese officials toward a people struggling to survive under conditions of poverty and discrimination.

Sebald enjoyed close and frequent contacts with the top SCAP brass, including General MacArthur. In August 1949, in a letter to the Secretary of State, he wrote that MacArthur

had been quite positive in his decision to take no action at the present time, looking to a clarification of the status of Koreans in Japan along the lines of the Mission’s recommendations. He feels that registration of Koreans at this juncture would only confuse an already complicated situation and possibly raise more problems with respect to the Koreans here than it would solve.[33]

Advancement of the plight of the Korean population in Japan, however, appeared to stall. The US encouraged the ROK and Japanese governments to negotiate settlement in their relations even before the Occupation officially closed its doors in 1952. But it was 1965 before agreements were concluded regarding normalization and the status of Japan-based Koreans.

Complications in Korean Repatriation and

Establishing Japanese Residence

SCAP’s decision to take a hands-off position on the repatriation issue was no doubt strengthened by the diametrically opposed opinions held by the Japanese and ROK governments. In effect, neither wanted these people under their jurisdiction for similar reasons: the hybrid cultural characteristics of Japan-based Koreans muddled both Korean and Japanese images of the homogeneous society that each sought to promote. The Japanese and US administrations, moreover, viewed Korean residents as liabilities.

The issue was aired in a February 1949 discussion held between US Foreign Service officer Richard B. Finn and Wajima Eiji, Director of the Control Bureau of the Japanese Foreign Office. Koreans in Japan, he explained, should be treated as “non-Japanese in all future legislation,” Wajima emphasized, and laws and regulations presently in force should be amended “in such a way as to give [Koreans] the status of non-Japanese in every aspect of the administrative field.” Here the Japanese official articulated a difference in perspective from the Occupation authority. The US view, thinking short-term, believed it best that Koreans be included as Japanese nationals.

Wajima explained the Japanese government’s reasoning behind its thinking by rejuvenating a colonial idea—the inferiority of Koreans to the Japanese. He boasted that “nearly all Koreans in Japan are extremely eager to acquire Japanese nationality,” so much so that they were willing to pay up to two million yen. The Japanese official then cited empirical research “proving” that the Koreans were an inferior race, one with “mental and social capacities” that “were of a primitive nature.” Their “inferiority,” he continued, “to a great extent motivates Japanese uncertainty and hostility in regard to the Koreans.”[34]

The newly inaugurated ROK government’s

stated its position on this issue in April 1949. It emphasized the suffering that Korean residents had endured to argue the need for their consideration as “Allied Nationals.”

... regardless of their current domicile, the nationals of the Republic of Korea should be accorded treatment as Allied Nationals. This is especially so in regard to the Korean residents in Japan, in view of the unfavorable conditions under which they originally migrated to Japan, their prolonged suffering under the Japanese as an oppressed minority group, and the peculiar situation in which they are [in] at the present.

The cover letter composed by the Korean Diplomatic Mission in Japan, emphasized that “the Republic of Korea has not requested any general repatriation of Koreans from Japan,” an issue that should be settled as a provision of a peace treaty to be signed by the ROK and Japan.[35]

In these two documents we see that Japanese and ROK official positions shared certain conclusions, but drew on fundamentally different logics: Koreans residing in Japan should maintain a separate status, and be handled differently, from their Japanese neighbors. Neither side wanted anything to do with this people. The Japanese Government wanted them deported and the ROK government preferred that they remain in Japan. At the same time, the two sides independently agreed that the issue should be resolved not by the US, but by Japanese and Koreans when they were ready to sign a treaty to reconcile their differences.

The ROK media also emphasized the cultural factor—Japan-based Koreans lacked sufficient

“Korean-ness”—to argue why the people should remain where they are. This point appeared in an April 1949 article titled “Cheil Choson munhwa undong” [The Cultural movement of Japan-based Koreans]. Although not stated directly, this Korean-language article suggested that Japan-based Koreans needed to strengthen their understanding of their ethnic heritage before they seeking repatriation.[36] Another editorial that appeared in the *P’yonghwa ilbo* in early 1950 complemented this opinion by describing the Japan-based Korean problem as one that could not be solved until these people completed education on the spirit of nation-building.[37]

Finally, the discussion regarding repatriation of Japan-based Koreans failed to adequately address the factors that prevented many Koreans from returning to their homeland. While acknowledging the limitations the authorities had placed on the amount of money with which they could return as problematic, as well as the ideological problems associated with a large number of Koreans in Japan, the discussion neglected to consider the problem of resettlement in a place that essentially was for many foreign and which experienced turmoil under a harsh occupying authority: although ethnic Koreans, many had lived for decades in Japan, and in the case of children, all their lives. Not only did this prevent many from attempting to return, it also led many who repatriated to seek a means, most often an illegal one, to return to Japan.

Adjusting the limitations on the amount of money with which Japan-based Koreans could return only solved the immediate financial problem. It did not address such long-term problems as housing and employment. One letter, intercepted by the Military Government in southern Korea, explained: “The conditions in Korea for repatriates is indeed deplorable, we have no means of livelihood, for we have no business, no homes, no food and our money was gone in a week.”[38]

Conclusion: The "Ultimate Solution" and the Status of Japan-Based Koreans

SCAP officials concluded in 1949 that determination of the status of the Korean population in Japan was a problem best left to the Japanese and ROK governments following normalization of diplomatic relations. Japan and the ROK reached this milestone in 1965; normalization of Japan and DRPK relations has yet to occur. In 1965 Japan and the ROK also signed an "Agreement on Legal Status and Treatment of South Korean Residents in Japan," one that posed a host of technical, ideological and political problems for Korean residents.[39]

This "Agreement" focused on defining the qualifications for permanent residency status for Koreans residing in Japan based on the timing and continuity of their residency in Japan. In general, they were required to provide documentary proof that their arrival date preceded the 15 August 1945 surrender of Japan to the Allied forces. Individuals were also required to demonstrate sustained residence in Japan—those who had returned to Korea for any length of time were ineligible. This rendered ineligible the thousands of Koreans who had reentered Japan illegally after returning to Korea immediately after liberation.[40]

Most problematic for the majority of Korean residents was the requirement to register as ROK nationals to qualify for permanent residence. This was offensive to the more than half of the 600,000 Korean residents in Japan who affiliated with Chongryun, the pro-North Korean group of Koreans in Japan.[41] The incentives to apply for permanent residence included Japan's "appropriate consideration" in matters concerning "the education, livelihood protection and national health insurance coverage." The Japanese government would apply this favorable consideration, as well, to financial matters of those who agreed to waive

their right to continued residence in Japan by repatriating to the ROK.[42] The "Agreement" made no mention of those who opted not to register for permanent residence status.

The terms of the "Agreement" satisfied few of the Japan-based Koreans. Even the pro-ROK Mindan group protested the terms as presented within a week of its signing. On 17 June, over 10,000 of its members gathered at the Hibiya Public Hall to demand greater equality with Japanese regarding education and employment conditions. By contrast, Chongryun's protests, centered on the very negotiations themselves, which had the effect of solidifying a two-Korea policy in Japanese diplomacy. Their status in Japan, which has remained precarious since this time, has been most directly affected by the vagaries of Japan-DPRK relations to present, with even the right to apply for nationalization closed to them and their children for many years because of ideological differences.

The plight of Japan-based Koreans began to improve from the late 1980s when the Japanese government removed one of the more controversial measures of the Alien Registration Act: fingerprinting.[43] The Japanese Diet reintroduced this practice in November 2007, but specifically excluded non-Japanese with "special permanent residency" (tokubetsu eiju ken) status (which includes the Japan-based Korean and Chinese populations) from this requirement. In recent decades there has also been a substantial rise in the number of Japan-based Koreans naturalizing and assimilating as Japanese, particularly after the Japanese government generally eased requirements for naturalization from the 1980s. At the same time the population continues to feel a backlash from swings in ROK and DPRK relations with Japan. In 2002, the DPRK acknowledgment that it had kidnapped more than a dozen Japanese citizens twenty years earlier provoked retaliatory hate activities against Korean schools, that targeted both the

students (attacks) and the institutions (bomb threats). The integration of Koreans into Japanese society thus appears to be contingent on improved relations between Japan and the DPRK.

This is a revised and abbreviated version of a chapter that appeared in Mark E. Caprio and Yoneyuki Sugita, eds., [Democracy in Occupied Japan. The U.S. occupation and Japanese politics and society](#) (London: Routledge, 2007). Mark E. Caprio is professor in the Department of Intercultural Communication and the Graduate School of 21st Century Design Studies at Rikkyo University in Tokyo, Japan. His book on Japanese assimilation policy in Korea is scheduled to be published by University of Washington Press in 2008.

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Notes

[1] Michael Weiner divides his study of this history into three phases of migration, 1910-1925, 1925-1938, and wartime. This last stage he divides into company-directed recruitment (1939-41), government-assisted recruitment (1942-44), and forced draft (1944-45). While a distinction can be made in principle between “voluntary” and “forced” labor procurement, Weiner adds that “there were numerous instances where recruiting agencies made no attempt to distinguish voluntary recruitment from involuntary conscription” even between 1939-44. See his *Race and migration in imperial Japan*, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 194-5.

[2] The Korean population in Japan more than doubled during this period. See *ibid.*, p. 197.

[3] A 1924 survey found Japanese-Korean wages differing by 5-50%, depending on the profession. See Higuchi Yuichi, *Nihon no chosen-kankokujin* [Japanese north Koreans-

south Koreans], Tokyo: Shinkosha, 2002, p. 93.

[4] Michael Weiner, *The origins of the Korean community in Japan, 1910-1923*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989, p. 53.

[5] John Hodge’s most infamous statement was labeling the Korean as “the same breed of cats as the Japanese,” an idea that he reportedly obtained from a Japanese general. See Mark Gayn, *Japan diary*, Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, Co, 1981, p. 359.

[6] USAFIK G-2 Periodic Reports, 14 December 1945.

[7] One of the gravest misunderstandings on the part of policy makers was to assume that Japan-based Koreans had been considered “Japanese nationals” up to the end of the war. For this reason many entertained the possibility that these people would eventually be able to choose acceptance of Japanese “citizenship” or maintenance of Japanese “nationality” as future options.

[8] Office of Strategic Services, “Aliens in Japan,” 29 June 1945. Included in “Occupation of Japan” United States Planning Documents, 1942-1945, Volume III of set located in the Japanese National Library.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 5-13 and 15-6. The report did acknowledge recent tendencies for Koreans to seek permanent settlement by noting a small rise in their intermarriage with Japanese as well as in the number of Koreans having been born in Japan, *ibid.*, p. 16.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 36-8.

[13] “[Basic Initial Post-Surrender Directive to Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers for the Occupation and Control of Japan](#),” Division of Special Records, Foreign Office, Japanese Government. On-line version was available.

[14] Utsumi Aiko reports that there were 23 Koreans and 21 Taiwanese among the 984 individuals who were executed for war crimes. And of the 3,419 people sentenced to life or limited imprisonment, 125 were Korean and 147 were Taiwanese. See Utsumi Aiko, “Korean ‘Imperial Soldiers’: Remembering Colonialism

and Crimes against Allied POWs,” in T. Fujitani, Geoffrey White, and Lisa Yoneyama, *Perilous memories: the Asia-Pacific war(s)*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001, p. 211.

[15] Foreign Office Japanese Government, “Japanese Nationals in Detached Territories and the Peoples of those Territories Residing in Japan,” in Records of the United States Department of State relating to the internal affairs of Japan, 1945-49, Reel 6, February 1948, pp. 9-10, Japanese National Diet Library, Kensei Room.

[16] Richard B. Finn, *Winners in peace: MacArthur, Yoshida, and postwar Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, p. 238.

[17] See, for example, documents concerning the 1948 Kobe-Osaka Riots following the School Education Law that closed many Korean schools as contained in Records of the United States Department of State relating to the internal affairs of Japan, 1945-1949, Reel 3, Japanese National Diet Library, Kensei Room. General William F. Dean, Military Governor of Korea, interpreted these riots as a communist effort to disrupt the electoral process in southern Korea. He wrote that the “Communist-inspired Koreans in Japan can only lose by such suicidal defiance of law as illustrated in the industrial areas of Kobe and Osaka.... Election day is just four days from now.... The activities of some Koreans in Japan are nothing but attempts to influence their native land’s first democratic elections.” See “General Dean’s Answer to Written Press Questions of 6 May 1948,” in Records of the United States Department of State, Reel 3.

[18] See Changsoo Lee, “The Period of Repatriation, 1945-49,” in Changsoo Lee and George De Vos, *Koreans in Japan: ethnic conflict and accommodation*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981, p. 62.

[19] Bruce Cumings, *The origins of the Korean war: liberation and the emergence of separate regimes, 1945-1947*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, pp. 197, 351.

[20] The 1948 “staff study” on Koreans in Japan

noted, “Koreans moving between Korea and Japan serve as the link between Japanese communists and those of the continent of Asia—Korean, Chinese, and Russian. See “Staff Study Concerning Koreans in Japan,” 16 August 1948, in Records of the United States Department of State, Reel 3.

[21] “Subject of Nationality and Treatment of Formosans,” in Records of the United States Department of State, Reel 1. Richard L-G Deverall, Chief of Labor Education in SCAP, writes that the Japanese government estimated that 3.5 million people engaged in black market activity. It repeatedly informed the Occupation that all Koreans in Japan were a “bunch of black-marketeers.” They failed to add, he continues, that “behind the black marketeering Koreans were sly Japanese politicians, purgees, and racketeers who found the Korean post-war status of “Friendly ally” useful... in alluding Japanese police detection or arrest.” See his *Red star over Japan*, Calcutta: Temple Press, 1952, p. 256.

[22] This was reported in a memo titled “Critical Refugee Situation” and sent to the Governor General, Headquarters, USAFIX in Seoul by the Commanding General of the 40th Division on 26 December 1945. See Gillette Papers, vol. 1, Seoul: Hanlin University, Asian Culture Research Center, 1996, pp. 370-2.

[23] Changsoo Lee, “The Period of Repatriation,” p. 59.

[24] “Staff Study Concerning Koreans in Japan,” pp. 2-3.

[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

[27] *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

[28] The majority of Japan-based Koreans originally came from towns in the southern half of the peninsula. See Sonia Ryang, *North Koreans in Japan: Language, Ideology, and Identity*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1997, p. 3.

[29] Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Exodus to North Korea: Shadows from Japan’s Cold War*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007, 22.

[30] Solutions are listed in “Staff Study

Concerning Koreans in Japan,” pp. 7-9.

[31] William J. Sebald, “Status of Koreans in Japan,” interoffice memo dated 18 February 1949 from the United States Political Advisor for Japan. Located in Records of the United States Department of State relating to the internal affairs of Japan, 1945-1949, Reel 15.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[33] William J. Sebald to Secretary of State, 15 August 1949, in *ibid.*

[34] Richard B. Finn, “Memorandum of Conversation: Koreans in Japan,” 3 February 1949, in Records of the United States Department of State relating to the internal affairs of Japan, 1945-1949, Reel 15.

[35] Letter and enclosure from the Korean Diplomatic Mission in Japan to the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, Tokyo dated 7 April 1949, contained in Records of the United States Department of State relating to the internal affairs of Japan, 1945-1949, Reel 15.

[36] “Cheil Choson munhwa undong,” [The Cultural movement of Japan-based Korea] Cheil Choson munhwa nyon kan, April 1949, pp. 50-61.

[37] “Chaeil kyop’o munje,” [The Japan-based Korean resident problem], P’yonghwa ilbo, 4 January 1950. This editorial in particular noted the leftist ideology of this group as problematic.

[38] HQ, USAFIK G-2 Periodic Reports, 7 September 1946.

[39] Terms of this “Agreement” are taken from the “unofficial translation of the gist of the agreement” carried in “Accord on Status of S. Koreans here,” Japan Times, 23 June 1965.

[40] Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “An Act Prejudicial to

the Occupation Forces: Migration Controls and Korean Residents in Post-Surrender Japan,” Japan Studies 24, no. 1 (May 2004); 5-28.

[41] Determining the exact number of Koreans that this provision affected is problematic because a sizeable number of this group was registered with both the pro-South Mindan and the pro-North Chongryun. Sonia Ryang estimates that around 220,000 Koreans were affected. See introduction to Koreans in Japan: voices from the margin, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 5. The 18 June 1965 issue of the Japan Times estimated that over half of the 600,000 Japan-based Koreans belonged to Chongryun. Tessa Morris-Suzuki verifies this figure as the perceived percentage of Chongryun Koreans in Japan. Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Exodus to North Korea, pp. 92-3. See also her Japan Focus article “[The Forgotten Victims of the North Korean Crisis](#)”.

[42] The Japanese Government had encouraged repatriation to the DPRK from 1959. This action, which returned over 93,000 Koreans (and their Japanese spouses) to the DPRK, lasted through 1967. Initially this had infuriated the ROK government and stalled normalization negotiations. For discussion see Sonia Ryang, “The North Korean homeland of Koreans in Japan,” pp. 35-9; Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Exodus to North Korea.

[43] The 1947 Alien Registration Ordinance and the 1952 Alien Registration Act were both modeled on the US Smith Act of 1940 introduced to register and fingerprint foreign residents. In Japan, fingerprinting was introduced in the latter 1952 Act, which went into effect in April 28, 1952, the day the occupation ended. Takemae Eiji, Inside GHQ, pp. 450, 499.