

## *Conclusion*

For many US policymakers, including the administration of George W. Bush prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, Japan after World War II offered a successful model for how best to conduct a military occupation. However, amid the hasty and ill-conceived predictions of triumph for the American occupations in Iraq or Afghanistan, parties within and outside of the US government alike usually forgot some important historical details.

Together with their counterparts in southern Korea and the Ryukyu Islands, US occupiers in Japan had helped to transform the regional order in Northeast Asia, from an order dominated by the Japanese imperium to a new American hegemony. The dissolution of the Japanese Empire meant the expulsion of officers and soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy, the *kempeitai* military police, colonial statesmen and bureaucrats, *zaibatsu* elites and employees, and vast numbers of migrant settlers, from liberated colonies and occupied territories alike. They were replaced by an influx of American occupying armies and their dependents, military government officers, CIC agents, civil affairs experts, and visiting statesmen and businessmen. For these US authorities, occupied territory was a borderless realm of free and unrestricted movement, as they encouraged a steady inflow of American citizens, goods, ideas, and culture, helping to reorient the former Japanese Empire from Asia to America.

Throughout the occupation period, authorized parties associated with the Allied forces did enjoy considerable freedom of movement. On the other hand, former imperial subjects, who had been accustomed to circular migration in the “transborder living sphere” of the Japanese Empire, found that the newly drawn borders of occupation restricted them to a one-way return migration. A half century of migrants moving, settling, and intermixing within the Japanese Empire was abruptly cut off with Japan’s defeat in war on August 15, 1945.

This epochal moment divided imperial subjects into defeated Japanese and liberated colonial subjects, initiating a messy and protracted unmixing of these populations along ethnic lines in the wake of empire. At first, the Japanese government prioritized the repatriation of demobilized military servicemen, including

Taiwanese and Koreans, while deporting Chinese and Korean laborers conscripted for the war effort—except for coal miners. Embracing their liberation, other resourceful Korean migrants chartered small fishing boats for their return journeys, leading a spontaneous mass exodus from Japan. Ethnic organizations such as the League of Koreans emerged to facilitate this return migration, while providing support for compatriots who remained in Japan. Likewise, driven by a resurgent sense of Okinawan identity, the League of Okinawans also demanded that the Japanese government assist fellow islanders while they awaited repatriation. Representing the needs and interests of their respective migrant communities, these influential organizations contributed to the process of ethnic segregation that unfolded in postimperial Japan.

The deployment of US occupation forces in Japan, Korea, and the Ryukyus symbolized the dawn of American hegemony in the region, and their joint repatriation program played a decisive role in resettling Northeast Asia. When the limited number of remaining Japanese commercial ferries struggled to meet the high demand for transporting repatriates, the US military provided a hundred Liberty Ships and eighty-five LSTs to expedite repatriation to and from Japan.<sup>1</sup> The close cooperation and coordination among occupation forces in the region helped determine the order, schedule, and overall pace of repatriation through 1946 and beyond. They also endorsed the registration of former colonial subjects and Ryukyuan as “non-Japanese,” reflecting SCAP’s de-Japanization policy, which strongly encouraged these migrant minorities to repatriate.

However, competing jurisdictions and divergent interests among various occupation authorities also resulted in periodic disagreements over how best to administer repatriation regulations. USAMGIK’s blunt criticism of the strict customs restrictions imposed upon repatriates is particularly significant, as it called into question the effectiveness of SCAP’s repatriation program. SCAP’s ESS Section stubbornly defended this policy, insisting that the customs regulations applied equally to Japanese and non-Japanese alike.<sup>2</sup> Yet this turned out to be a moot point, especially after repatriation was made mandatory for all Japanese nationals, while non-Japanese were given the freedom to repatriate or not. More than a half million Koreans ultimately decided to remain in Japan, thus retaining the sum of their hard-earned savings. Furthermore, the officially promoted “mass repatriation program” amounted in the end to a misnomer of significant proportions, as it accounted for less than one-tenth of the 1.5 million Koreans who returned to their homeland after liberation.

In addition to inter-occupation cooperation, the American-led effort at resettling Northeast Asia was dependent upon a high degree of mutual collaboration between the occupiers and the occupied. SCAP succeeded in brokering cooperative

relations with the Japanese state, which eagerly sought to retain its governing authority, in the execution of repatriation. On the other hand, USAMGIK and USMGR each struggled to plan for and implement policies aimed at reintegrating returnees, largely due to the absence of a functioning state or a meaningful comprador class in Korea or the Ryukyus after Japanese rule. Military government officials had at their disposal ample supplies of material resources to meet the needs of returnees, but they were hampered by a dearth of reliable local officials with governing experience to administer a sound resettlement program. Consequently disregarded, returnees found themselves relegated to the fringes of society, where many resorted to food rations and the black markets for survival. Others joined political movements to resist direct US military rule. To escape from their predicament, increasing numbers of Korean and Ryukyuan returnees from Japan resolved to resettle in the former metropole, utilizing smuggling networks to return to the Japanese islands.

SCAP responded to the waves of unauthorized immigration by attempting to enforce a blockade of occupied Japan, eager to avoid this unexpected challenge to its mass repatriation program. Again, it relied on close cooperation and coordination with the Eighth Army, BCOF, and the Japanese police to apprehend, detain, and deport these “blockade runners.” The joint effort to combat smuggling and illegal immigration indirectly affected the large Korean community in Japan, as American and Japanese authorities actively collaborated with each other to deal with the “Korean problem.” This collaboration spawned the alien registration system, which merged preexisting Japanese and American models. It was primarily aimed at documenting former colonial subjects to reestablish state surveillance over them. Alien registration was then incorporated into the powerful new migration control system, shaped by American immigration laws, which gave the Japanese state discretionary authority to deport undesirable aliens in the name of national security.

In the context of the heightening Cold War in Northeast Asia, SCAP was hardly alone in the American-led effort to block illegal shipping and immigration from occupied territory. USAMGIK also institutionalized a rudimentary system of identity documentation closely linked to restrictive migration regulations, transferring the centralized power of enforcement to the national security state it created in South Korea. In addition, USMGR enacted its “passport system” to stamp out rampant smuggling, while enforcing stringent security measures for screening communist infiltrators. Each of the three US occupation administrations in the region thus bequeathed exclusionary border and migration controls, helping to consolidate American hegemony in the divided realm of the former Japanese Empire.

## Controlling Postwar and Postcolonial Migrations in Europe and Asia

A few historians have discerned the significance of how the borders of American occupations were closed off from the rest of the region that Japan had recently called the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Noting the striking absence of Japanese–Asian intercourse in the wake of empire, Marius Jansen observed that Japan after World War II “was in total isolation from Asia and much of the West” for a half decade or more. Drawing a historical parallel with the Tokugawa period, he rightly attributed this postwar isolation to travel restrictions imposed on the Japanese, who had so recently been scattered throughout Asia.<sup>3</sup> John Dower also adduced Tokugawa Japan’s two centuries of self-imposed seclusion, contrasting it with occupied Japan’s “strange seclusion,” which saw the country withdraw from the world while locked in a close embrace with its American conqueror.<sup>4</sup>

As insightful as these historical analogies with early modern Japan are, closer analogies with postwar Japan’s occupied isolation are found by comparing border and migration controls between US military occupations in Northeast Asia and Central Europe after World War II. Securing newly redrawn borders of jurisdiction by controlling the movement of people who crossed over them was a pressing issue for Allied occupiers in postwar Europe as well as in Asia. The architects of postwar Europe used these borders to divide and isolate occupied Italy and Germany from the rest of the region that the Axis powers ruled over, including Austria, which the Allies occupied separately. Serving as a direct model for the postwar occupations in Asia, the isolation of occupied territory in Europe was enforced by suspending foreign relations, repatriating masses of people, and closing borders to contain free travel and emigration.

In occupied Germany, American authorities implemented a law that prohibited anyone from crossing the German frontiers, except as authorized by the US military government, and civilians were not even allowed to leave their place of residence without permission. The primary purpose of this border control law was to “seal off Germany as a security measure to prevent the escape of German intelligence personnel and other unwanted persons, primarily former Nazi officials.”<sup>5</sup> American authorities deployed in occupied Japan followed the same logic, blockading borders to prevent Japanese war crimes suspects from fleeing the country. The establishment of Allied border controls in occupied territory was thus aimed initially at containing a lingering security threat posed by Axis fugitives who remained at large.

Beyond such security concerns from the late war, the escalating political rivalry between the US and USSR contributed to the tightening of border controls,

further isolating occupied territory in Europe and in Asia. Mere months after the end of the European war, the focus of American authorities shifted from Germany's external borders to its internal borders, as a flood of German refugees crossed into the western zones from the eastern zone under Soviet occupation.<sup>6</sup> Much like the internal migration of millions of Koreans who crossed the 38th parallel into American custody in US-occupied southern Korea, an estimated 1.6 million Germans crossed over from the Soviet zone through June 1946. As a result, the Allies agreed to close off zonal borders, requiring all persons to obtain inter-zonal travel permits, or passports, without which one was punishable for illegal border crossing.<sup>7</sup> No such internal passport system was implemented in Korea, where American and Soviet authorities lacked either the willpower or the manpower to cooperate in monitoring their shared border. The fortification of Cold War frontiers in Germany and Korea continued beyond the occupation period, as the two divided nations became isolated from one another for decades to come.

German refugees fleeing the Soviet zone were but one of many groups of people who crossed Europe's postwar borders, legally or not, during the tumultuous years between World War II and the emerging Cold War. Allied military directives ordered the repatriation of an estimated 8 million civilians. Categorized as "displaced persons" (DPs), these included concentration camp inmates, prisoners of war, forced laborers, and foreign workers in Germany at the end of the war. In addition, there were an estimated 3 million other displaced persons in other parts of Europe, most of whom had been displaced by the Nazis' carefully planned wartime state policies. Ethno-national identity served as a critical marker for sorting these people, especially between nationals of wartime allies and enemy states, a distinction that was invoked when establishing priorities for their repatriation.<sup>8</sup> As a result, a majority of displaced French, Belgian, Dutch, Polish, Czech, and Soviet nationals were repatriated rapidly by the fall of 1945. Italians, as nationals of a former enemy state, were repatriated next, while the expulsion of Germans from Central and Eastern Europe, underway since early 1945, meant that no special provisions were made for them in the Potsdam agreements. American authorities adopted many of these measures from early postwar Europe and applied them in Asia, where postwar repatriation was just getting underway.

Although humanitarian concerns drove the Allies to expend significant resources in providing care for displaced persons in Europe, powerful political motivations in determining their fate often worked against these vulnerable people. One such problem involved the Anglo-American-directed repatriation of over 2 million Soviet nationals, many of them against their will, in order to abide by agreements made among wartime allies. Since the Soviet Union was an important ally in the war against fascism, British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden

promised in September 1944 that all Soviet nationals would be repatriated “whether they were willing to return or not.”<sup>9</sup>

This promise was signed into an agreement in May 1945, initiating the enforcement of repatriation, often involving British and American troops pushing desperate people across the border into Soviet custody. Confirming their worst fears, the journey of these reluctant repatriates often met a tragic end: among the 5.5 million Soviet nationals repatriated through the early 1950s, one in five were shot or dispatched to the Gulag, while many more were exiled to Siberia.<sup>10</sup> In the meantime, inter-Allied cooperation was replaced by the Cold War conflict, as the Western Allies belatedly terminated forced repatriation in 1947 and began recasting displaced persons as political refugees from communist states. Instead of relying on repatriation, the US government thereafter championed the emigration of these anti-communist refugees from Europe, ostensibly for humanitarian reasons.

In Asia, too, the treatment of displaced persons during the postwar years exposed a predicament of competing motives, as well as underlying contradictions, between political expediency and humanitarianism. As was the case in Europe in the wake of war, the treatment of millions of forced laborers, military conscripts, prisoners of war, and “comfort women” mobilized and displaced by the Japanese war effort throughout Asia largely depended on postwar contingencies—namely, which Allies were in command of what territory, and whether those authorities recognized a humanitarian need for repatriation.<sup>11</sup> And just as in Europe, so too in Asia did US occupation forces provide the bulk of needed resources and the organizational leadership in orchestrating mass repatriation.

While the 2.5 million migrants in Japan discussed in this book were fortunate enough to be offered the choice of repatriating or not, those from other parts of the former Japanese Empire were at the mercy of local forces. The Nationalist Chinese (GMD) authorities distinguished displaced persons from those who actively aided Japan’s war effort or who willfully benefited from Japanese rule, a distinction that directly affected Chinese politics toward repatriation. Koreans who migrated to the puppet state of Manchukuo were therefore to be returned home voluntarily, though the GMD’s confiscation of their property and assets drove an estimated 700,000 to 800,000 Koreans out of northeastern China.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, Soviet authorities made no such distinctions, detaining an estimated 43,000 Korean laborers to continue working in coal mines in Sakhalin, where they were forced to remain until the 1990s, when a small number began to be repatriated to North and South Korea.

In considering Allied policies towards postwar population transfers, it is noteworthy that displaced persons constituted but a fraction of people who moved, or

were removed, in Europe or Asia. An estimated 12 million ethnic Germans expelled from Central and Eastern Europe were also displaced from their homes, and a large proportion of them perished in the process. The 3.2 million Japanese civilians repatriated from various parts of Asia were displaced, too—not by the war itself, but by the terms of the postwar settlement that followed. These displaced Germans and Japanese, especially those who ended up in Soviet hands, suffered as much as other displaced persons for whom the Allies cared.<sup>13</sup>

However, US authorities coined the term “displaced persons” to refer specifically to various victims of fascist states and their respective policies of enforced population movements, and thus excluded nationals of enemy states. Within a year after the war, the use of this term was expanded to include victims of Soviet political persecution. As noted by Gerard Cohen, “the acronym DP exclusively applied to particular victims of Hitler and Stalin,” an important status conferred on a relatively small percentage of displaced persons around the world.<sup>14</sup>

In occupied Japan, American officials were disinclined to recognize colonial migrants who refused repatriation as displaced persons, leaving them without any aid from either occupation or Japanese government agencies. Instead, they were registered as “aliens” and required to carry identity passbooks as part of a newly instituted state surveillance system, which had no parallel in the treatment of displaced persons in postwar Europe. Neither were those who entered occupied Japan considered refugees—not even those fleeing the Korean War—but rather condemned as illegal immigrants, subject to deportation. In this sense, the right to seek asylum, as enshrined in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was not applicable to these continental Asians after its adoption in 1948. Political refugees from communist states, on the other hand, enjoyed a more favorable status in human rights laws shaped largely by the United States and its Western Allies.<sup>15</sup> Reflecting one of many ambiguities involving such rights for refugees, those fleeing US military rule and US-sponsored, undemocratic regimes in East Asia were unworthy, unwelcome, and detrimental to American interests in the Cold War context.

A comparison of the experiences of displaced persons in Europe and Asia, and how the Allies treated them, reveals a noteworthy intersection between postwar and postcolonial history that is distinctive to Northeast Asia in particular. Repatriation, resettlement, illegal migration, and deportation were all parts of the mass population movements in both postwar history and postcolonial history. In the case of the former Japanese Empire, the “postwar” and the “postcolonial” commenced simultaneously when Japan lost both the war and its empire in August 1945. The victorious Allies were forced to contend with the reality that displaced persons in Asia, unlike in Europe, had been displaced not only by years

of violent warfare, but also by decades of Japanese colonialism, complicating the task of population transfers after the war. Reluctant to confirm the status of Japanese colonial subjects as displaced persons, Allied governments showed no special commitment to helping them. This lack of concern resulted in SCAP's ambiguous policy of treating Koreans and Taiwanese *both* as liberated peoples *and* as enemy nationals, depending on the circumstances.

Such evasion could only spark ongoing friction between Japanese authorities and former colonial subjects. When it did, occupation officials often insisted that such problems be resolved through repatriation or deportation. The Allies thus aimed to return all non-Japanese and Japanese alike to their respective homelands, reflecting their commitment to divide and isolate Japan from its former colonial empire in Asia. In this sense, repatriation served as a prime example of what Lori Watt calls "third party decolonization," whereby the Allies triangulated the process of dissolving Japan's empire by interposing themselves between the defeated Japanese and liberated Asians.<sup>16</sup>

In practice, decolonization in Northeast Asia meant removing Japanese colonial institutions, laws, and authorities, replacing them with local elements that Allied occupation officials carefully chose to establish postcolonial states. Although the particularities in this process of eliminating Japanese colonialism varied depending on the policy priorities of the Allies, a common consensus soon emerged that the removal of all Japanese colonists was in their best interest. In Taiwan, Manchuria, and other parts of China, the Nationalist Chinese detained a minority of Japanese technocrats and soldiers, who were compelled to help rebuild an industrialized, anti-communist nation. The Republic of China relied on American assistance in returning all other Japanese.<sup>17</sup> Many American authorities shared with their Chinese and Korean counterparts serious concerns with the fact that Japanese migrants had at times acted as agents of Japan's imperial expansion.<sup>18</sup> By uprooting and returning these migrant settlers from what had been Japanese colonies and occupied territories, repatriation served as a crucial means of postwar decolonization. SCAP's ban against overseas travel and emigration of Japanese nationals also contributed to the decolonization in Northeast Asia, not unlike similar restrictions enforced against Europeans by postcolonial nations in other parts of Asia and Africa.

The comparative framework also exposed the limits of the language of "decolonization" to describe the dissolution of the Japanese Empire in Northeast Asia. The Allies in the region never officially adopted decolonization as a major policy objective, or even used the term, while European officials were forced to recognize the global trend of decolonization after the Second World War. The preferred focus of American occupiers in Northeast Asia was on nation-building, even if

this policy objective was not evenly applied to all their occupied territories, as exemplified by the prolonged US military rule in the Ryukyu Islands. For this reason, SCAP maintained the position that unresolved problems resulting from Japanese colonial rule be addressed in the future through bilateral negotiations between Japan and its former possessions, and that the United States, as a third party, would not interfere in such matters.

This was a somewhat disingenuous stance, especially given the fact that USAMGIK had proposed plans for mediating a settlement between Japan and Korea, only to have them rejected by SCAP.<sup>19</sup> However, the third-party rationale was employed as a convenient justification to avoid becoming embroiled in sensitive issues of colonialism. Such an evasion of questions related to decolonization was reflected in SCAP's failure to compel Japanese authorities to reimburse Korean conscript laborers for their unpaid wages and assets, despite its initial commitment to do so. It is reflected again in SCAP's announcement in November 1946 that former colonial subjects in Japan would retain their Japanese nationality, thus pressing repatriation on Koreans and Taiwanese who maintained they were liberated nationals of other polities. Ultimately, US authorities in Northeast Asia determined that the painstaking effort required to reach a postcolonial settlement did not necessarily serve American interests, which were squarely focused on the containment of communism and the cultivation of client states in the region. However, the consequences of this Cold War freeze on decolonization would plague US-mediated efforts to foster closer ties between Japan and South Korea beyond the normalization of relations in 1965, resurfacing as the so-called history problem beginning in the 1980s and which has remained salient since then.

The US effort at dismantling the Japanese Empire was also fraught with conflict and contradictions in the Ryukyus, where the ambiguous status of the archipelago and its people was intertwined with their history, ethnicity, and identity. By categorizing Okinawans in Japan as non-Japanese, and encouraging them to return to the Ryukyus, SCAP persistently promoted their de-Japanization. Meanwhile, in the wake of the mass protests against US military rule in Okinawa between 1948 and 1949, USMGR began to advocate a "Ryukyuanization" of the archipelago.<sup>20</sup> The dual policy of de-Japanization and Ryukyuanization implied liberation, decolonization, and independence—powerful ideas that resonated with liberal Okinawans. However, even those repatriates who advocated autonomous self-government were confronted by the stark reality of direct military rule in the Ryukyus, which contrasted starkly with the democratization of occupied Japan. The elusive appearance of Ryukyuan autonomy, symbolized by travel documents issued to "Ryukyuan" without any reference to their nationality, was an American creation, invented to maintain the division of the Ryukyus

from Japan. The policy of de-Japanization ultimately backfired when successive waves of resistance against the US military's neocolonial rule led Ryukyuan residents to demand reversion to Japan.

The anomaly of the indirect and haphazard dissolution of the Japanese Empire precludes any facile comparisons with postcolonial migrations that accompanied decolonization in other parts of the world. On the one hand, the repatriation of Japanese settlers from Japan's liberated colonies in Asia may be comparable to the repatriation of the French *pied noir* from revolutionary Algeria, or of Italian settlers from Italy's liberated Mediterranean and East African colonies.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, occupied Japan's isolation from postcolonial Asia, enforced by SCAP's ban against immigration, stands in stark contrast to the dramatic increase in postcolonial migrations to Europe. Whereas immigration to Japan from its former empire came to a prolonged standstill after 1945, a reverse trend became apparent in Holland, France, and the United Kingdom. In these countries, over 3 million people from the former colonial world had settled by 1980. Initially, this new wave of immigrants to Europe was largely refugees fleeing their homelands for having supported the losing side in colonial wars, including 13,000 Indonesians who settled in Holland and 85,000 *harkis* from Algeria who settled in France. They were soon followed by hundreds of thousands of postcolonial immigrants, who provided the low-cost labor that promoted the economic recovery of Western Europe after the Second World War.<sup>22</sup>

No such parallels can be found in postimperial Japan. Having lost its empire by fiat, not through colonial wars of independence, the Japanese state faced no obligation to accept Chinese, Taiwanese, or Korean collaborators, who were persecuted at home but unable to seek refuge in the former metropole. Neither was the state compelled to rely on immigrant laborers, as millions of Japanese repatriates and internal migrants from rural areas contributed towards economic recovery and growth. Furthermore, Japanese emigration to Central and South American countries resumed in 1952, supported by post-occupation government programs aimed at tackling the problem of overpopulation in Japan. The minuscule number of postcolonial immigrants to Japan were treated as illegal aliens. Those who managed to escape detection had to live in constant fear of arrest and deportation for years, if not decades.

Such vastly differing patterns of postcolonial migrations must be understood in relationship to the transformation of citizenship rights in metropolitan Europe and Japan after the Second World War. Unlike Japan, which was forced to relinquish its empire at war's end, France and the United Kingdom attempted to bolster their crumbling empires through an expansion of citizenship, including conceding the right of colonial subjects to enter the metropole. For example, the passage

of French Union citizenship in 1946 established legal equality between French nationals and colonial subjects, thus eliminating the latter term from official language. The UK followed suit in 1948 by passing its Nationality Act, which affirmed that inhabitants of its Commonwealth had British nationality, with equal rights of entry into and employment within the UK.<sup>23</sup> Although French citizenship was subsequently revoked from Vietnamese, Algerians, and others who fought against and gained independence from France, the British law guaranteed citizenship rights to former colonial subjects, thus honoring Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which stated, “No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.”<sup>24</sup>

Unconstrained by international human rights accords that it did not sign (and could not have signed) during the occupation, the government of the newly independent Japan immediately stripped former colonial subjects of their Japanese nationality on the very day the occupation ended in 1952. Such a unilateral denationalization thus left more than a half million persons stateless, without any citizenship rights, in postimperial Japan. The Japanese government presented these stateless aliens with two potential solutions to solve their predicament: repatriation and naturalization. In December 1955, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs devised a plan to encourage repatriation. After four years of intense lobbying and negotiations, it began in December 1959 to ship out tens of thousands of Koreans to North Korea.<sup>25</sup> From April 1952, the Ministry of Justice opened the door to naturalizing former colonial subjects, as more than 20,000 Koreans and Taiwanese became Japanese citizens through 1960.<sup>26</sup> However, an overwhelming majority could not return to their respective homelands for economic and sociopolitical reasons, and refused to renounce their ethnic heritage and identity as a precondition for obtaining Japanese citizenship. The Japanese state thus continued to treat these former colonial subjects as stateless persons, who were totally unprotected by any legal rights.<sup>27</sup>

Korean residents in post-occupation Japan (*zainichi* in Japanese) remained stateless persons, at least until Japan and the Republic of Korea signed a treaty normalizing relations in 1965. According to the terms of the treaty, Koreans who had migrated to Japan during the colonial period and their descendants were offered a special status as “treaty permanent residents” (*kyōtei eijūsha*).<sup>28</sup> Holders of this anomalous status were granted certain privileges as South Korean nationals, such as the right to travel or study abroad, no longer hampered by fears of being barred from reentering Japan. Following ratification of the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1982, North Koreans were permitted to acquire “general permanent residence,” a status more secure than statelessness, but less so than the formal treaty rights enjoyed by South Koreans. Under the terms

of the Refugee Convention, Koreans and other foreign residents became eligible for state health, pension, and disability benefits; government housing services, child-rearing allotments, and other entitlements formerly reserved for Japanese nationals.<sup>29</sup> However, nationality clauses still bar *zainichi* Koreans from most public-sector jobs, including the teaching profession. Furthermore, the Education Ministry does not honor the high school diplomas of Korean ethnic high schools, making it mandatory for their graduates to take an equivalency exam to enter state-run universities.<sup>30</sup>

American occupation authorities were fully aware that Japanese officials were preparing to denationalize former colonial subjects but did nothing to intervene, remaining quietly complicit in the denial of human rights in postimperial Japan. Such tacit complicity was part of a larger US effort to maintain Japan's active collaboration in combating communism within and beyond its borders, especially since a majority of *zainichi* Koreans openly supported the North Korean regime through the 1980s.<sup>31</sup> Taken together with exclusionary immigration laws, which American occupiers took a more direct role in drafting, such complicity and collaboration paved the way for the construction of national security states in the region that emerged in the wake of empire. Standing above this hierarchy of national sovereignty, the foreign occupiers themselves remained exempt from such exclusionary laws, as their priority remained the consolidation of American hegemony in the region beyond the occupation period.

### **The Expansion and Curtailment of American Hegemony**

How did the administration of US military occupations serve to lay the foundations for expanding American hegemony in Northeast Asia after World War II? One way to answer this question is to measure the extent of American authority in the region by examining the extralegal authority of US occupation forces, who were totally immune from existing local laws. This legal immunity entered force at the very moment American occupiers crossed into occupied territory, as they were exempt from standard immigration and customs regulations. Instead, an official deployment order or transfer order from the appropriate military authorities governed the entry and exit of US occupation forces, whose military identification served in lieu of passports. Such minimal requirements guaranteed maximum freedom and flexibility in moving military personnel throughout the region.

On the other hand, US occupation officials set up detailed regulations to control the movement of people and goods in Japan, Korea, and the Ryukyus,

demonstrating that their authority extended to the very borders of occupied territory. The authority to enforce these regulations was gradually transferred to local officials, though none were allowed to inspect the personal belongings of occupation forces, much less deny their entry and exit, regardless of any violations.

Another illuminating and more controversial example of the occupiers' absolute immunity was their exemption from criminal jurisdiction in occupied territory. American servicemen who committed crimes ranging from petty theft, reckless driving, and black marketeering to assault, rape, and murder could not be punished by local jurisdictions. As a result, American soldiers and sailors in Japan, Korea, and the Ryukyus broke the law with impunity. Sexual violence against local women, in particular, was a prevalent problem. Military police were authorized to arrest American servicemen found to have committed such criminal acts, which were punishable by military courts as stipulated in the Articles of War. In reality, however, MPs arrested relatively few servicemen for these offenses, and the military courts convicted even fewer. Furthermore, news of criminal activity by occupation forces was totally suppressed, as censorship orders outlawed the publication of articles and reports considered "inimical to the objectives of the Occupation."<sup>32</sup> Such a concealed and lenient application of extralegal military jurisdiction would emerge as a major source of conflict when US officials demanded perpetuation of the practice beyond the occupation period.

A final, related measure of American hegemony after World War II can be gleaned by tracing the legal expansion of US military authority outside of the framework of military occupations. The extension of diplomatic immunity enjoyed by American servicemen was formalized as part of a series of bilateral and multilateral security treaties the US government signed with its Cold War allies in the 1950s. These security treaties served to lease territory for US military bases, while accompanying status of forces agreements (SOFA) granted extralegal immunity, in a set package that helped to secure American hegemony throughout the Cold War era and beyond. US military bases therefore became exclusive zones of "occupation" within a nation, whereby the host nation held *de jure* sovereignty while the US exercised *de facto* sovereignty over the leased territory. Such arrangements amounted to the establishment of a new form of extraterritoriality, based on unequal security treaties, that East Asian states grudgingly accepted in exchange for American military assistance in containing communism. This expansion of American hegemony thus became interlinked to a vast, global network of US military bases around the world.

US military occupations, together with their border and migration controls, fundamentally reshaped the state and society of occupied territories in Asia and Europe after World War II. Today, the presence of over 125,000 American troops

on US military bases in Japan, South Korea, Germany, and Italy serves as one of the most visible, enduring legacies of these occupations. The military bases that replaced the occupations are the clearest territorial markers of postwar American hegemony, which are maintained to defend allies while also limiting their sovereignty, making them US dependencies.

As Bruce Cumings has noted, this hegemonic penetration was most apparent in semi-sovereign nations that were on the front line of the Cold War, such as West Germany and South Korea.<sup>33</sup> And yet American predominance in East Asia made this hegemonic power feel that much more palpable, whereas Allied cooperation in Western Europe resulted in regional integration represented by multilateral institutions. The inability to assert independent foreign policy or defense initiatives, relying instead on the growing political, economic, and military power of the United States, led to the creation of what some have called American client states in East Asia.<sup>34</sup>

The maintenance of hegemony, however, depends upon the ability of a hegemon to enforce its dominance—a basic principle that the United States could not, and did not, uphold indefinitely. While the US government secured strong alliances with anti-communist states in Northeast Asia, social resistance against American hegemonic power grew over time, especially in post-occupation Japan. Long before the protest movement against the renewal of the US-Japan security treaty culminated in the violent riots of 1960, one of the strongest and most consistent forces of opposition came from leftist Korean residents in Japan. SCAP's order to forcibly close down ethnic schools in April 1948 disillusioned an entire generation of resident Koreans, who had initially welcomed US occupation forces as an "army of liberation." Maintaining their strong spirit of independence, however, volunteer teachers continued to educate the Korean youth by tutoring them in exchange for meals with their families, while the larger communities began collecting donations to rebuild ethnic schools. Likewise, the enforced dissolution of the League of Koreans in September 1949 engendered deep-seated resentment against American and Japanese authorities, serving as a strong motivation for rebuilding a new ethnic organization.

A half year after the outbreak of the Korean War, former League members established the Democratic Front for the Unification of Koreans in Japan (Minjeon in abbreviated Korean), initiating an anti-American struggle to oppose the US intervention in the civil war. Building upon its cross-border contacts with the Korean peninsula, in 1955 the Democratic Front was reorganized as the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryun in abbreviated Korean), explicitly aligning itself with the North Korean state. According to Sonia Ryang, Chongryun soon commanded "mass support among Koreans in Japan for whom

North Korea still had greater sway than South Korea.” Mindan, its rival organization, was not as popular, largely because the United States backed the authoritarian regimes in South Korea. Hundreds of thousands of *zainichi* Koreans continued to support Chongryun and the 160 schools it operated throughout Japan, thus resisting the American allies that threatened to break its transnational networks of interaction and cooperation with North Korea.<sup>35</sup> The Alien Registration Law’s onerous and demeaning requirement to forcibly fingerprint all non-Japanese every five years, a direct legacy of Japanese-American collaboration during the occupation, galvanized Koreans across the political spectrum into a resistance movement. In the midst of McCarthyism in the US and the Red Purge in Japan, Nicholas Collaer had convinced the Japanese government to enact mandatory fingerprinting in a systematic practice that would endure for decades. Just as the League of Koreans led a sustained campaign against the Osaka Prefectural Police’s attempt to fingerprint Koreans in 1946, Korean and Chinese organizations launched an intense campaign against the reenactment of fingerprinting in 1952. Whereas the appeal of these ethnic organizations was limited mainly to minority aliens, the institutionalized discrimination against them received widespread public sympathy when an individual first-generation Korean immigrant refused to be fingerprinted in 1980. This incident encouraged others to engage in civil disobedience, leading to well-publicized court cases supported by human rights groups.<sup>36</sup> The persistent resistance movement finally forced the government to abolish mandatory fingerprinting in the year 2000, nearly a half century after Collaer insisted that it be implemented to track “subversive” aliens.

Another illuminating example of the limitations of American hegemony can be found in the intermittent struggle against US military rule in the Ryukyu Islands, which paved the way for the reversion of Okinawa Prefecture to Japan in 1972. The incorporation of the Ryukyus into America’s defense perimeter in the Asia-Pacific region had resulted in renewed contacts and increased interactions with Japan. Nevertheless, the 30th parallel border remained in place, separating the Ryukyus from Japan. This administrative division became the main subject in the contentious public debate over the political disposition of the Ryukyus, which was reignited with the commencement of US-Japan peace treaty negotiations in early 1950. In order to justify the US government’s decision to retain control over the strategically valuable archipelago, USMGR held elections for governors and assemblymen, leading to the inauguration of the four island group (*guntō*) governments in November 1950. The following month, the military government was reorganized to resemble SCAP’s indirect occupation of Japan, allegedly for American civil affairs officers to operate through the *guntō* government authorities. In reality, however, the newly named USCAR maintained

a firm grip on the reins of governing authority.<sup>37</sup> This American effort to construct a façade of democratic and sovereign governing structures was not lost on the political opposition in the Ryukyus, many members of which came to embrace the possibility of returning to Japanese sovereignty as a viable alternative to the elusive dream of independence.

The Okinawan reversion movement evolved into a cross-border political movement, linking together various pro-reversion activists and organizations in the Ryukyus with those in Japan. Some of the earliest reversion activists in Japan were former civil and public servants from Okinawa Prefecture, including Nakayoshi Ryōkō, who gained national prominence for their strong opposition to trusteeship.<sup>38</sup> Specifically, US Secretary of State Dean Acheson publicly announced in January 1950 the possibility that the Ryukyus would be placed under a UN trusteeship, catapulting reversion to the forefront of public opinion against the indefinite separation of the Ryukyus from Japan. Upon hearing Acheson's announcement, Nakayoshi sent a long letter to Governor Taira Tatsuō in Okinawa, urging him to organize a signature drive against trusteeship and in support of reversion, and promised to do the same in Japan.<sup>39</sup> Shortly after news reached Okinawa that Prime Minister Yoshida accepted the Ryukyuan trusteeship arrangement in January 1951, Taira's Socialist Mass Party, together with the People's Party, announced their support for reversion. In April these two parties formed the Association for the Promotion of Reversion to Japan (Nihon Fukki Sokushin Kiseikai), or Reversion Association, which began a signature drive campaign throughout Okinawa calling for reversion. When it became apparent that the signature drive in Okinawa was failing to meet expectations, Nakayoshi sent over 2,000 leaflets to the Reversion Association for distribution, encouraging all Okinawans to unite themselves in support of the movement.<sup>40</sup> In response, Okinawan activists in the Ryukyus and in Japan formed a united front between the reversion movements on both sides of the 30th parallel.

Okinawa was not the only island group in the Ryukyus to be swept up in the cross-border reversion movement with Japan. In fact, activist organizations in the Amami island group and their counterparts in Japan that coordinated the reversion movement preceded Okinawa's, were better orchestrated, and were more united. Geographically and historically closer to Japan, Amami stood apart from the rest of the Ryukyus. The sustained political movement to reunite Amami with Japan was, therefore, just as much a unified expression of pro-Japanese sentiment as it was a rejection of the US effort to create the Northern Ryukyus as part of an imagined Ryukyuan polity and identity. The expanding scale and momentum of the underground networks of Amamian activists, even

more than their Okinawan counterparts, proved a formidable challenge to the border and migration controls of American authorities on either side of the 30th parallel. What emerged then was a cross-border reversion movement largely independent from—and ultimately more successful than—the Okinawan movement.

Unlike Okinawa, where the push for greater autonomy was the prevailing political trend in the immediate postwar years, public support for reversion surfaced in Amami as early as 1947. For a large number of Amami residents, disillusioned by their island group's separation from Japan, General MacArthur's press statement in March calling for an early peace with Japan was received as welcome news. MacArthur suggested that the political status of the Ryukyu Islands should be decided at a peace conference, raising expectations among Amami residents who hoped for an early end to Amami's division and military occupation.<sup>41</sup> Local newspapers eagerly reported on the subsequent diplomatic maneuvers. Nakamura Yasutarō, the editor of *Amami Taimusu*, also began providing greater coverage to Japan's democratic reforms, contrasting them with Amami's growing list of problems, thereby giving expression to widespread popular support for reversion. American authorities began to take notice in August 1947, when Nakamura reportedly helped organize a public rally in the city of Naze, attended by an estimated 3,000 residents, to advocate not only elections and reforms but also reversion to Japan. The CIC noted that this mass rally was quickly followed by various meetings organized by Amami's council of municipal leaders, the law revisions committee, and the education department, all of which expressed "the unanimous desire of the people for return to Japan."<sup>42</sup> Upon investigating Nakamura's popular base of support, the CIC discovered that he had formed an underground communist party, which enlisted widespread support from a large number of young Amamians. As a CIC study of communist influence on Ryukyuan politics observed, Nakamura and his followers represented the strongest organized faction of potential political activists in the Northern Ryukyus.<sup>43</sup> What this report failed to note, however, was the fact that Nakamura was a former member of the JCP in prewar Japan, and that he had formed the Amami Communist Party (ACP), assisted by an underground agent dispatched by the JCP.<sup>44</sup> Neither could the CIC have known that the ACP then decided to depart from the JCP's early policy of Ryukyuan independence, advocating reversion instead as an expression of the strong identification of Amamians with Japan.

On the other side of the border—and at the opposite end of the political spectrum—conservative Amami residents in Japan were slowly beginning to rally support for reversion even before MacArthur's peace treaty initiative. Politically

conservative Amamians in the Kansai region first attempted to form a federation of like-minded members in February 1947. They largely aimed at countering their dominant, liberal rivals such as the Amami League and the League of Okinawans. Right from the outset, the preparatory committee members unambiguously declared that their goal was to promote a reversion movement. They met again in March 1948, this time formally establishing the Amami Union (Amami Rengō) Osaka headquarters, inspired by the formation of conservative Amami coalitions in Hyōgo and Kyoto Prefectures. Using nationalist language, the executive committee declared that the administrative division from Japan made Amami an “orphan of the South Seas” that threatened its “ethnic extinction,” before concluding, “we firmly reject this, demanding and expecting instead total reversion to be [included] in the peace treaty.”<sup>45</sup> The Amami Union thus helped lay the groundwork for the nationalistic appeal that would characterize the coming reversion movement.

A series of incidents between 1949 and 1951 culminated in a resurgent movement towards reversion, a movement that quickly transcended the 30th parallel border. The first of these was USMGR’s threefold increase in food prices in Amami, implemented in April 1949, following similar economic austerity measures enacted in Okinawa three months earlier. The resulting food price crisis drove many desperate Amami residents to join the black market trade along the Yamato smuggling route, while galvanizing youth groups, labor unions, and other organizations into a united opposition movement.<sup>46</sup> This opposition movement triggered another incident when occupation authorities fired a twenty-six-year-old teacher for orchestrating a pro-reversion debate at a youth group meeting. Undeterred, the teacher-activist illegally crossed into Japan and joined an Amamian youth group in Miyazaki Prefecture, which had just launched an organized reversion movement in August.<sup>47</sup> Shortly thereafter, a student association in Tokyo responded by holding rallies in support of reversion. These youth groups then began to organize a coordinated pro-reversion campaign with the Amami Union, which had grown into a national federation representing twelve regional branches throughout Japan. During the US-led peace treaty negotiations, the Amami Union expressed its strong opposition to Amami’s indefinite separation from Japan in a four-page petition to General MacArthur, explaining that Amamians were Japanese nationals, not Ryukyuan.

On the other side of the border, the Amami Oshima Reversion Council (Amami Ōshima Nihon Fukki Kyōgikai), or Reversion Council, was formed in February 1951, and immediately began collecting signatures in support of returning the islands to Japan. Two months later, the Reversion Council had collected over 139,000 signatures, or 99.8 percent of Amamians over the age of fourteen who

supported reversion.<sup>48</sup> This overwhelmingly successful signature drive served as an inspirational model for Okinawa's pro-reversion signature drive the following month. In August, on the eve of the peace treaty conference, eleven delegates from the Reversion Council illegally entered Japan, capturing media attention—not to mention widespread sympathy—in their joint quest with the Amami Union to make a direct appeal to government officials.<sup>49</sup>

The San Francisco Peace Treaty signed the following month legitimated indefinite US military rule in the Ryukyu Islands, but American hegemony proved vulnerable to public opinion. The continuing Amami reversion movement received sympathetic media coverage not only in Japan but also from abroad, prompting the US government to conduct a number of investigative studies. In March 1952, USCAR's Civil Information and Education (CI&E) office compiled a public opinion survey, which concluded that favorable attitudes towards reversion were "too intense and deep-seated to be changed overnight." An anthropological study compiled in October found that the people of the Amami Islands were "culturally more Japanese than Okinawans," and recommended that the reunion of the islands with Japan could help win back the hearts and minds of Amami-ans.<sup>50</sup> These studies helped convince American policymakers to readjust the territorial boundaries of the Ryukyus, as the US government in August 1953 declared that the Amami Islands would be returned to Japan. The Joint Chiefs of Staff ultimately determined that the Northern Ryukyus were of minor strategic value, especially since the mountainous terrain of Amami Oshima was unsuitable for airfields, which were already under construction in Okinawa. While the Pentagon's strategic calculations were thus paramount, Amamian activists could rightfully claim that they had successfully resisted US military rule when the Amami Islands were finally reverted to Japanese sovereignty in December.

The reversion of the Amami Islands to Japan, juxtaposed with the continued occupation of the Ryukyu Islands, revealed the extent to which American officials were willing to shape and reshape the administrative boundaries of US-occupied territory to serve their security interests. On the other hand, the cross-border reversion movements clearly demonstrated the limitations of American military hegemony. Reversion activists, protesters, and their sympathizers saw through the façade of a Ryukyuan nation-state, which American officials had sought to craft. Other symbolisms of nationhood that masked the absence of sovereignty, such as the US military's failed attempt in 1954 and 1956 to inaugurate a national flag for the Ryukyus, only reinforced the feeling of disillusionment against the United States.<sup>51</sup>

Ryukyu residents who were able to leave their islands—prominently including students who attended universities in the United States and Japan—returned

with an acute awareness of their predicament. The travel documents they carried with them were not official passports issued by a national government, but rather certificates issued by USCAR that were recognized only by the US and Japanese governments. The US Navy administration in the Bonin Islands issued similar travel documents that, like USCAR's, identified each individual with no reference to nationality.<sup>52</sup> Fed up, many Ryukyu residents decided to reject such symbols of subjugation and engaged in an intermittent struggle against American military rule. After a series of protest activities against the US military's draconian land policies in the 1950s, another wave of protests occurred in the late 1960s that culminated in a forceful demand for reversion to Japanese administration.<sup>53</sup> Boatloads of reversion activists from the Ryukyus and Japan convened at sea for joint rallies along the 27th parallel, which had replaced the 30th parallel as the administrative border after the reversion of the Amami Islands. Before long, this became an annual event held on April 28, which was referred to as the "day of humiliation" when Japan had regained sovereignty in 1952 but remained divided from the Ryukyus. Reminiscent of the Yamato smuggling operations, the so-called "4.28 rally at sea" (*4.28 kaijō shūkai*) embodied a new form of resistance to American hegemony, which continued until the reversion of Okinawa Prefecture to Japan in 1972.

The reversion of Okinawa, however, did not mean the US military returned vast areas of the island it occupied, as Okinawans had demanded. Instead, the Japanese government agreed to cover the cost of retaining a substantial American military presence in Okinawa, while compensating landlords for the free use of their agricultural lands. The widespread disillusionment of Okinawans deepened over time, as many US military bases were downsized or closed in mainland Japan, even while they became concentrated and reinforced on Okinawa Island. In September 1995, the abduction and gang rape of a twelve-year-old schoolgirl by three US servicemen resulted in an outburst of anger, leading to a mass demonstration of an estimated 85,000 Okinawans the following month. The joint effort of the US and Japanese governments to contain the crisis by vowing to close down the Futenma Airbase backfired, as they agreed to construct a new, alternative base in Henoko Bay, without the consent of the Okinawan governor. The sustained resistance against the Henoko relocation reflects what some scholars have described as the fundamental issue with the Okinawa "base problem": the relentless "US insistence on Japanese submission and support for its hegemonic order," even as American credibility withered with the aggressive wars of invasion in the early twenty-first century.<sup>54</sup>

At the time of this writing, the US military has completed the withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan, and the American combat mission in Iraq is

scheduled to end by 2022. Whether these momentous developments mark the imminent demise of American hegemony is for future historians to determine. At a minimum, the largely unsuccessful US military occupations in the Middle East make a strong case for reexamining the history of other ineffective American occupations, in Northeast Asia and beyond.