

Guest Editor's Introduction: Writing the "Empire" Back into the History of Postwar Japan

Deokhyo Choi*

Where did the "empire" go in the history of postwar Japan? In postwar Japanese history, one finds a historiographical "amnesia of empire." The Japanese empire lost its colonies all at once as a result of its defeat in World War II, and the end of the empire was, in the words of Japan historian Lori Watt, a "third party decolonization" managed by the Allied Powers.¹ In postwar Japan, this process of decolonization was imagined as a "distant event that happened to other people," and this conditioned the "amnesia of empire" in collective memory and historiography.² "The dominant narrative of Japanese historiography," Japan scholar Leo T.S. Ching claims, "is therefore able to circumvent the dissolution of its empire altogether, insulating itself and moving briskly from defeat to U.S. occupation, from demilitarization to 'democratization' and unprecedented economic 'miracle.'"³ Yet, the presence of Koreans in Japan unsettles this "amnesia of empire." By the end of World War II, Japan had a population of over two million Koreans, most of whom were both colonial

* Research Professor, Research Institute of Korean Studies, Korea University

1 Lori Watt, *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

2 Leo T.S. Ching, *Becoming "Japanese": Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 37.

3 Ching, *Becoming "Japanese"*, 37.

migrant workers and wartime conscripted workers. At Japan's defeat, issues related to this large colonial population on the empire's home front formed a critical site where "decolonization" took place, whether in the form of their self-empowerment, their open defiance of Japanese authority, or the U.S. Occupation's "liberation" and "repatriation" of Koreans in Japan. How can we write the "empire" back into the history of postwar Japan through the prism of the Korean (post)colonial population in Japan?

This special issue is intended to be a contribution to the growing body of research on the legacies of empire in postwar Japan.⁴ With its primary focus on the "postcolonial" Korean population (*zainichi* Koreans) and the so-called "Korean problem" in U.S.-occupied Japan, this issue seeks to expand the scope of postwar history. In particular, the three articles included here attempt to enlarge the *temporal* and *spatial* framework of the existing historiography, which often assumes a temporal divide between

4 Recent studies have explored various topics regarding the aftermath of empire in postwar Japan, such as the making of a "homogeneous nation" from the ruins of "multi-ethnic empire"; the postcolonial return migration of Japanese overseas settlers; and competing memories of defeat and decolonization in postwar Japan. See Barak Kushner and Sherzod Muminov, eds., *The Dismantling of Japan's Empire in East Asia: Deimperialization, Postwar Legitimation and Imperial Afterlife* (London: Routledge, 2017); Lori Watt, "Embracing Defeat in Seoul: Rethinking Decolonization in Korea, 1945," *Journal of Asian Studies* 74-1 (February 2015): 153-174; *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Sebastian Conrad, "The Dialectics of Remembrance: Memories of Empire in Cold War Japan," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56-1 (January 2013): 4-33; Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Borderline Japan: Foreigners and Frontier Controls in the Postwar Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Barak Kushner, "Pawns of Empire: Postwar Taiwan, Japan and the Dilemma of War Crimes," *Japanese Studies* 30-1 (May 2010): 111-133; Mariko Tamanoi, *Memory Maps: The State and Manchuria in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009). For a new attempt to rewrite the history of the U.S. occupation of Japan through the prism of the "Korean minority question," see my "Crucible of the Post-Empire: Decolonization, Race, and Cold War Politics in U.S.-Japan-Korea Relations, 1945-1952" (PhD Diss., Cornell University, 2013).

wartime and postwar and takes the form of an “island history” centered on a national unit of analysis.

In general historical accounts, Emperor Hirohito’s speech announcing Japan’s surrender on August 15, 1945, marks the “postwar” as a “new beginning.”⁵ The postwar is portrayed as disconnected and inverted from the bleak wartime past, and this idea of discontinuity has dominated the narrative framework for decades. Since the 1990s, however, Japan historians have challenged the idea of discontinuity.⁶ Studies of the “total war system,” particularly in the volume edited by Yasushi Yamanouchi, Victor Koschmann and Ryūichi Narita, emphasize the presence of continuity across the divide of the wartime and the postwar.⁷ Similarly, historians Andrew Gordon and Nakamura Masanori use a “transwar” analysis to understand the recurring dynamic of social change in twentieth-century Japan.⁸ The new scholarship treats postwar Japan as the product of a long process continuous with past transformations, rather than as a completely “reborn” entity.

The first article in this special issue adds a “postcolonial” analysis to this growing body of historical research on the long continuity in modern

-
- 5 Carol Gluck, “The ‘End’ of the Postwar: Japan at the Turn of the Millennium,” *Public Culture* 10-1 (1997): 1-23.
- 6 Some U.S. historians had already rejected this temporal framework in the 1980s. See Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: the Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925-1975* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982); Andrew Gordon, *The Evolution of Labor Relations in Japan Heavy Industry, 1853-1955* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985); John Dower, *Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shigeru and the Japanese Experience, 1878-1954* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).
- 7 Yasushi Yamanouchi, J. Victor Koschmann, and Ryūichi Narita, eds., *Total War and “Modernization”* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).
- 8 Their notions of the scope of “transwar” history differ slightly. See Nakamura Masanori, *Sengoshi* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2005); Andrew Gordon, “Consumption, Leisure and the Middle Class in Transwar Japan,” *Social Science Japan Journal* 10-1 (April 2007): 1-21; Andrew Gordon, *Fabricating Consumers: The Sewing Machine in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

Japanese society. In his article, "Historicizing 'Korean Criminality': Colonial Criminality in Twentieth Century Japan," Joel Matthews discusses the continuing legacies of Japanese colonialism by tracing the "genealogy of Korean criminality" in the official parlance and the social imaginary of modern Japan. Matthews focuses particularly on the "criminal racialization" of Koreans in postwar Japan. In the aftermath of World War II, an American journalist in occupied Japan wrote that during mid- to late 1946 "a nation-wide anti-Korean campaign in Japan [had] emerged into the open," in which the presence of Koreans became associated with social disorder and the rampant *yami* (black market) economy.⁹ Historians familiar with how Koreans had previously been framed in the imperial propaganda of "*naisen ittai*" (unity of Japan and Korea) might consider this postwar "criminal racialization" as a drastic shift in public discourse on the Korean population. In public discourse during the war, the Japanese government and media put forth the image of Koreans as the same Japanese "brethren" and glorified (and often exaggerated) their dedication and sacrifice for the empire. For the most part, the government and media stopped using contemptuous phrases like "*senjin*" to portray Koreans and instead called them "*hantō dōhō*" (peninsular brethren) under the *naisen ittai* slogan.¹⁰ But, Matthews demonstrates how the Japanese government, particularly the police authorities, simultaneously crafted the language of Korean criminality behind the scenes during the war. He argues that this

9 David Conde, "The Korean Minority in Japan" *Far Eastern Survey* 16-4 (February 1947): 41-45, here 41.

10 Shinbun Yōgo Kenkyūkai, *Chōsen dōhō koshō narabi shinbun zasshi kiji toriat-sukai zadankai* (Osaka: Shinbun Yōgo Kenkyūkai, 1939); Higuchi Yūichi, *Kyōwakai: senjika Chōsenjin tōsei soshiki no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Shakai Hyōronsha, 1986), 231-239; Kang Tongjin, *Nihon genronkai to Chōsen: 1910-1945* (Tokyo: Hōsei Daigaku Shuppankyoku, 1984), 348-353; Kang Toksang, *Chōsenjin gakuto shutsujin: mō hitotsu no wadatsumi no koe* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1997), 185-201; Takashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), chapter 7.

later shaped the “image of lawless and subversive Koreans in the post-war” and functioned as a “justification for postcolonial legalized exclusion and discrimination.” Moreover, Matthews also analyzes the postwar “criminal racialization” as a response to the crisis spurred by the collapse of the Japanese empire: namely, the crisis of imperial racial hierarchy and Japanese superiority. His analysis provides new insight into “postcolonial” Japan.

While the first article contributes to recent methodological innovations about the temporal framework of Japanese history, the second article enlarges the spatial context of histories of postwar Japan and postliberation Korea. Previously, historians have commonly employed a nation-centered analysis. In their focus on the process of dismantling the Japanese empire, historians have framed their analyses along national lines, resulting in histories split between the U.S.(Allied) occupation of Japan (1945-1952) and the U.S. and Soviet occupations of Korea (1945-1948).¹¹ In Japanese history, the aftermath of Japan’s defeat in World War II is primarily a story about encounters and interactions between the victors and the vanquished in occupied Japan.¹² Although some recent studies have begun to

11 For historiographical surveys, see Carol Gluck, “Entangling Illusions: Japanese and American Views of the Occupation,” in *New Frontiers in American-East Asian Relations*, edited by Warren I. Cohen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); John W. Dower, *Japan in War and Peace: Selected Essays* (New York: New Press, 1993), chapter 5; Laura Hein, “Revisiting America’s Occupation of Japan,” *Cold War History* 11-4 (November 2011): 579-599; Leighanne Yuh, “The Historiography of Korea in the United States,” *International Journal of Korean History* 15-2 (August 2010): 127-142.

12 John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999); Yukiko Koshiro, *Trans-Pacific Racisms and the U.S. Occupation of Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Naoko Shibusawa, *America’s Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Takeshi Matsuda, *Soft Power and Its Perils: U.S. Cultural Policy in Early Postwar Japan and Permanent Dependency* (Stanford: Stanford

explore “trans-pacific” connections between occupied Japan and the United States, scholarship still emphasizes a national unit of analysis, centered on the history of U.S.-Japan(ese) relations set in occupied Japan.¹³

In a departure from this “island history” approach to the U.S. occupation of Japan, the second article takes a transnational approach and looks at interactions between American occupiers in both Japan and Korea, between the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) and the U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK). In “The Limits

University Press, 2007); Christopher Gerteis, “The Erotic and the Vulgar: Visual Culture and Organized Labor’s Critique of U.S. Hegemony in Occupied Japan,” *Critical Asian Studies* 39-1 (2007): 3-34; Mire Koikari, *Pedagogy of Democracy: Feminism and the Cold War in the U.S. Occupation of Japan* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008); Eiichiro Azuma, “Brokering Race, Culture, and Citizenship: Japanese Americans in Occupied Japan and Postwar National Inclusion,” *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 16-3 (Fall 2009): 183-211; Hiroshi Kitamura, *Screening Enlightenment: Hollywood and the Cultural Reconstruction of Defeated Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Yasuhiro Okada, “Race, Masculinity, and Military Occupation: African American Soldiers’ Encounters with the Japanese at Camp Gifu, 1947-1951,” *The Journal of African American History* 96-2 (Spring 2011): 179-203; Sarah Kovner, *Occupying Power: Sex Workers and Servicemen in Postwar Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012); Mire Koikari, *Cold War Encounters in US-Occupied Okinawa: Women, Militarized Domesticity, and Transnationalism in East Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

- 13 For a “trans-pacific” approach, see Yukiko Koshiro, *Trans-Pacific Racisms and the U.S. Occupation of Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Naoko Shibusawa, *America’s Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Eiichiro Azuma, “Brokering Race, Culture, and Citizenship: Japanese Americans in Occupied Japan and Postwar National Inclusion,” *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 16-3 (Fall 2009): 183-211; Hiroshi Kitamura, *Screening Enlightenment: Hollywood and the Cultural Reconstruction of Defeated Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Yasuhiro Okada, “Race, Masculinity, and Military Occupation: African American Soldiers’ Encounters with the Japanese at Camp Gifu, 1947-1951,” *The Journal of African American History* 96-2 (Spring 2011): 179-203.

of Decolonization: American Occupiers and the ‘Korean Problem’ in Japan, 1945-1948,” Matthew R. Augustine examines what “inter-occupation relations” looked like at the site of the “Korean problem” in Japan, where SCAP and USAMGIK were faced with the difficult task of mediating the decolonization of the Japanese empire. When the U.S. (Allied) forces occupied Japan after the war, SCAP and the Japanese government tried to send as many Koreans as possible back to Korea in order to reduce the surplus population in war-torn, demobilized Japan. Yet, as the U.S. project of repatriating (re-placing) “displaced persons” of the over two million Koreans in Japan led to more than half a million Koreans choosing to remain in postwar Japan, their presence emerged as a “problem” in the U.S. agenda of decolonization. Augustine carefully analyzes how SCAP and USAMGIK coordinated the massive repatriation of Koreans from Japan (and also Japanese settlers from Korea) and discusses how U.S. repatriation policy resulted in creating a set of new questions for the American occupiers: Who owns the property and assets of Korean repatriates left behind in Japan? What happens to their “nationality” status when Koreans choose not to return to Korea but remain in Japan? Augustine shows how three interrelated issues of the “Korean problem” – repatriation, restitution, and nationality – complicated “inter-occupation relations” and ended up exposing discordance and discrepancy in occupation policy concerned with how to mediate the process of decolonization.

The third article sheds new light on *zainichi* Korean critiques of the Tokyo War Crimes Trial (1946-1948) and reevaluates the significance of their discussion of “colonial responsibility” in occupied Japan. The Tokyo Trial has left behind highly polarized views of its historical significance. While the Allied Powers celebrated the event as the “judgment of civilization,” Japanese nationalists saw it as retaliatory “victors’ justice” and questioned its legitimacy. This kind of binary approach dominated debates on the Tokyo Trial for a long time. In the 1970s, however, Japanese historians began to open up new debates beyond this binary and offered a more nuanced and balanced interpretation of the significance and limits of the Tokyo Trial. Since then, historians have examined how certain crucial

issues were silenced and excluded from war crimes trials under the realpolitik of victorious nations. According to this new scholarship, as historian Yuma Totani explains, the Tokyo Trial was “problematic because *it did not do enough* to disclose Japanese war crimes or to punish responsible individuals.”¹⁴ Among the important agendas that the Allied Powers never fully addressed in the Tokyo Trial were Japanese colonialism and the crimes committed against Korean and Taiwanese colonial subjects. Many historians now agree that the absence of both the colonial question and the voices of former colonial subjects exemplifies the serious limits of the Tokyo Trial.

In fact, the problems and limits of the Tokyo Trial that historians began to “discover” in the 1970s had already been questioned and discussed by *zainichi* Koreans in the late 1940s at the time of the Tokyo Trial. In this issue’s third article, “The Tokyo Trial and the Question of Colonial Responsibility: *Zainichi* Korean Reactions to Allied Justice in Occupied Japan,” Young-hwan Chong shows how *zainichi* Korean critics understood the limits of the Tokyo Trial beyond the binary of “victors’ justice” and “the judgment of civilization,” and how they problematized the absence of “colonial responsibility” in the Allied pursuit of justice and war responsibility. Chong’s article – originally written in Japanese and published in Japan in 2016 – is the first major research work to document *zainichi* Korean voices and critiques of the Tokyo Trial by delving into previously under-explored historical sources, particularly the numerous newspapers published by *zainichi* Korean groups during the occupation period.¹⁵ Through an examination of *zainichi* Korean newspaper editorials and opinion articles, Chong demonstrates how *zainichi* Korean critics

14 Yuma Totani, *The Tokyo War Crimes Trial: The Pursuit of Justice in the Wake of World War II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 250.

15 Yōng-hwan Chōng, “Kaihō chokugo no zainichi Chōsenjin undō to ‘sensō sekinin’ron, 1945-1949,” *Nihon shokuminchi kenkyū* 28 (June 2016): 21-41. Also see his “Tōkyō Saiban o meguru zainichi Chōsenjin hakkō shinbun kikanshi no ronchō,” *Nikkan sōgo ninshiki* 1 (2008): 19-67.

tried to synthesize the colonial question into the legal language and definition of war crimes used in notions such as “crimes against peace” and “crimes against humanity.” For instance, some critics made the claim that the two former Governors-General of Korea, Minami Jirō and Koiso Kuniaki, had committed “crimes against humanity” by “conscripting innocent Korean youths and sending them by force and by deceit to the battlefield to die.” Although Koreans were not given any significant role in the Tokyo Trial, Chong’s analysis illuminates how *zainichi* Korean groups were actively engaged with the pursuit of justice in their own way outside the courtroom and resisted the “amnesia of empire” in postwar Japan.

The three articles in this special issue enlarge the *temporal* and *spatial* framework of the existing historiography of postwar Japan, which often assumes a temporal divide between wartime and postwar and takes the form of an “island history” centered on the history of U.S.-Japan(ese) relations set in occupied Japan. The articles show how a close examination of the postcolonial population of Koreans in Japan and related questions can open up new opportunities for approaching the history of postwar Japan differently.¹⁶ By presenting the “Korean problem” in Japan as a primary analytical site, Matthews and Augustine both offer new insights into under-examined dimensions of the aftermath of the Japanese empire, namely, the continuing legacies of colonial discourse in Japan and the “inter-occupation” collaborations and frictions over how to mediate decolonization. In a similar vein, Chong recovers long-neglected critical voices raised by *zainichi* Korean groups concerning the problems and limits of the Tokyo Trial, particularly the absence of the colonial question in the Allied pursuit of justice and war responsibility, which was “discovered” only later by historians. This special issue hopes to expand the

16 My recent work is also part of these new attempts to unsettle the existing framework of “postwar history.” Deokhyo Choi, “Post-Imperial Anxiety: Race, Violence, and the Korean Minority Question at the Birth of a Pacifist Japan, 1945-1947” (paper presented at Living and Leaving the Japanese Empire Conference, University of Chicago, November 20-21, 2015).

scope of existing historiography by writing the “empire” back into the history of postwar Japan.