Missing Keystones: Echoes of Empire in Kobayashi Masaru's "Bridge Building"

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Properly situating the postwar works of Japanese writers who were raised in Japan's colonial empire is a complex task. After the Second World War, the Allied Occupation and the shared project of rebuilding Japan resulted in widespread (and often willful) amnesia in Japanese society about Japan's imperial past, rooted in a "foundational narrative" that turned Japan's focus toward the axis of United States–Japan relations and served to absolve many Japanese people of responsibility for Japanese imperialism and promotion of the war effort.¹ However, some returnee Japanese authors maintained particularly responsible perspectives toward Japan's imperial past, and returnees remained strongly aware of the hidden diversity of postwar Japanese society.² Their writings are undeniably

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1 Yoshikuni Igarashi, "The Bomb, Hirohito, and History: The Foundational Narrative of United States–Japan Postwar Relations," *positions* 6, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 261–272.

2 See Lori Watt, *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009); Park

influenced by their postwar experiences in Japan, yet their experiences of empire—as children, as settlers, as bureaucrats or soldiers, and later as repatriates—also exert a ghostly influence on their works. Because of this, postwar writings by and about Japanese repatriates serve the crucial task of illustrating the incomplete nature of Japanese decolonization. Japanese repatriation literature (*hikiage bungaku*, 引揚げ文学) highlights how the same policy of repatriation and ethnic “sorting” pursued by the Allies that physically removed nearly seven million Japanese colonists and soldiers from the former empire also resulted in Japan deferring the necessary process of coming to terms with its imperial past.

Even when an author's strong connection to the colonies is widely recognized, or when a certain piece of writing foregrounds a character's colonial background, a great deal of work remains to be done in reinterpreting postwar Japanese fiction to account for the aftereffects of empire. The connections of many celebrated authors to the colonies and occupied areas were deemphasized until recent years. In other cases, returnee authors who were once prominent have fallen into relative obscurity, perhaps in part because their connections to the colonies could not be ignored, or because their works became illegible in an environment that relegated issues related to the empire to the distant past.

This paper examines how unresolved memories of empire reemerge in the postwar writings of Kobayashi Masaru (小林勝, 1927–1971), a Japanese author who was born and raised in colonial Korea. After the Asia–Pacific War ended, Kobayashi became deeply involved in radical movements in Japan before turning his full attention to literature in the 1950s. His fiction was nominated three times for the prestigious Akutagawa Prize, Japan's most distinguished literary award, culminating in the nomination of his 1960 short story “Bridge Building” (“Kakyō,” 架橋). In the

Yuha, *Hikiage bungakuron josetsu: Arata na posutokoroniaru e* (Kyoto: Jinbun Shoin, 2016); and Nicholas Lambrecht, *New Arrivals: Returnee Identity and the Memory of Repatriation in Japanese Literature* (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2019).

mid-1970s, Kobayashi's writings were collated into a five-volume set of compiled works co-edited by prominent writers including Noma Hiroshi and Nakano Shigeharu.³ Yet today nearly all of Kobayashi's work has gone out of print in Japanese, and he has come to be read more widely in South Korea than in Japan.⁴

Kobayashi's "Bridge Building" depicts a joint attempt by a Japanese repatriate and a *zainichi* (在日, Japanese-resident) Korean to commit an act of sabotage against American war supplies being shipped from Japan to Korea for use in the Korean War. Here, I read "Bridge Building" through a variety of lenses in order to bring into focus how it demonstrates Kobayashi's struggle to remember the empire ethically and responsibly through his literature. First, I locate this short story within the context of Kobayashi's personal background and our contemporary understanding of Japanese postcolonial literature and repatriation literature. Next, I analyze the text itself, placing particular emphasis upon the repatriate background of the Japanese protagonist. Here, I argue that Kobayashi's work, which was composed in the midst of the widespread 1960 Anpo protests (*Anpo tōsō*, 安保闘争) against the renewal of the United States–Japan Mutual Security Treaty, clearly shows how unresolved memories of empire preclude the possibility of easily constructing a bridge of understanding between Korean and Japanese people. "Bridge Building" thus demonstrates the enduring nature of Japanese colonial and war responsibility and presents readers with a new international perspective on postwar repatriation. Finally, I suggest that these very characteristics of "Bridge Building" were the likely cause of the lack of critical attention the work received in Japan in the half century following its initial

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- 3 Kobayashi Masaru, *Kobayashi Masaru sakuhinshū*, ed. Noma Hiroshi, Hasegawa Shirō, Sugawara Katsumi, and Nakano Shigeharu, 5 vols. (Tokyo: Shirakawa Shoin, 1975–1976).
 - 4 Nadeschda Bachem has characterized Japan's treatment of Kobayashi as "pervasive silence." See the translator's introduction to "Ford 1927: A Translation with Commentary," *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 71, no. 2 (July 2017): 647.

publication.

Kobayashi Masaru's Postcolonial Activism and Returnee Identity

Kobayashi Masaru was born in the city of Jinju (Chinju) in Japanese-occupied Korea in November 1927, and was raised primarily in the city of Andong, where his father taught at an agricultural school. His family was well established in Korea, having moved there from Nagano Prefecture in 1914. Leaving his family behind, Kobayashi moved to the Japanese Home Islands in 1944 to undergo officer training, first at an army preparatory school and later at the Imperial Japanese Army Air Academy in Saitama Prefecture. However, he underwent little actual training because of the dire state of Japan's war effort, and Japan was defeated before his activation. While both of his brothers had been conscripted and died before they could return to Japan, the rest of his family eventually repatriated from Korea.⁵

In 1948 Kobayashi Masaru joined the Japanese Communist Party and became involved with the New Japanese Literature Association (*Shin Nihon Bungakukai*, 新日本文学会; he was not made an official member of the Association until 1955). In 1949 and 1950 Kobayashi briefly studied in the Russian literature program at Waseda University, but he was soon suspended and expelled for his associations with the Communist Party. By this time Kobayashi already strongly objected to Japan's alignment with the United States, and he was subsequently arrested and convicted of attacks on police during demonstrations against the Korean War. Still, just after this period he managed to become a recognized—if not widely popular—author of fiction dealing with themes of war responsibil-

5 For a thorough account of Kobayashi's upbringing, see Hara Yūsuke, *Kinjirareta kyōshū: Kobayashi Masaru no sengo bungaku to Chōsen* (Tokyo: Shinkansha, 2019), 14–47.

ity, political suppression, and the Korean Peninsula. While he was appealing his prison sentence, he was nominated for the Akutagawa Prize twice in 1956, including a nod for the story “1927 Ford” (“Fōdo 1927-nen,” フォード・一九二七年).⁶

In “1927 Ford,” a soldier who is destined to die before returning to Japan (likely based upon one of Kobayashi’s brothers, who died of tuberculosis in China) describes life growing up in colonial Korea and expresses feelings of regret regarding his past behavior as a colonist. His behavior as part of the Japanese ruling class is contrasted with that of a friendly immigrant Turkish family that interacted with Koreans on equal terms. Although he is on his deathbed, the soldier thereby comes to a new realization that the wrongs of imperialism are fundamentally linked to the consequences faced by Japan at the end of the war. Yet the man listening to this soldier’s story, a Japanese combat medic without the same experience of colonial Korea, is not interested in deciphering its underlying message, and this serves as an indictment of the lack of self-awareness of complicity in the imperial project exhibited by many of those who survived to repatriate to postwar Japan. While contemplative narratives like “1927 Ford” have become somewhat more common over time in postwar Japanese literature, most repatriation narratives in the mid-1950s were still underscored by a sense of elation at successful reunification with the postwar Japanese homeland,⁷ so Kobayashi was relatively quick to arrive

6 This story has been translated into English by Nadeschda Bachem as “Ford 1927;” see Kobayashi 2017. This remains the only widely-available English translation of a text by Kobayashi Masaru to date.

7 The most well-known case of presenting repatriation to Japan as the culmination of a heroic and harrowing journey is Fujiwara Tei’s 1949 novel *The Shooting Stars Are Alive* (*Nagareru hoshi wa ikiteiru*, 流れる星は生きている). Fujiwara was an amateur writer whose novel described, in a fictionalized version of her own postwar experience, a mother’s yearlong effort to escort her children from Manchuria to Japan by way of the Korean Peninsula. Fujiwara’s novel also became a bestseller in Korea, where more emphasis was placed on the characters’ efforts to cross the 38th parallel into areas controlled by the United States Army Military Government

at his postcolonial perspective toward Japanese imperialism.

However, this progressive stance was not conducive to making Kobayashi's writing accessible to a broad readership at the time. In 1959 Kobayashi finally completed the remaining prison time for his earlier offenses, and after his final nomination for the Akutagawa Prize in 1960, his fortunes declined further. He was nominated once for the Naoki Prize in 1962, but the award's panel rejected his work out of hand. Then in 1964 and again in 1966 Kobayashi was hospitalized for several months due to tuberculosis. While he continued to write, particularly for the journal of the New Japanese Literature Association and often pieces exploring his relationship with Korea, his stories were rarely run in major literary journals after the early 1960s, and in March 1971 he died of a combination of acute cirrhosis and intestinal blockage at the age of 43.⁸

Clearly Kobayashi was a complex and talented, but troubled writer. Kobayashi Masaru's writings do not fit easily into any specific genre of postwar literature, but renewed academic interest in Kobayashi over the last decade reflects the long overdue emergence of postcolonial theory as a tool for analyzing Japanese literature. Three of Kobayashi's works, including "Bridge Building," were selected for the 21-volume "Literature and War" anthology published by Shūeisha between 2011 and 2013, and in 2019 Hara Yūsuke released an essential book-length study of Kobayashi titled *Forbidden Nostalgia: Kobayashi Masaru's Postwar Literature and Korea* (*Kinjirareta kyōshū: Kobayashi Masaru no sengo bungaku to Chōsen*, 禁じられた郷愁：小林勝の戦後文学と朝鮮) that emphasizes the postcolonial nature of Kobayashi's life and writings.⁹ Given

in Korea than on the ensuing voyage to Japan.

8 Hara 2019, 382–384.

9 Asada Jirō et al., eds., *Korekushon sensō to bungaku*, 21 vols. (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2011–2013). "Bridge Building" was included in the volume of the set focusing on Japanese-language literature about the Korean War. Although this was numbered "Volume 1" of the set, it was the thirteenth volume released. In addition to the Shūeisha collection and Hara's work, Park's *Hikiage bungakuron josetsu* also discusses works by Kobayashi in the context of postcolonial and repatriation literature

these recent developments, I believe that we can now gain additional insight into Kobayashi Masaru's work by using ideas adopted from the emerging study of Japanese repatriation literature, thus recognizing the role that the trauma of movement plays in some of his most significant stories.

This endeavor is somewhat complicated by the fact that Kobayashi Masaru was not a postwar repatriate in the traditional sense, having emigrated from Korea to Japan well before the war ended.¹⁰ In many significant studies on Japanese repatriation produced in recent years, scholars have exhibited a clear tendency to privilege accounts that closely reflect the personal experiences of their authors, with an eye to the role such accounts play in creating a corpus of enduring historical testimony.¹¹ Attempts to document the history of the empire and of repatriation are undeniably necessary, but a singular focus on historical accuracy can serve as an impediment to the appreciation of fictional narratives that have been conveying important psychological aspects of the returnee experience to new audiences for several decades.

Literary scholars have used two primary methods to combat the bias in favor of works that are considered to be "pure" attempts at the historical documentation of repatriation. The first strategy is to concentrate upon the postwar subject positions of authors who had been second-generation settler colonists (*shokuminsha nisei*, 植民者二世) rather than upon the connections between these authors and repatriation itself. Second-generation colonists, and particularly those who were still children when

without focusing on "Bridge Building."

10 In some cases Kobayashi might be considered a "returnee" rather than a repatriate, although the implication that Kobayashi was "returning" to Japan in 1944 is inaccurate, since he had been born and raised in Korea. I discuss this point in more detail later in this section.

11 For example, see Mariko Asano Tamanoi, *Memory Maps: The State and Manchuria in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009) and Narita Ryūichi, "*Sensō keiken*" no sengoshi: *Katarareta taiken/shōgen/kioku* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2010).

the war ended, have often been considered less culpable for the wrongs of Japanese imperialism than other colonizers. Such authors evoke sympathy because they have found themselves forced to deal with the postwar repercussions of settler colonialism as a result of the untenable situations they were placed in by their upbringings.¹² Among scholars who deal with the writings of Kobayashi Masaru, this strategy is most evident in studies of Japanese postcolonial and repatriation literature,¹³ but Korean-language studies that are more concerned with the memory of Japanese imperialism than with the process of return to Japan have also emphasized the status of Kobayashi as a settler colonist.¹⁴

The second method is to expand the scope of repatriate identity to encompass a greater number of subjects. Some recent English-language scholarship on Kobayashi declares unambiguously that he should be considered a repatriate, thus undermining the possibility of dismissing his literature involving repatriates as a simple series of fanciful inventions.¹⁵ It may seem inaccurate to label Kobayashi Masaru a repatriate given his personal background, but this decision should not be dismissed out of hand. The turning tide of the war caused many Japanese people to return

12 Inevitably, one decision that had to be made by former settler colonists was how to react to the American Occupation of Japan. Acceptance of the Occupation could be taken as a rejection of imperialism, but at the same time, the Occupation served as a catalyst for the remaking of Japan as an American outpost in the Cold War geopolitical structure, which was often interpreted as a postwar manifestation of imperialism with new and often hazardous consequences for Japan's former colonies.

13 Park 2016, Hara 2019.

14 For more on this point, see Oh Taeyoung, "Shingmin(chi) ūi kiōkkwa chōnhu yōndae ūi sangsangnyōk: Kobayashi Masaru ūi *Tchokpari* rŭl chungshim ūro," *Inmun'gwahak* 114 (December 2018): 114.

15 See Kobayashi 2017 and Nadeschda Bachem, *Remnants of Empire: Colonial Memory in Japanese and South Korean Short Fiction, 1953–1972* (PhD diss., SOAS London, 2017). For example, in the introduction to her translation of Kobayashi's "1927 Ford" ("Ford 1927"), Bachem writes of Kobayashi, "He was a member of the so-called *hikiagesha*, the Japanese returnees from the colonies after the country's defeat in World War II." Kobayashi 2017, 646.

to Japan before the war ended, such as the author Hayashi Kyōko, who is best known for her works drawing upon her subsequent exposure to the atomic bombing of Nagasaki but also grew up in Shanghai until early in 1945. The story of repatriation to Japan is incomplete when these sorts of cases are excluded from its scope.¹⁶ At the same time, Kobayashi never underwent a forced return to Japan at all; instead, when the war ended he simply lost the ability to return to the place where he had been raised in Korea.

Actually, I would argue that it was the very fact that Kobayashi did not experience postwar life as a refugee that allowed him to maintain conflicting feelings of nostalgia and guilt toward Korea during the postwar period. Many repatriates interpreted their journeys to Japan as a process of victimization, which clouded their interpretations of the colonial past in which they functioned as aggressors, but Kobayashi did not endure such a shift in perspective. Therefore, instead of being quickly re-enveloped in Japanese nationalism over the course of a journey to his purported “homeland,” Kobayashi underwent a gradual rejection of imperialism that led him to an ideological allegiance with the early postwar Japanese Communist Party.

With this in mind, it appears to be possible to take a middle road when considering Kobayashi’s relationship to repatriation literature, a path between either attempting to validate Kobayashi’s work by labeling him a repatriate or analyzing his work solely as that of a young settler colonist. Acknowledging the facts that Kobayashi’s writings include depictions of characters who are unmistakably labeled as repatriates and postwar refugees, and that Kobayashi had personal connections to the process of repatriation, allows us to recognize that his writings about repatriates are valuable as works of repatriation literature regardless of his repatriate status. Reinterpreting Kobayashi’s writings on Korea from this new point

16 Likewise, in order to achieve a truly balanced perspective on repatriation, advances must be made in comparing Japanese repatriation to other large-scale migrations, including postwar repatriation from Japan to Korea.

of view also helps broaden our understanding of returnee identity.

“Bridge Building,” the piece to which I dedicate the remainder of this essay, is ripe for further consideration in this regard. “Bridge Building” is one of several short stories in which Kobayashi employs a complex repatriate protagonist to interrogate the possibilities for postwar reconciliation between Korea and Japan.¹⁷ Yet along with the question of returnee identity, “Bridge Building” also manages to foreground each of Kobayashi’s other perennial themes—colonial responsibility, political activism, and the enduring problem of war in Asia—in a single story. Assessing “Bridge Building” in the years following Kobayashi’s death, Fujii Tōru noted that the story encapsulates the tangled hope and cynicism toward the future of Japan–Korea relations that characterized Kobayashi’s writing from the early 1950s onward.¹⁸ Kobayashi’s hope and cynicism were rooted in his nuanced understanding of Japan’s imperial past and its key role in the Korean War, making “Bridge Building” essential reading when reflecting upon the historical relationship between Japan and Korea as well.

Sabotage as Comradship, and Camaraderie Sabotaged in “Bridge Building”

Kobayashi Masaru’s “Bridge Building” first appeared in the July 1960 issue of the prominent journal *Literary World* (*Bungakukai*, 文學界),¹⁹

17 Subsequent stories of this type by Kobayashi include “A Head Without Eyes” (“Menashi atama,” 目なし頭) from 1967 and “Those with Split Hooves” (“Hizume no wareta mono,” 蹄の割れたもの) from 1969.

18 Fujii Tōru, “Kaidai,” in *Kobayashi Masaru sakuhinshū*, 4:385.

19 See Kobayashi Masaru, “Kakyō,” *Bungakukai* 14, no. 7 (July 1960): 14–31. “Bridge Building” was later included in the short story collection *Choppari* (チョッパリ, named after a Korean-language ethnic slur for Japanese people) and in Kobayashi’s compiled works; see Kobayashi Masaru, *Choppari: Kobayashi Masaru shōsetsushū* (Tokyo: Sanseido, 1970), and Kobayashi 1975–1976. There

becoming his first piece published in that venue after he finally completed the prison term for his participation in violent 1952 protests against the Korean War. Fittingly, “Bridge Building” is set in Japan in 1952, and depicts an underground plot to sabotage and set fire to supplies that are scheduled to be moved to support the American war effort in Korea. Kobayashi’s views on the Korean War protests and the positions taken by the Japanese Communist Party had shifted significantly in the intervening eight years, but “Bridge Building” presented Kobayashi with a remarkably timely opportunity to delve into the psychology of early postwar dissidents, since this work was produced at the height of the Anpo protests that swept Japan in the spring and summer of 1960. These protests, which were intended to fend off renewal of the United States–Japan Mutual Security Treaty and thereby reduce Japan’s exposure to the dangers presented by the Cold War, proceeded on a far larger and more visible scale than the protests that had come at the height of anti-American sentiment during the Korean War.²⁰ In fact, the magazines carrying Kobayashi’s story were released less than a week after the highly publicized death of University of Tokyo student Kanba Michiko in massive demonstrations against the Anpo treaty at the National Diet Building, so methods and consequences of protest were a salient societal issue at the time.²¹

are several small variations among the published versions, particularly in the speech patterns of the central Korean character. Unless otherwise noted, this essay relies upon the 1960 version of the text, from which all translations are my own.

- 20 The earlier protests, which had culminated in the so-called Bloody May Day Incident (Chi no Mē-dē jiken, 血のメーデー事件) in 1952, served as inspiration for the setting of “Bridge Building.” Another notable difference between the two protest movements was the explicit exclusion of *zainichi* Koreans from inclusion in domestic Japanese leftist politics after the mid-1950s. For more information on radical movements in the early 1950s and the participation of Korean residents of Japan in them, see Kenji Hasegawa, *Student Radicalism and the Formation of Postwar Japan* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).
- 21 It is likewise notable that the Anpo protests followed closely on the heels of the protests that resulted in the fall of the Syngman Rhee (Yi Sŭngman) regime in South Korea.

“Bridge Building” is the story of a young Japanese agitator named Toda Asao (戸田朝雄), a repatriate from colonial Korea who is participating in a major antiwar plot for the first time. Several sites are to be targeted simultaneously, requiring a large number of participants, so Asao is included even though he is not a member of the Communist Party. Asao’s party contact, the charismatic Ninagawa, partners him with a man identified by the code name “Motomura” (本村),²² but Asao immediately discerns that his partner using this distinctively Japanese surname actually has a Korean background. Asao credits his immediate apprehension of Motomura’s *zainichi* Korean identity to his own experiences growing up in colonial Korea.

Until his mission with “Motomura,” Asao had not attempted to justify his involvement with leftist politics to those around him. He had “felt no desire to reveal the problems he had been struggling with constantly since the end of the war” and how they had prompted his decision to participate in antiwar efforts, because he was convinced “his pains were of a sort that could not possibly be understood by anyone who had not gone through a similar sort of experience.”²³ Yet on this occasion Asao makes a different choice. While they are lying in wait to perform their act of sabotage, Asao casually reveals to “Motomura” that he had once been in Korea, in an attempt to bond with his partner. However, Motomura snubs this overture and refuses to reveal himself as Korean, incensing Asao: “Asao felt some-

22 Notably, in the 2007 Korean translation of “Bridge Building,” the Korean character’s name is rendered as “Kimura” (기무라/木村). “Kimura” is a family name known to be used by many resident Koreans in Japan, but all Japanese versions of the text refer to this character as “Motomura.” The change from “Motomura” to “Kimura” is useful when reviewing recent scholarship on “Bridge Building” published in Korean, insofar as adoption of the “Kimura” name for the Korean character is a strong indication of an analysis that relies upon the Yi Wŏnhŭi translation rather than the original text. See Kobayashi 1960, 15, and “Kagyo,” in *Tchokpari: Kobayashi Masaru chakp’unjip: Hallim shinsŏ Ilbon hyŏndae munhak taep’yo jaksŏn*, trans. Yi Wŏnhŭi (Seoul: Sowha, 2007), 69.

23 Kobayashi 1960, 16.

thing like a ringing in his ears. *I was rejected, I was rejected*, he muttered to himself over and over, *this bastard* [koitsu, こいつ] *rejected both my smile and the way I opened my heart to him in friendship.*"²⁴

Asao's past in the empire then swirls through his mind as he broods over why it is so difficult to gain the acceptance of his Korean partner. Motomura's refusal to engage with Asao beyond helping him perform the act of sabotage (a task at which Asao proves to be quite inept) prevents Asao from revealing the additional information that his policeman father had been executed in Korea by the Soviets and Koreans at the end of the war and that he had then repatriated to Japan along with his mother at the age of twelve. Asao is not aware of why his father was executed by Soviet forces, but believes it took place for a specific reason—that is, that his father had been involved in repressing the Koreans he policed, and that the punishment was therefore justified. This is the true impetus behind his decision to support the conspiracy against the American war effort, even though the Americans are ostensibly fighting against some of the same people who made the decision to put his father to death.

In other words, while Asao—whose very name incorporates a character that serves as a reference to Korea, functioning as a permanent reminder of his origin—is working to undermine the war effort, it is revealed that he is more interested in atoning for his personal guilt than in the actual conditions of the Korean War. Asao's self-absorption manifests itself in his demand to be recognized and praised by the Korean Other for the actions he is taking in a unilateral attempt to atone for Japan's imperial past. The contradictions involved in this are put into even more stark terms when Motomura tries to calm Asao's nerves by engaging him in a different sort of conversation. By this time Motomura has revealed his foreign identity through an offhand remark in which he criticizes Asao for his Japanese perspective, which feels to Asao like another slap in the face.²⁵

24 Ibid., 17.

25 In the 1960 text Motomura says, "That's how Japanese people think" ("*Sore wa Nihonjin no kangaekata da*"), but in later versions this is changed to the still clearer

When the topic of Asao's job comes up, Asao reveals that by day he works at a factory creating nondescript metal fragments. He claims to be unaware of their function, but Motomura points out that they must be intended as shrapnel to be put inside American bombs that will be used to kill more Koreans. Thus while Asao's history as a repatriate convinces him to act in ways that go against the postwar policies of the Japanese state, he is once again shown to be unable to avoid complicity in carrying out these same policies. In the context of the publication of "Bridge Building," this can be taken as further commentary on the implications of the 1960 renewal of the United States–Japan Mutual Security Treaty.

Swiftly on the heels of this series of awkward exchanges between Asao and Motomura, their key attempt at sabotage also goes awry. Despite having determined that the working jeeps, tanks, and barrels that were the intended target of their attack are actually decommissioned Korean War wreckage that has been brought back to Japan, they decide to follow through with their original plan, only for Asao to panic and drop his Molotov cocktail in the mistaken belief that he has been spotted by the police. The Molotov cocktail immediately goes up in flames, so Motomura and Asao flee the scene and retreat to a Korean restaurant in a busy area, where they are able to engage in unhurried conversation for the first and only time.

It is worth noting that at the time depicted in "Bridge Building," during the period of international immobility at the end of the American Occupation of Japan, this sort of exchange between a former colonizer and a Korean patriot could only have taken place in Japan. Yet even during the discussion between Motomura and Asao at the Korean restaurant, the conversation is one-sided, concentrating upon Asao's eventual decision to disclose the story of his father's fate. The *zainichi* Korean calling himself Motomura has already made it clear that he cares specifically about working to prevent the deaths that are mounting in what he calls "our home-

and more biting, "That's how you Japanese people think" ("*Sore wa kimitachi Nihonjin no kangaekata da*"). See Kobayashi 1960, 25, and Kobayashi 1970, 85.

land” (*bokutachi no sokoku*, ぼくたちの祖國) every day during the Korean War,²⁶ but Asao’s existence in postwar Japan is untroubled by such concrete problems. This means that in spite of the personal torment Asao experiences in his attempts to avoid the cognitive dissonance involved in his contradictory identification with and guilt towards Korea, his motivations cannot help but seem selfish in comparison to those of Motomura. The sense of camaraderie that should have been produced by their shared experience is irrevocably undermined by their divergent interpretations of the purpose of the act of sabotage. Ultimately, the last lines of “Bridge Building” show the true extent of Asao’s self-absorption: just before disappearing into the city, the Korean man explains that his father had also been killed, but by the Japanese.²⁷ As illustrated by this final twist, the fundamental difference between the characters’ perspectives reflects a relationship that Japanese society was generally unwilling to recognize during Japan’s early postwar period—Asao hopes to be absolved of all responsibility for imperial rule, but Motomura, as a representative of the Korean Other, has ample reason to be disinclined to forgive.

“And That’s All”: Incomplete Bridges of Understanding

Although the Korean-born Japanese and Japan-based Korean characters in “Bridge Building” are united by their common goal and by their past experiences of imperial violence, the gap between them remains insurmountable. Asao’s Korean partner ultimately remains inscrutable to him, a point reinforced by the narrative’s adherence to a limited omniscient perspective that gives no insight into the thoughts of “Motomura,” whose true name and personal history remain hidden throughout the text. In ad-

26 Kobayashi 1960, 25–26.

27 The way the past of Motomura mirrors that of Asao also implies that this, rather than a link to Korea, could have been the true impetus for Asao’s initial intuition that he shared a background with Motomura.

dition, Asao's desire to attain forgiveness for imperial rule from the Korean Other is shown to be strictly self-serving. Motomura exposes this situation skillfully when Asao finally discloses the violent death of his father near the end of "Bridge Building." Motomura prompts Asao to draw additional conclusions about his motivations for participating in the act of sabotage, but Asao is unable or unwilling to do so:

"My father was shot dead. I was twelve years old at the time. My mother and I repatriated here together."

"And?" the young man prompted.

"And that's all."

The young man stacked the plates and bowls, now wiped completely clean, and pushed them to the edge of the table that was sticky with oil.

"And that's all?" the young man said.

"Right."

"Humph."

The young man pulled the ashtray towards himself, took out a cigarette, drew on it as though he were starving, then took out another and raised it to his mouth.

"So your dad was shot dead. How do we tie that to what you're doing now?"

"I don't need you to tie the two things together."²⁸

Asao does proceed to speak more about his mindset, but what this exchange ultimately represents is Asao's rejection of Motomura's ability to act as an interpreter for his actions. This is also a missed opportunity for Asao to acknowledge his complicity in the colonial process before he is forced to account for it by Motomura. After Asao's self-centered speech ends without any indication of a desire to hear the position of the Other, Motomura takes up the point himself: "I wish you would also think about

28 Ibid., 30.

how there have been tens of millions of Chinese and Korean people killed by the Japanese.”²⁹ Further, Asao’s failure to draw a line from cause to effect takes place at the precise moment when he falls back upon referring to his repatriation. Instead of connecting his actions to his father’s directly, Asao inserts the additional step of referring to his mother and their repatriation, thus placing himself in the position of a victim. Because Kobayashi Masaru did not go through the same sort of repatriate journey of “victimhood” as his character, this aspect of the repatriate psyche would have been particularly apparent to him, and criticism of the single-minded portrayal of Japanese repatriates as victims is one unmistakable message of the text. Yet even in Korean scholarship on “Bridge Building,” which has outpaced Japanese scholarship to date, the central role that “repatriation” plays in short-circuiting Asao’s thought has not garnered much attention.

One reason for this may have been the difficult nature of translating Kobayashi’s work from Japanese to Korean. While Asao describes his journey from Korea to Japan as one in which he “repatriated here” (*hikiagete kita*, 引揚げて来た), in the 2007 Korean translation this has been rendered as *kwiwhanhaetchi* (귀환했지), or “returned.”³⁰ The Korean word *kwiwhan* is more closely equivalent to the Japanese term *kan* (帰還) than to the term *hikiage*. While not a mistranslation, there is a significant difference between the ideas of “repatriation” and “return” when used in this context. For better or for worse, the Japanese term chosen by Asao refers in a literal sense to “pulling up roots,” thereby highlighting Asao’s connection to the Korean Peninsula as the place from which his family was “uprooted.” Meanwhile, the Korean translation attributes to Asao an additional sense that he truly belongs in Japan, a point upon

29 Ibid.

30 Kobayashi 2007, 101. When Asao uses the phrase “repatriated here” (*hikiagete kita*, 引揚げて来た) to refer to his situation as part of his internal monologue earlier in the story, the term is translated into Korean as *torawatta* (돌아왔다), another way to say “returning here” or “coming back here.” See Kobayashi 2007, 75.

which the original text remains stubbornly agnostic. Describing Asao more generally as a “returnee” in this way may occlude the fact that this character was “born and raised in [colonial] Korea”³¹ and that therefore his only direct experience of Japan has taken place in the postwar.

In fact, Asao’s ongoing, if remorseful, feeling of identification with Korea is one of the central factors preventing any true understanding between him and Motomura. Asao’s reference to his repatriation at the key moment in which he reveals the darkest part of his family’s true background also indicates an underlying similarity between Asao and his father: each has taken the uninvited liberty of imposing a “Japanese” subject onto a “Korean” Other, in effect defining the self through the construction of this contrast.

In a 2018 article in *The Journal of the Humanities* (*Inmun'gwahak*, 人文科學), Oh Taeyoung argues that “Bridge Building” illustrates the impossibility of Korean and Japanese subjects coming to a mutual understanding through the sharing of memories alone, since the difference between these two subject positions ensures that their retroactive interpretations of the same events will always be mutually exclusive.³² This is an astute assessment of the inefficacy of Asao’s attempts to use his memory of the end of the war to evoke sympathy from Motomura. (In the original version of “Bridge Building,” Motomura thanks Asao for having “told him a good story,” but this line was removed from subsequent versions.³³) However, it is important to note that the two characters are also united by their very isolation; Asao’s deep-seated identification with his Korean past isolates him from mainstream Japanese society, and Motomura’s status as a *zainichi* Korean person leaves him utterly isolated from what is happening in Korea. This leaves Asao and Motomura in an impossible situation: they can make gestures to one another, but they cannot add the keystone to the bridge between them. Any sense of true unity would im-

31 “*Chōsen de umare sodatta*,” Kobayashi 1960, 17.

32 Oh 2018, 128.

33 “*Kimi wa ii hanashi o kikasete kureta*.” Kobayashi 1960, 31.

mediately destroy the isolation that was the very condition for their mutual appreciation. The attempt to build a bridge is meaningful, but the bridge can never be completed.

This may have been a difficult message to convey to a Japanese readership in 1960, even though the publication of “Bridge Building” coincided with the nationwide Anpo protests objecting to the postwar status quo in Asia. In 1952, the Bloody May Day Incident had been prompted by the imposition of an unequal security treaty between the United States and Japan at the end of the Allied Occupation, with important ramifications for Japan’s practical contribution to the prosecution of the Korean War. The 1960 Anpo protests against the renewed security treaty were likewise powered by Japanese people who opposed Japan’s incorporation into the American sphere of influence, protesters who should have been cognizant of the effects of United States–Japan foreign policy on conflicts taking place elsewhere on the continent. While the antiwar and anti-imperial sentiments that characterized the Anpo protests were also given voice in “Bridge Building,” the story’s simultaneous profession of skepticism toward the possibility of Asian solidarity may have been confusing to its target audience. In other words, the advantage of the broad readership promised by publication in the influential *Literary World* may have been squandered as a result of the story’s underlying pessimism.

Despite being nominated for the Akutagawa Prize, “Bridge Building” was not well received by critics either. One of the award’s panelists, the celebrated poet and I-novelist Takii Kōsaku, called it poorly written and claimed that he still could not understand the intention behind its title even after reading the entire work.³⁴ Thus, while the literary community

34 “*Kore wa dō mo tsutanai. Shimai made yonde mo ‘Kakyō’ to iu dai no ito mo wakaranai.*” Takii Kōsaku, “Kanbi na ren’ai shōsetsu,” *Bungei shunjū* 39, no. 3 (March 1961): 274. This is all the more confusing because the idea of a bridge between Asao and Motomura is explicitly referenced in the text in Asao’s internal monologue. Notably, Takii had actively contributed to the Japanese war effort, including working as a journalist embedded in fighting units during the Second Sino-Japanese War, so there may have been an element of willful ignorance or self-

showed a degree of respect for Kobayashi's writing, the sort of thorny repatriate character depicted here was not considered worthy of incorporation into a general Japanese understanding of the end of empire. In fact, such a character was not even considered legible by some among the literary elite. This is to say nothing of the Korean character in the work, who was not only a cipher to Asao but whose very presence in Japan represented an indelible reminder of the imperial period. In this sense "Bridge Building" is emblematic of Kobayashi's career as an author, since his persistent engagement with Japan's relationship with Korea only resulted in a continuous decline in his literary fortunes over the course of his lifetime.

Just as notably, "Bridge Building" has received scant critical attention in Japan over the sixty years following its initial publication. Its inclusion in the well-regarded "Literature and War" anthology has not yet prompted a scholarly reappraisal of the work in Japan. In the past, some degree of disregard for the text may have been a result of how "Bridge Building" demonstrates the enduring nature of Japanese colonial responsibility in the postwar period, or may have stemmed from a distaste for its political allegiances and the extreme methods of protest advocated by the main characters. However, it is also possible that it was particularly difficult to contextualize "Bridge Building" before the advent of recent scholarship on Japanese repatriation literature, which is capable of revealing how Kobayashi's story presented readers with an unorthodox and uniquely international perspective on postwar repatriation. The character of Asao has little in common with prominent tropes of repatriates as simple victims of the Second World War, and for Asao, return to Japan does not obviate the need to think deeply about colonial responsibility. In this way, "Bridge Building" represents a striking attempt to counteract the romanticized repatriation narratives that had been coopted for new nationalist ends since the beginning of Japan's participation in the Cold War. Despite Asao's failure to build a bridge with Korea, Kobayashi's work thereby

succeeds in revealing one of the unstable pillars of Japan's postwar foundational narrative.

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<Abstract>

Missing Keystones: Echoes of Empire in Kobayashi Masaru's "Bridge Building"

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Postwar writings by and about Japanese repatriates often serve to illustrate the incomplete nature of Japanese decolonization. While the process of repatriation physically removed Japanese colonists from the former empire, it also deferred the necessary process of coming to terms with Japan's imperial past. This article examines how unresolved memories of empire reemerge in the postwar writings of Kobayashi Masaru (1927–1971), a Japanese author who was born and raised in colonial Korea. Through an analysis of Kobayashi's Akutagawa Prize-nominated short story "Bridge Building" ("Kakyō," 1960), set in Japan during the Korean War, it shows that although Kobayashi depicts Japanese and Korean characters who are united by a common goal and their past experiences of imperial violence, the gap between them remains insurmountable. The article contends that Kobayashi's work represents an attempt to counteract romanticized repatriation narratives that had been coopted for new nationalist ends at the beginning of the Cold War.

Keywords: Japan, repatriation, decolonization, reconciliation, *zainichi*, literature, postcolonial, Korean War, Kobayashi Masaru, Anpo protests

〈국문초록〉

잃어버린 뼈기돌: 고바야시 마사루의 “가교”에 남은 제국의 흔적

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일본인 귀환자 (히키아게사, 引揚者)들이 쓴 전후의 글들은 종종 미완성적인 일본 탈 식민지성을 잘 드러내준다. 귀환 (히키아게, 引揚げ)의 과정이 구 제국 지역에서 일본 식민자들을 물리적으로 제거하는 과정이었지만, 이는 또한 일본 제국주의의 과거를 제대로 매듭짓는 데 필수적인 과정을 지연시키기도 했다. 이 논문은 식민지 조선에서 태어나고 자란 일본인 작가, 고바야시 마사루 (小林勝, 1927~1971)의 전후 작품에서 해소되지 못한 제국의 기억이 어떻게 다시 나타나는가를 검토한다. 한국 전쟁 당시의 일본을 배경으로 한 작품으로, 아쿠타가와상 후보작에 오르기도 했던, 고바야시의 단편 “가교” (架橋, 1960년 작)에 대한 분석을 통해서, 본 논문은 작가가 일본인과 한국인이 제국주의 폭력에 대한 과거의 경험과 공동의 목표를 위해 연대하는 과정을 그리지만, 그들 사이에는 극복할 수 없는 간극이 있다는 점을 보여준다. 이 글은 고바야시의 작품이 냉전 초기, 새로운 민족주의적 목적으로 동원되었던 낭만화된 귀환 서사에 정면으로 맞서는 시도를 보여준다고 주장한다.

주제어: 일본, 귀환, 히키아게, 탈식민화, 화해, 재일조선인, 자이니치, 문학, 포스트 콜로니얼, 한국 전쟁, 고바야시 마사루, 안보 투쟁