

# “Japan Still Has Cadres Remaining”

Japanese in the USSR and Mainland China,  
1945–1956<sup>1</sup>

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Hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians, soldiers, and prisoners of war (POWs) were detained or living in the Soviet Union and Communist-controlled parts of China in the turbulent decade from the end of World War II to the early years of the Cold War. But Soviet and Chinese authorities differed significantly in how they made use of, communicated with, and conceptualized the Japanese under their control. The Soviet Union treated Japanese internees with a higher degree of neglect and mistrust and employed them as a mass labor force on large-scale Soviet infrastructure and industrial projects. In contrast, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was far more magnanimous in its treatment, valuing the Japanese POWs and civilians for their skilled labor and military contribution to the Chinese Civil War and using them as a means of demonstrating the CCP's credentials as an effective and legitimate governing party. The way the Japanese were treated by the CCP and Soviet Union offers an innovative means of comparing how these Communist states responded differently to the changing international order from World War II to the Cold War. CCP and Soviet policies toward the Japanese during this decade were shaped less by ideological alignments or the formation of the Sino-Soviet alliance in 1950 and more by the legacies of East Asia's recent wars: the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), World War II/China's "War of Resistance against Japan" (1937–1945), and the Chinese Civil War (1946–1949).

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1. The quotation in the title comes from Joseph Stalin's remarks during a January 1950 conversation with Mao Zedong. See "Record of Talks between I. V. Stalin and Chairman of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China Mao Zedong," 22 January 1950, in Archive of the President, Russian Federation, Fond (F.) 45, Opis' (Op.) 1, Delo (D.) 329, Listy (L.) 29–38, trans. by Danny Rozas, in History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive (HPPDA), available online at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111245>.

The very fact of these differences in Chinese and Soviet conceptions and treatment of Japanese under their control is puzzling from the perspective of the existing literature on attitudes toward Japan within the wider Sino-Soviet relationship. The literature emphasizes *similarities* in the policies of these two Communist states toward Japan and argues that *shared* anti-Japanese sentiment helped to bind the CCP and the Soviet Union as new allies in the unfolding Cold War. David Wolff, for instance, suggests that shared enmity toward Japan helped to guide negotiations between Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong from 1949 to 1950.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Adam Cathcart and Patricia Nash maintain that the two Communist states “stoked” hostility toward Japanese war criminals as a means of demonstrating Sino-Soviet solidarity and building domestic Chinese support for the new Sino-Soviet alliance.<sup>3</sup>

In this article we come to an alternative conclusion that instead emphasizes *differences* in Soviet and CCP conceptions and treatment of the Japanese in their territories. We reach this conclusion for two reasons. First, the article takes an explicitly comparative approach, studying how the Soviet Union and CCP each managed the welfare and day-to-day lives of the Japanese, how the two Communist states employed propaganda to instill key messages among their charges, and how they dealt with the question of repatriation. Although an extensive literature has explored separately the experience of the Japanese in either the Soviet Union or China, few scholars have directly compared how the two Communist allies dealt with the Japanese under their control.<sup>4</sup> In

2. David Wolff, “Japan and Stalin’s Policy toward Northeast Asia after World War II,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Spring 2013), pp. 5, 9–12.

3. Adam Cathcart, “Against Invisible Enemies’: Japanese Bacteriological Weapons in China’s Cold War, 1949–1952,” *Chinese Historical Review*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2009), pp. 101–129; Adam Cathcart and Patricia Nash, “To Serve Revenge for the Dead’: Chinese Communist Responses to Japanese War Crimes in the PRC Foreign Ministry Archive, 1949–1956,” *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 200 (December 2009), pp. 1053–1069; and Adam Cathcart and Patricia Nash, “War Criminals and the Road to Sino-Japanese Normalization: Zhou Enlai and the Shenyang Trials, 1954–1956,” *Twentieth Century China*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (April 2009), pp. 89–111.

4. See, for example, Lori Watt, *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009); Yang Daqing, “Resurrecting the Empire? Japanese Technicians in Postwar China, 1945–49,” in Harald Fuess, ed., *The Japanese Empire in East Asia and Its Postwar Legacy* (Munich: Iudicium, 1998); Rowena Ward, “Delaying Repatriation: Japanese Technicians in Early Postwar China,” *Japan Forum*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (2011), pp. 471–483; Chan Yeeshan, *Abandoned Japanese in Postwar Manchuria: The Lives of War Orphans and Wives in Two Countries* (New York: Routledge, 2011); William F. Nimmo, *Behind a Curtain of Silence: Japanese in Soviet Custody 1945–1956* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988); Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Homecomings: The Belated Return of Japan’s Lost Soldiers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); Andrew E. Barshay, *The Gods Left First: The Captivity and Repatriation of Japanese POWs in Northeast Asia, 1945–1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Sherzod Muminov, *Eleven Winters of Discontent: The Siberian Internment and the Making of a New Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022); Yokote Shinji, “Soviet Repatriation Policy, U.S. Occupation Authorities, and Japan’s Entry

taking a comparative approach, we draw on a range of Soviet, Chinese, and Japanese sources, including new materials from the State Archive of the Russian Federation, the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive, and memoirs by Japanese who were interned in either the USSR or China. We also consult U.S. and British archives from the period to locate the problem in a broader international context. To the best of our knowledge, currently available Chinese and Soviet archives provide only glimpses of direct discussion between the CCP and Soviet Union about how to deal with postwar Japan and the vast numbers of Japanese in territories under their control.<sup>5</sup> We thus adopt an approach that compares CCP and Soviet policies, attitudes, and behavior toward the stranded Japanese. Although Japanese memoirs provide valuable source material about the day-to-day experiences of internment, most of the accounts tend to portray the Japanese subjects as victims of (in particular) Soviet brutality and often fail to recognize Japan's own brutality in China and elsewhere in Asia.<sup>6</sup> Where possible, we therefore triangulate the Japanese memoirs with surveys and other reports produced by the Soviet and Chinese authorities. Relations between the Communist parties of the three countries were important but are not directly relevant to the topic of this article and therefore are not examined here.

into the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2013), pp. 30–50; Donald G. Gillin and Charles Etter, "Staying On: Japanese Soldiers and Civilians in China, 1945–1949," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (1983), pp. 497–518; Araragi Shinzō, "The Collapse of the Japanese Empire, Human Migrations and Repatriation," in Barak Kushner and Sherzod Muminov, eds., *The Dismantling of Japan's Empire in East Asia: Deimperialization, Postwar Legitimation and Imperial Afterlife* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 66–83; and Park Jung-jin, "North Korean Nation Building and Japanese Imperialism: People's Nation, 'People's Diplomacy' and the Japanese Technicians," in Barak Kushner and Sherzod Muminov, eds., *The Dismantling of Japan's Empire in East Asia: Deimperialization, Postwar Legitimation and Imperial Afterlife* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 199–219. For Japanese language sources, see, among many others, Takeshi Tomita, *Shiberia yokuryūsha tachi no sengo: Reisenka no seron to undō, 1945–56 nen* (Tokyo: Jinbun Shoin, 2013); Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Haisen to sengo no aida de: Okurete kaerishi mono tachi* (Tokyo: Chikuma Sensho, 2012); and Yasuo Wakatsuki, *Shiberia horyō shūyōjo: Soren to nihonjin* (Tokyo: Saimaru Shuppankai, 1979).

5. For evidence of discussion between the PRC and Soviet Union on the issue of Japanese war criminals and the Soviet decision to transfer 971 (eventually 969) Japanese POWs to Chinese custody in July 1950, see "Conversation between A. Vyshinsky and Mao Zedong, Moscow," 6 January 1950, in Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation, F. 0100, Op. 43, D. 43, Papka 302, Ll. 1–5, obtained by Odd Arne Westad and Daniel Rozas, in HPPPPDA. However, on the whole, scholars emphasize the lack of coordination between Moscow and Beijing in dealing with war criminals and the fact that Beijing was at times frustrated or surprised by Moscow's spontaneous policy decisions. See, for example, Cathcart, "Against Invisible Enemies," pp. 64–66, 74–77; Cathcart and Nash, "War Criminals and the Road to Sino-Japanese Normalization," p. 93; Cathcart and Nash, "To Serve Revenge for the Dead," pp. 1,063–1,066; and Barak Kushner, *Men to Devils, Devils to Men: Japanese War Crimes and Chinese Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 261–262.

6. For more on this point, see Sherzod Muminov, "From Imperial Revenants to Cold War Victims: 'Red Repatriates' from the Soviet Union and the Making of the New Japan, 1949–1952," *Cold War History*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (2017), pp. 425–442.

The second reason to emphasize differences is in the article's temporal focus that connects the end of World War II in September 1945 to the immediate resumption of the Chinese Civil War between the CCP and Nationalist government and to the onset and early years of the Cold War in Northeast Asia, concluding in 1956 with the end of Japanese internment in the Soviet Union. Examining this continuous eleven-year period reveals how specific circumstances in China and the Soviet Union, and the two countries' discrete pathways from World War II to Cold War, produced different conceptions of and approaches toward Japanese under their control and, by extension, post-war Japan. The emphasis here is thus on continuities that bridge World War II and the Cold War rather than on ruptures.

The article highlights the complex negotiations between the great powers and other countries in which Japanese internees often served as bargaining chips or vehicles of propaganda. By expanding our temporal focus, we show that the early Cold War in East Asia did not represent a neat division between two ideological or geopolitical camps and was instead a fluid period in which the contours of the new international order had not yet congealed. Comparing Soviet and CCP treatment of the Japanese allows us to observe the uncertain and unsettled period of the early Cold War in East Asia and the ways it was embedded in East Asia's recent wars. This comparison reveals a new layer in the Sino-Soviet-Japanese triangle, with historical and regional realities and relationships often trumping ideological alliances. In what follows, we integrate this comparative and chronological approach to explore Soviet and CCP treatment of Japanese over four discrete periods from 1945 to 1956.

## **The World at War's End**

More than 6.5 million Japanese military personnel and civilians were based in Japanese colonies and occupied regions around Asia at the end of World War II.<sup>7</sup> How to unravel the vast Japanese empire became a matter of pressing concern for the governments of the Allied forces. At wartime conferences in Cairo (1943), Yalta (1945), and Potsdam (1945), the leaders of the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and Nationalist China made plans for the winding back of Japan's colonies and the repatriation of millions

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7. Kobayashi Hideo, "The Post-War Treatment of Japanese Overseas Nationals," in P. Towle, M. Kosuge, and Yoichi Kibata, eds., *Japanese Prisoners of War* (London: Hambledon Press, 2000), pp. 163–172.

of Japanese once the war was over.<sup>8</sup> The Allied governments were concerned not only about ensuring that Japan was effectively demobilized and demilitarized but also about preventing the mass slaughter of Japanese nationals by their erstwhile colonial subjects.<sup>9</sup> As the war drew to a close in the late summer of 1945, millions of Japanese nationals were repatriated to Japan from colonies in China, Korea, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia.<sup>10</sup> Yet the repatriation process was complicated and was held up by three factors that changed the fate of hundreds of thousands of Japanese nationals: first, the Soviet Union's late entry into the war against Japan in August 1945; second, the resumption of the civil war between the Chinese Nationalists and Communists in April 1946; and third, the gradual erosion of wartime Allied solidarity and its replacement by Cold War adversarial relations between the United States, the Soviet Union, and the newly established (in 1949) People's Republic of China.

In August 1945, the Soviet Red Army engaged in a short but highly destructive campaign against the Imperial Japanese Army in Southern Sakhalin, the Kurile Islands, and the puppet state of Manchukuo. Soviet reports estimate that more than 80,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians were killed by the Red Army, with tens of thousands more fleeing to the Korean peninsula as refugees.<sup>11</sup> On 23 August 1945, just three days after the Kwantung Army accepted the terms of its surrender with the Soviet Union, Stalin signed a secret decree on behalf of the Soviet State Defense Committee titled "On Receiving and Accommodating the Japanese Army Prisoners of War and Utilizing Them for Labor."<sup>12</sup> This decree initiated a process of detaining, at the final count, more than 600,000 Japanese nationals and forcibly removing them to labor camps in Siberia and other parts of the USSR.<sup>13</sup> The detainees included soldiers of the Japanese Kwantung army, officials who had served in Japan's

8. For example, Barak Kushner and Sherzod Muminov, eds, *Overcoming Empire in Post-Imperial East Asia: Repatriation, Redress and Rebuilding* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

9. Watt, *When Empire Comes Home*, p. 4.

10. Lori Watt estimates that from September 1945 to December 1946 over 5 million Japanese nationals were repatriated. See *ibid.*, pp. 1, 135–137.

11. Shinji Yokote, "Soviet Repatriation Policy, U.S. Occupation Authorities, and Japan's Entry into the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Spring 2013), pp. 33–36. For more on the war and the toll inflicted on Japanese civilians in Manchukuo, see Chan, *Abandoned Japanese in Postwar Manchuria*, pp. 20–21.

12. "Postanovlenie GKO SSSR o prieme, razmeshchenii i trudovom ispol'zovanii voennoplennykh Yaponskoi armii," 23 August 1945, in Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation (TsAMO RF), F. 66, Op. 178499, D. 1, Ll. 593–598, reproduced in *Russkii arkhiv: Velikaya Otechestvennaya*, Vol. 18 (7-2) (Moscow: Terra, 2000), pp. 175–179.

13. The exact number ranges from 574,000 to 640,000 Japanese captives, with 600,000 the most widely cited figure by both Russian and Japanese historians.

Manchukuo government, military-age men who had been called up from Japanese settler communities in Northeast China in the late stages of the war, and civilians employed by the military and the South Manchuria Railway.<sup>14</sup>

Day-to-day life for most Japanese in Soviet camps was defined by physically demanding labor, extreme cold, and hunger—the three conditions that formed “the Siberian trinity of suffering” in Japanese memoirs of the period. For example, internee Iitsuka Toshio recalled how he spent his days trying to meet the daily work quota of digging one cubic meter of earth. The Siberian soil was so hard and stony that “it was impossible to complete one day’s work even in a week.”<sup>15</sup> Sawatari Hideo faced the far more dangerous job of felling and sawing trees. Though he survived the ordeal, many others did not, and Sawatari’s memoir provides an account of the illness and death caused by lumbering and other forms of hard labor. Felling trees was, in his words, a job that caused internees to die “one after another.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, despite the hard manual labor they performed, the food rations the Japanese received were hardly sufficient, especially during the first two years of their internment, when the food situation in the Soviet Union was disastrous. The typical daily diet consisted of black bread, a bowl of *balanda* (a thin soup made with cabbage, grain, and other cheap ingredients), and a mug of weak tea. Iitsuka’s memoir is representative of many internee recollections about food, which “was the foremost matter of concern of our lives in Siberia.” Because both the quality and the quantity of food were extremely poor during the first months of captivity, the internees often ate “whatever they could find.” Many died from eating poisonous mushrooms and herbs until camp authorities banned gathering wild food. Even though internees at most camps received a daily ration of 100 grams of meat, what they fished out of their soup bowls was often not meat. It was not unusual to find “goats’ feet, hooves, [or fragments of animal] heads chopped up with an axe. I can imagine the genuine surprise of somebody who found a goat’s eyeball in his soup,” Iitsuka wrote.<sup>17</sup>

14. Chan estimates that up to 50,000 military-age men were called up to join forces with the Kwangtung army in 1945. See Chan, *Abandoned Japanese in Postwar Manchuria*, p. 19.

15. Iitsuka Toshio, “Watashi no shiberia yokuryūki,” in Public Foundation for Peace and Consolation (PFPC), ed., *Heiwa no ishizue: Shiberia kyōsei yokuryūsha ga kataritsugu rōku*, 19 vols. (Tokyo: Heiwa kinen jigyō tokubetsu kikin, 1991–2012), Vol. 9, p. 294.

16. Sawatari Hideo, “Watashi no shiberia yokuryūki,” in PFPC, ed., *Heiwa no ishizue*, Vol. 6, p. 318.

17. The amount differed from camp to camp, and in the first two years of internment many received as little as 30 grams of meat a day. See Iitsuka, “Watashi no shiberia yokuryūki,” p. 295. The years 1946 and 1947 were a period of extreme food shortages in the Soviet Union that resulted in famines across the country. See V. F. Zima, “Golod v Rossii 1946–1947 gg.,” *Otechestvennaya istoriya*, No. 1 (1993), pp. 97–128.

Ultimately, however, the harsh and unfamiliar Siberian climate and the shortage of adequate quarters and clothing were what most contributed to the day-to-day suffering of the Japanese in the Soviet labor camps. During the first winter, close to 10,000 Japanese internees died of severe cold or illness caused by poor sanitation, onerous working conditions, and a lack of food and clothing suitable for the climate.<sup>18</sup> To the internees' (and their captors') bad luck, the winter of 1945–1946 was one of the coldest on record. More than 7,300 internees died in December 1945 and January 1946 alone, and a further 25,000 became ill and unable to work.<sup>19</sup> In a February 1946 dispatch addressed to a senior Soviet official, Lavrentii Beria, on “Receiving and Accommodating Japanese POWs in the Soviet Union,” People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs Sergei Kruglov reported that of around 300,000 POWs who had been medically examined, 19.5 percent were “weakened” and 5.9 percent were ill. Furthermore, nearly one-third (29.7 percent) of all internees suffered from marasmus—severe malnutrition caused by protein deficiency. Kruglov candidly outlined the reasons for the high number of deaths and illnesses: “insufficient daily food quotas, which do not compensate for the energy spent, especially for the POWs working at physically demanding duties in severe environmental conditions.”<sup>20</sup>

The bitter experience Japanese POWs faced in Soviet labor camps was primarily the product of economic and climatic conditions beyond the control of Soviet authorities, but it also resulted from labor mismanagement and shortages in the USSR. In the 1930s under Stalin, the Soviet Union had expanded the system of employing prisoners in forced labor camps, better known by the shorthand “Gulag” after the Soviet government agency that administered the camps.<sup>21</sup> For the camp chiefs, the foreign captives’ most immediate role was to provide labor. Paragraph 2 of the decree that initiated the internment stipulated the selection of “up to 500,000 Japanese physically fit to work in the conditions of the Far East and Siberia.”<sup>22</sup> The mission of Beria, Kruglov’s predecessor as commissar of internal affairs, was to use them in alleviating the Soviet’s Union drastic shortage of workers, although recent research by

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18. “Donesenie Narkoma vnutrennikh del v SNK SSSR o khode priema i razmeshcheniya yaponskikh voennoplennykh v Sovetskom Soyuze,” February 1946, in Center for Preserving Historical Documentary Collections (TsKhIDK), F. 1/p, Op. 01e, D. 40, Ll. 37–41, reproduced in *Russkii arkhiv*, pp. 193–195.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. “Gulag” stands for “Glavnoie Upravlenie ispravitel’no-trudovykh lagerey i koloniy,” the Main Directorate (of the NKVD) for Correctional-Labor Camps and Colonies.

22. “Postanovlenie GKO SSSR,” in TsAMO RF, F. 66, Op. 178499, D. 1, Ll. 593–598.



Russian and Western historians has demonstrated the inefficiencies of the Soviet forced labor system.<sup>23</sup> By late 1945, the Japanese were being put to work in priority economic sectors of the Soviet Union, where postwar reconstruction was nearly impossible without substantial human resources. Tens of thousands of Japanese worked on Soviet construction projects such as the ports of Nakhodka and Vladivostok, in coal mines and lumber sites, on railway construction, and in collective farms across the USSR. Perhaps the largest project to which the Japanese contributed was the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM). More than 150,000 Japanese—almost one third of the total number of Japanese initially transported to the Soviet Union—worked under onerous conditions alongside Soviet citizens to build this new railway, described later by Leonid Brezhnev as “the construction project of the century.”<sup>24</sup>

As early as September 1945, the Japanese government began lobbying U.S. occupying authorities to recognize the plight of Japanese detained in the Soviet Union. The intensity of these pleas increased amid growing geopolitical tensions between the two superpowers. The Soviet Union’s decision to seize 600,000 Japanese in August 1945 was made just days after U.S. President Harry Truman rejected Stalin’s request to land troops on Hokkaido, Japan’s northernmost island. Full archival evidence behind Stalin’s decision to detain the Japanese remains unavailable, but the internment of the Japanese might well have served as Stalin’s attempt to preserve a lever of influence over post-war Japan, which, unlike Germany, had fallen completely into U.S. hands.<sup>25</sup> The United States was similarly determined to minimize Soviet influence in Japan. Leveling criticism at the Soviet detention of Japanese in Siberia thus became a convenient way for the United States to diminish the USSR in Japanese eyes.<sup>26</sup> In response to U.S. criticism, Soviet officials insisted they were

23. Natalia Surzhikova, “*Ekonomika sovsetskogo plena: Administrirovanie, proizvodstvo, potreblenie*,” in L. I. Borodkin, S. A. Krasil’nikov, and O.V. Khlevniuk, eds., *Istoriya stalinizma: Primuditel’nyi trud v SSSR—Ekonomika, politika, pamyat’* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2013), pp. 78–87.

24. Soviet propaganda hailed the BAM as a feat of the Komsomol (Soviet youth organization), but the railway was completed using significant POW and prisoner labor. See S. V. Kalugina, “*Faktyory ideologicheskoi ‘obrabotki’ yaponskikh voennoplennykh i internirovannykh v period stroitel’sтва BAMA 1945–1956 gg.*,” *Vestnik Tikhookeanskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, Vol. 13, no. 2 (2009), pp. 177–182.

25. “Translation of Message from Harry S. Truman to Joseph Stalin,” 19 August 1945, in Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), F. 558, Op. 11, D. 372, Ll. 112–113, trans. by Sergey Radchenko, in HPPDA.

26. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency documents from the period demonstrate this strategy. For example, “Strategic Importance of Japan,” in CIA, ORE 43–48, 24 May 1948, CIA-RDP78-01617A003200190001-5, available online at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom>. See also Yokote, “Soviet Repatriation Policy,” p. 48; and Muminov, *Eleven Winters of Discontent*, pp. 231–240.



improving the living and working conditions of the Japanese POWs. From 1945 to 1947, Kruglov and his deputy Vasilii Chernyshov issued numerous regulations exhorting local officials to “avoid the degradation of [the POWs’] physical condition” and requiring that the Japanese internees receive “eight hours of uninterrupted night-time rest” and “hot meals three times a day.”<sup>27</sup> After confirming the dire state of Japanese internees’ health, Kruglov decided the only way “to preserve the pool of labor and to use the POWs effectively in industry” was by increasing the daily food allowance for those who had been “weakened” or had been involved in the hardest forms of labor. Kruglov established special food quotas for the malnourished, called for the transfer of POWs from Siberia and the Far East to regions with “more customary climatic conditions” (such as Soviet Central Asia); and sought to “free and repatriate Japanese POWs who are ill, weakened and unable to work.”<sup>28</sup>

Yet these regulations did nothing to improve the situation at a time when the Soviet economy was not up to the task of feeding its own citizens, let alone sustaining several million POWs.<sup>29</sup> Reports from the Soviet Army’s Far Eastern Headquarters indicate that many camps early in the internment “[were] not supplied with fuel and food. Bread [was] substituted with [raw] flour. They had no rice, vegetables, and fats. The [detainees’] main diet consist[ed] of millet and sorghum. The incoming POWs [were often] accommodated under open skies.”<sup>30</sup> Even though the conditions in labor camps for Japanese were demanding, they were no worse than those faced by Soviet citizens in forced labor camps around the country.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the suffering of Japanese in the USSR would not have been all that surprising were it not for the striking contrast in how China’s Communist leaders dealt with the Japanese POWs and other civilians under their control.

27. “Polozhenie NKVD SSSR o trudovom ispol’zovanii voennoplennykh,” 29 September 1945, in State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), F. 9401, Op. 1, D. 737, Ll. 180–214, reprinted in M. M Zagorul’ko, ed, *Voennoplennyye v SSSR, 1939–1956: Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow: Logos, 2000), Doc. 6.45, pp. 628–641; and “Direktiva Narodnogo Komissara vnutrennikh del SSSR No. 175,” in GARF, F. 9401, Op. 12, D. 205, T. 13, L. 53, reprinted in Zagorul’ko, ed., *Voennoplennyye v SSSR*, Doc. 6.44, p. 627.

28. “Donesenie Narkoma,” in TsKhIDK, F. 1/p, Op. 01e, D. 40, Ll. 37–41.

29. An NKVD memorandum, dated 28 January 1949, puts the total number of foreign soldiers taken prisoner by the USSR during World War II at 3,899,397. Close to 2 million POWs still remained in the Soviet camps at war’s end. See “Spravka GUPVI NKVD SSSR o voennoplennykh,” 28 January 1949, in TsKhIDK, F. 1/p, Op. 01e, D. 15a, Ll. 92–95, reprinted in Zagorul’ko, ed., *Voennoplennyye v SSSR*, Doc 3.93.

30. Ibid.

31. L. I. Borodkin et al., *Istoriya stalinizma*; and Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (London: Penguin, 2004).

## From the Ashes of Civil War to the Creation of the PRC

For the Japanese nationals who had not been killed or captured by Soviet troops, life in postwar China was governed by either the Chinese Nationalist government or the CCP, depending on where the Japanese happened to be living at the time of Japan's surrender. The vast majority of Japanese fell under the authority of Chang Kai-shek's Nationalist government, which in the immediate aftermath of World War II established a Management Office for Japanese Civilians and Prisoners of War to assist in the Allied repatriation of some 3 million Japanese.<sup>32</sup> But around 300,000 Japanese were also living in the CCP-controlled parts of northern and western Manchuria at the end of the war. In the late summer of 1945, these Japanese were dispatched by the CCP to the Nationalist-led repatriation sites in Harbin, Qiqihar, and other major cities.<sup>33</sup> However, many Japanese failed to be repatriated that summer. Some slipped through the cracks because of illness, residence in remote areas of Northeast China, and failure to travel to repatriation sites, or because they were lost in the chaos of the early postwar. Other Japanese elected to remain because they now viewed China as their home or feared what they might find in Japan.<sup>34</sup> The biggest disruption to repatriation, however, occurred with the resumption of civil war between Communist and Nationalist forces in April 1946 (a war that had commenced in 1927 but had ceased temporarily as the two sides pursued a "united front" during the eight-year war against Japan). Tens of thousands of Japanese were intentionally "kept back" by the Nationalist government and the CCP's "Northeast Democratic Allied Forces," both of which viewed Japanese civilians and soldiers as important in rebuilding China's war-torn economy and in boosting the ranks of their armies in the unfolding civil war.<sup>35</sup>

Even before the onset of the civil war, Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government had recognized the need for Japanese technical expertise in helping to rebuild the major industrial sites across China that had been damaged during World War II and in running the facilities established in Japanese-occupied

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32. Yang, "Resurrecting the Empire?" p. 194.

33. "Dongbei Ribenren qingkuang he chuli yijian," 1 August to 30 November 1951, p. 6, in Foreign Ministry Archive of the People's Republic of China (FMA PRC), File No. 118-00118-02.

34. Watt, *When Empire Comes Home*, p. 104; "Guanyu dui Dongbei Riben ren gongzuo de zongjie baogao," 11 August 1949, p. 16, in FMA PRC, File No. 105-00224-02; and "Dongbei Ribenren qingkuang he chuli yijian," p. 3.

35. "Dongbei Ribenren qingkuang he chuli yijian," p. 6.

regions and cities such as Manchuria, Shanghai, and Tianjin. In late 1945, the Nationalists issued a set of “Temporary Regulations Concerning the Use of Japanese Personnel in China” stipulating that Japanese with particular technical expertise could be “retained” in China rather than repatriated. Subsequently, after the first major wave of repatriation in 1946, more than 90,000 Japanese remained in Nationalist-controlled parts of China, including 14,000 engineers, doctors, scientists, and researchers deployed to run Chinese mines, industrial facilities, research laboratories, and hospitals.<sup>36</sup> As the civil war escalated in late 1946 and into 1947, the Nationalist government repatriated many civilians but continued to make use of Japanese military personnel. Gillin and Etter contend that up to 80,000 Japanese troops were operating under Nationalist military control in Manchuria until January 1947, and that Nationalist-aligned warlords such as Yan Xishan skillfully used a corps of 15,000 Japanese soldiers to defend Shanxi against the Communists until 1949.<sup>37</sup>

In a similar turning of the tables, the CCP also shifted from fighting alongside the Nationalists against the Japanese during World War II to fighting alongside the Japanese against Nationalist forces in the Chinese Civil War. Between 8,000 and 10,000 Japanese served with the CCP during the civil war, of whom around 3,000 fought on the front lines.<sup>38</sup> Many of these were soldiers and low-ranking officers imprisoned by the Eighth Route Army and New Fourth Army, the two main Communist military forces, during World War II.<sup>39</sup> These POWs had undergone a program of ideological “training and education” led by Nosaka Sanzō, one of the founders of the Japanese Communist Party. In 1940, Nosaka had travelled to China from the USSR to work with the CCP in establishing a series of “Japanese Workers and Peasants Schools” across China to indoctrinate Japanese POWs and convert them into “revolutionary cadres” who could support the CCP’s military campaign against the Imperial Japanese Army.<sup>40</sup> Although the majority of these Japanese POWs were sent home at the end of World War II, a “few hundred” were kept back by the CCP to train additional Japanese soldiers to fight against

36. Yang, “Resurrecting the Empire?” pp. 190, 194, 205. On the Nationalist government’s use of Japanese technicians, see also Ward, “Delaying Repatriation,” pp. 471–483.

37. Gillin and Etter, “Staying On,” pp. 499–500, 507.

38. Furukawa Mantarō, *Chūgoku zanryū nihonhei no kiroku* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1994), p. iv.

39. “Guanyu Dongbei Riben ren de qingkuang baogao,” 1–30 June 1950, p. 16, in FMA PRC File No. 118-00086-02; and Gillin and Etter, “Staying On,” pp. 511–515.

40. The Japanese People’s Liberation Alliance was initially known as the “Japanese People’s Anti-war Alliance” (*Ribenren fanzhan tongmen*), see “Guanyu Dongbei Riben ren de qingkuang baogao,” p. 16.

Nationalist forces in Northeast China.<sup>41</sup> In 1951, the CCP lauded these Japanese as “international class brothers” who had been “heroic in the battle against Chiang Kai-shek’s forces.”<sup>42</sup>

As the CCP consolidated its control over Northeast China in 1947 and 1948, it also began to recognize the valuable role that Japanese civilians might play in rebuilding the Northeast’s economy. In addition to the Japanese civilians who had been working in CCP military units, hospitals, and industrial sites since the end of World War II, thousands more Japanese who had previously been “kept back” by the Nationalists now found themselves in CCP-controlled parts of the Northeast.<sup>43</sup> In October 1948, the CCP therefore established a Committee for the Management of Japanese in Northeast China (CMJNC) as a way of collecting information on the numbers of Japanese living in the region and managing their day-to-day lives.<sup>44</sup> Although precise numbers are unavailable, the committee’s first survey in September 1949 made a rough estimate of 34,000 Japanese living in the Northeast. Later surveys taken in 1950 and 1951, after the establishment of the PRC, revised those figures downward to between 20,797 and 21,063.<sup>45</sup> Of these, 14,026 worked in hospitals, industrial enterprises, and provincial and city government offices, with the majority based in the Ministry of Industry (6,883), Northeast Railway Department (2,005), and cities such as Shenyang, Harbin, Hegang, and Andong (present-day Dandong).<sup>46</sup>

A crucial explanation for the relatively better treatment of Japanese in China as compared to the Soviet Union is that the CCP viewed the Japanese

41. “Dongbei Ribenren qingkuang he chuli yijian,” pp. 6–7; and “Guanyu Dongbei Riben ren de qingkuang baogao,” pp. 16–18. On the history of the Japanese Communist Party, see Robert A. Scalapino, *The Japanese Communist Movement, 1920–1966* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

42. “Dongbei Ribenren qingkuang he chuli yijian,” pp. 7, 14–15.

43. “Guanyu Dongbei Riben ren de qingkuang baogao”; and “Guanyu dui Dongbei Riben ren gongzuo de zongjie baogao,” pp. 4–5. See also Amy King, “Reconstructing China: Japanese Technicians and Industrialization in the Early People’s Republic of China,” *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (2016), pp. 141–174; and Christian A. Hess, “From Colonial Port to Socialist Metropolis: Imperialist Legacies and the Making of ‘New Dalian,’” *Urban History*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (2011), pp. 373–390.

44. The CMJNC included representatives from the Department of Industry (*gongyebu*), Public Security Bureau (*gong’anbu*), the Northeast Railway headquarters (*tielu zongju*), the Political Affairs Unit of the Northeast Military (*junqu zhengzhibu*), the Foreign Affairs Bureau (*waishiju*), the Northeast People’s Government (*Dongbei renmin zhengfu*), and the Harbin and Shenyang municipal governments (*Ha’erbin shizhengfu*, *Shenyang shizhengfu*). “Guanyu dui Dongbei Riben ren gongzuo de zongjie baogao,” p. 10.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 16; “Dongbei Ribenren qingkuang he chuli yijian,” p. 1; and Liang Zhikou, “Jianguo Chuqi Waiqiao Guanli Gongzuo Shuping,” *Dangdai Zhongguo Shi Yanjiu*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (2006), p. 48.

46. “Dongbei Ribenren qingkuang he chuli yijian,” p. 5.

as a particularly valuable source of skilled labor. In August 1945, the Soviet Union had seized 600,000 Japanese nationals from Northeast China, along with most of the region's valuable industrial equipment and technology, as a form of compensation for its very brief military campaign against Japan. Yet the Soviet authorities had left behind in Northeast China many of the most skilled Japanese technicians and industrial experts, choosing instead to give priority to Japanese military personnel who were deemed fit for manual labor.<sup>47</sup> In a country desperately short of industrial, scientific, and medical expertise, CCP officials viewed Japanese engineers, doctors, nurses, and scientists—all of whom had long-term experience running the industries and public services in Japan's informal colony of Manchukuo—as crucial in ensuring that Northeast China would flourish under CCP control. If the Japanese had been starved or exhausted through physical labor, or if they otherwise had had their spirits broken, the CCP would have found it much harder to make use of their expertise.

This explains why skilled Japanese in Northeast China received highly favorable treatment. The CMJNC reported that work units in the city of Shenyang, where the majority of Japanese were based, paid a total of 183,629 “fen” each month to the 108 Japanese households across the city. This worked out to around 103 fen per person, which was deemed sufficient to meet average monthly living costs in Shenyang of around 60 fen per person.<sup>48</sup> But the most skilled Japanese, such as senior technicians working in the Ministry of Industry, earned up to 765 fen per month and were thus considered “relatively well off.”<sup>49</sup> Even the Japanese who were deeply critical of the Chinese Communists still acknowledged that the CCP had afforded good treatment toward skilled Japanese. One Japanese national, Yoshida Atsushi, who was detained by the CCP and made to work as a medical officer for the Communists during the civil war, argued that, because of the Communists' dire need for technical expertise, “practically all the Japanese technicians and engineers detained by the Chinese Communists are fully employed with special good treatment [*sic*] given to technicians working in war arsenal.”<sup>50</sup>

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47. King, “Reconstructing China,” pp. 167–168.

48. In May 1950, each “fen” was worth 13,200 “*Dongbei* dollars” (*Dongbei bi*), the name given to the local currency issued by the CCP-run Northeast Bank from November 1945 to December 1951. According to statistics from Shenyang, therefore, each person's monthly living costs were approximately 792,000 *Dongbei* (Northeast) dollars. “Guanyu *Dongbei* Riben ren de qingkuang baogao,” p. 3.

49. *Ibid.*

50. “Japanese National Describes Red China,” *Foreign Broadcast Information Service: China*, 17 January 1949, p. 17.

Perhaps even more important than skilled labor in explaining the difference in CCP and Soviet treatment of the Japanese, however, is that the CCP viewed the Japanese as a marker of the party's efficacy and legitimacy as a future governing force. The CCP regarded Japanese willingness to remain in China as a sign of the success of the Communist project. Thus, using ideological work and "self-criticism" campaigns, the CMJNC sought to improve the Japanese "state of mind" by teaching Japanese to "recognize the evil of the Japanese emperor" and "to understand U.S. imperialists' conspiracy to make Japan a U.S. colony."<sup>51</sup> These same officials also paid close attention to Japanese living and working conditions, studying Japanese pay rates, levels of unemployment, and quality of food. The CMJNC was pleased to report that conditions had improved significantly since the CCP's "liberation" of Northeast China in the autumn of 1948. Compared with the previous three to four years, Japanese had "relatively secure" employment and were now "mainly eating white rice" rather than sorghum.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, Northeast officials publicly recognized Japanese contributions to Communist military and civilian efforts during the civil war. In 1948 and 1949, more than 2,400 Japanese were recognized as "meritorious" or "model workers" by their Chinese work units. In March 1949, for example, the PLA praised three "heroic" Japanese soldiers for their "meritorious achievement," including Tanaka Isamu of the Northeast Field Army's Seventh Column.<sup>53</sup> Two months later, at the Chinese May Day celebrations, the Health Unit of the Northeast Military also commended 33 Japanese doctors and nurses who had provided "outstanding service" in Chinese hospitals.<sup>54</sup> One such nurse was twenty-year-old Mochizuki, who worked at the Number 15 Hospital in Northeast China.<sup>55</sup> The CMJNC reported that, when a small child came into the hospital seriously ill with tuberculosis, Mochizuki volunteered to look after the child day and night until he became well.<sup>56</sup> As a result of their ideological work and efforts to recognize Japan's contributions in this way, Northeast officials reported to the CCP Central Committee that the Japanese "feeling of wanting to return to Japan has subsided."<sup>57</sup>

51. "Guanyu dui Dongbei Riben ren gongzuo de zongjie baogao," pp. 4–5.

52. "Guanyu Dongbei Riben ren de qingkuang baogao," p. 3.

53. "Dongbei Ribenren qingkuang he chuli yijian," pp. 14–15.

54. "Guanyu dui Dongbei Riben ren gongzuo de zongjie baogao," p. 7; and "Guanyu Dongbei Riben ren de qingkuang baogao," p. 5.

55. It is not clear from this file whether the CMJNC referred to this Japanese nurse using the Japanese reading of her name, "Mochizuki," or the Chinese reading, "Wang Yue."

56. "Guanyu dui Dongbei Riben ren gongzuo de zongjie baogao," pp. 7–8.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

Although the CMJNC's work reports are not objective measures of the Japanese state of mind or living conditions, they do reflect a degree of objectivity because they also include observations on the committee's self-perceived failings with regard to the Japanese. For instance, Northeast officials acknowledged that the improvement in Japanese "class consciousness" had not been uniformly successful. They argued that the period from August 1945 until the end of 1946 had been a "time of despair" for many Japanese in the region: Japan had been defeated in war; Japanese POWs felt hopeless about their own futures; and many longed to return home and did not wish to work for the CCP.<sup>58</sup> Japanese had also been caught up in the CCP's mass mobilization and land reform campaigns in 1947 and 1948. An unintended consequence of the confession and self-criticism meetings that accompanied the CCP's ideological campaigns was to stir up bad feelings between "ultra-leftist" young Japanese and older, more conservative Japanese technicians.<sup>59</sup>

The unhappiness intensified so much that one group of Japanese petitioned the CCP authorities in Harbin in August 1948 asking to be allowed to return home. In response, the CCP arrested the "bad elements" who were behind the petition, "suppressed" the movement for repatriation, and attempted to dampen the ultra-leftist tendencies among young Japanese. Yet the CMJNC warned that these methods had been only partly successful and that further examples of "backwardness" might arise in the future.<sup>60</sup> Despite these exceptions, however, the CCP took much greater care than its Soviet counterparts to treat the Japanese hospitably in the years after World War II. As the Chinese civil war ground to an end and the PRC was established, the CCP continued to use expatriate Japanese as a critical plank in its efforts to demonstrate the legitimacy and success of the Communist project.

## Onset of the Cold War

With the onset of the Korean War in June 1950, Cold War animosity between the major powers in Asia intensified. The CCP and the Soviet Union now viewed the Japanese detained or left behind in their territories as a means to promote their wider goals vis-à-vis Japan. Both governments considered

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58. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

59. On the CCP's use of land reform as a form of political mobilization, see Suzanne Peper, *Civil War in China: The Political Struggle, 1945–1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

60. "Guanyu dui Dongbei Riben ren gongzuo de zongjie baogao," pp. 4–5; and "Guanyu Dongbei Riben ren de qingkuang baogao," p. 18.



the U.S.-occupied Japan as a bastion of U.S. capitalism and imperialism in East Asia. Soviet representatives at the Allied Council for Japan and the Far East Commission, as well as the official TASS news agency, dispatched regular reports to Moscow lamenting the “mass dismissals for political purposes” of left-leaning Japanese workers and police crackdowns and arrests of leftist political groups.<sup>61</sup> In China, the Xinhua news agency and *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily) published regular articles in 1949 and 1950 condemning the U.S. “imperialists’ efforts” to turn Japan into a military base, U.S. “interference” in the unfolding Korean War, and the policies of “terror” supposedly being implemented by General Douglas MacArthur and his “running dog” Yoshida Shigeru.<sup>62</sup>

In this tense international climate, Soviet and Chinese officials believed they could use propaganda to educate Japanese so that they might “lead the struggle” for Japan’s “democracy” and “independence” after repatriation.<sup>63</sup> To do so, both governments published Japanese-language newspapers and magazines and distributed them among Japanese civilians and POWs. In China, the Northeast People’s Government subsidized the publication of the daily *Minshu shimbun* (Democracy News), which carried translations of *Renmin ribao* articles about Japanese suffering under the U.S. occupation and notices about political activities for Japanese in the Northeast.<sup>64</sup> In the USSR, the newspaper was simply called the *Nihon shimbun* (Japan Newspaper), established by the Red Army’s Political Department and published in Khabarovsk.<sup>65</sup> The *Nihon shimbun* outlined the rules of conduct in the camps and became a crucial vehicle of propaganda: justifying Soviet entry into the war against Japan, pointing out injustices of the capitalist system in Japan, and criticizing the U.S. occupation of postwar Japan.<sup>66</sup> The newspaper was a core feature of Soviet indoctrination programs in subsequent years. So-called “societies of friends of the

61. “O yaponskikh voennoplennykh,” 26 August–8 December 1949, in RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 3, D. 1078, Punkt (p.) 561 (also, appendices to punkty 597 and 799); and “Yaponiya—fashizatsiya i militarizatsiya: Voennye prestupniki,” 1 January 1–29 May 1951, in GARF, F. 4459, Op. 27, D. 13176.

62. Sun Pinghua, Xiao Xiangqian, and Wang Xiaoxian, *Zhanhou Zhongri Guanxi Wenxianji, 1945–1970* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1996), pp. 60, 78–84.

63. Elena Katasonova, *Poslednie plenniki Vtoroi mirovoi voiny: Malozvestnye stranitsy rossisko-yaponskikh otnoshenii* (Moscow: IVRAN, 2005), pp. 64–65; “Guanyu dui Dongbei Riben ren gongzuo de zongjie baogao,” pp. 11–12; and “Dongbei riben guanli weiyuanhui gongzuo baogao (1949 nian 8 yue dao 1950 nian 6 yue),” 1 August 1949–30 June 1950, pp. 1–2, in FMA PRC File No. 118-00086-01.

64. “Dongbei riben guanli weiyuanhui gongzuo baogao”; and “Guanyu dui Dongbei Riben ren gongzuo de zongjie baogao,” p. 11.

65. “Ob izdanii ‘Yaponskoi gazety,’” 1 September 1945, in RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 3, D. 1053, L. 231. See also Katasonova, *Poslednie plenniki*, p. 50.

66. Katasonova, *Poslednie plenniki*, pp. 68–69.

newspaper” were established in camps where regular readings and discussions took place.

But beyond these broad similarities, the two states’ visions for postwar Japan and the methods of propaganda they adopted differed in important ways. In the USSR, propaganda toward the Japanese reflected Soviet aims of changing the political system in Japan and general suspicion that the country continued to pose a political and security threat to Soviet interests as a newly established U.S. ally. Soviet officials struck a reproachful note when they instructed camp officers to use propaganda as a way to ensure that “the POWs acknowledge their responsibility for the destruction inflicted by their armies on the territory of the USSR” and that they “work wholeheartedly in the camps [to compensate for this destruction].”<sup>67</sup> It did not matter that the Japanese had never actually invaded the USSR or caused any destruction on Soviet territory during World War II. Apparently, “destruction” referred not only to the Soviet-Japanese War of August 1945 but also to the Japanese victory over Tsarist Russia in the 1904–1905 Russo-Japanese War and Japan’s “intervention in the Far East” from 1918 through 1922, when it occupied Vladivostok and other parts of the Russian Far East.<sup>68</sup> The sentiment expressed in Soviet propaganda toward Japanese POWs reflected official Soviet views that Japan posed “a constant threat to the Far East of the USSR,” owing to its long history of military prowess in Asia and the rehabilitation of its military and heavy industries under U.S. occupation.<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, Soviet officials used camp propaganda networks to conduct surveillance and stay abreast of the day-to-day activities of the Japanese internees. A key part of Soviet ideological work was the establishment of “anti-fascist democratic activist groups” (*aktiv*). To join the *aktiv*, Japanese internees had to demonstrate left-leaning ideological credentials. Incentives for joining the *aktiv* were numerous, from easier work assignments and better food to the alluring promise of early repatriation. These privileges encouraged *aktiv* members to promote the Soviet line among themselves and to inform on their fellow Japanese. Soviet camp officers demanded to be informed of the political mood within the camps, especially any “hostile” or “subversive” elements who might threaten the order in the camps.<sup>70</sup> Archival materials confirm that

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67. *Ibid.*, pp. 64–65.

68. Kathryn Weathersby, “Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945–1950: New Evidence from Russian Archives,” CWIHP Working Paper No. 8, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, 1993, p. 20.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 17–18, 20.

70. Katasonova, *Poslednie plenniki*, pp. 64–65.

Soviet officials took harsh measures against those who espoused incorrect political ideologies or refused to work (sabotage) or secretly campaigned against work quotas, bad food, and delays in repatriation. Those guilty of such “subversive acts” risked receiving sentences of up to 25 years of hard labor in the camps.<sup>71</sup>

Given the environment of constant surveillance, the evidence on whether Japanese “activists” were actually converted into ideological supporters of Communism and the Soviet Union is mixed. On the one hand, the Soviet Union kept records of more than 15,000 letters written by Japanese internees who thanked the Soviet government for the “good treatment, good food, [and] exceptional humaneness” they had supposedly received, and praised the USSR for being “steadfast in its fight for the establishment of peace among the peoples of the world.”<sup>72</sup> Soviet reports also note that, once the Japanese were aboard the repatriation ships bound for Japan, they shouted, “Hurrah! Soviet Union *Banzai* (Long Live)! Comrade Stalin *Banzai!*”<sup>73</sup>

On the other hand, Japanese memoirs written after repatriation suggest that many of these so-called anti-fascist activists were motivated less by ideological support for the Soviet Union than by other factors. Many were “forced” by their Soviet superiors and some opportunistically hoped to achieve early repatriation.<sup>74</sup> Regardless of whether the Japanese were converted into “genuine antifascists,” the key point to stress here is that Soviet propaganda toward the Japanese was never solely about political ideology. It also had a corrective element to it, designed to punish the Japanese for their country’s past wartime atrocities, to redress the injustices supposedly inflicted on the USSR by motivating the Japanese to increase production, and to prevent Japan from posing a future threat to the Soviet Union by keeping a large number of potential soldiers away from Japan and using the Siberian internees as vehicles for delivering pro-Soviet ideas to U.S.-occupied Japan.

In China, rather than punishing Japanese POWs and civilians for their colonization of Manchukuo and wartime aggression in China, CCP propaganda struck a more positive note, viewing Japanese not as subversive elements but as “our allies” in the common struggle against U.S. imperialism.<sup>75</sup> This view of Japan came directly from the leaders of the CCP, Mao Zedong

71. “Dokladnaya zapiska S. N. Kruglova,” 27 May 1949, in GARF, F. 9401, Op. 2, D. 235, Ll. 37–41.

72. See samples of the letters in TsAMO RF, F. 142, Op. 419632, D.11, Ll. 75–78.

73. *Ibid.*

74. Inomata Kunio, “Sennō kyōiku mo noruma,” in PFPC, ed., *Heiwa no ishizue*, Vol. 1, pp. 23–26.

75. “Dongbei Ribenren qingkuang he chuli yijian,” p. 18.

and Zhou Enlai, who wanted to strengthen people-to-people ties with Japan in order to “drive a wedge” between Washington and Tokyo and to persuade the Japanese government to remove U.S. military bases from Japan. In contrast to Moscow’s emphasis on past wars with Japan, Mao and Zhou instead informed delegations of Japanese politicians, businesspeople, musicians, and artists visiting China in the 1950s and 1960s that Japan did not need to continue apologizing for its war with China.<sup>76</sup> In 1961, Mao even expressed gratitude for Japan’s invasion of China, without which, he argued, the CCP would never have come to power.<sup>77</sup>

Beyond high-level Japanese delegations, the CCP saw Japanese POWs and civilians as a key plank in their efforts to turn Japan against the United States. Many Japanese in the Northeast had begun receiving letters from home containing stories of the U.S. occupation, including the “atrocities of MacArthur’s suppression of the Japanese Communists.” CCP officials acknowledged that Japanese in China were not necessarily supporters of the Japanese Communist Party or of Communism more generally, but they expressed hope that anti-American sentiment among Japanese could be “very valuable” to the CCP in its propaganda efforts.<sup>78</sup> From January to April 1950, therefore, the CMJNC sought to harness this sentiment and installed a series of photographic exhibitions at government departments and industrial sites where large numbers of Japanese worked. The exhibitions were centered on the theme of the U.S. occupation of Japan and, in particular, the suffering of Japanese citizens and leftists under that occupation.<sup>79</sup> Eager to demonstrate the success of this propaganda work, the CMJNC reported to the Foreign Ministry in Beijing that 75,000 people had visited the exhibitions, including nearly 10,000 Japanese living and working in the region.<sup>80</sup>

CCP officials, like their Soviet counterparts, did acknowledge the possibility that Japanese living in the Northeast could represent a threat to China in the unfolding Cold War. In April and May 1949, for instance, the Shenyang Public Security Bureau acknowledged that around 400 Japanese “reactionaries” might be potential spies for the KMT or U.S. government.<sup>81</sup> Yet the

76. Zhang Shu Guang, *Beijing’s Economic Statecraft during the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), pp. 136–140.

77. Richard McGregor, *Asia’s Reckoning: China, Japan, and the Fate of U.S. Power in the Pacific Century* (New York: Viking, 2017), p. 28; and Bruce Elleman and S. C. M. Paine, *Modern China: Continuity and Change, 1644 to the Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), p. 368.

78. “Dongbei Ribenren qingkuang he chuli yijian,” pp. 11–12.

79. *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12; and “Dongbei riben guanli weiyuanhui gongzuo baogao.”

80. “Dongbei riben guanli weiyuanhui gongzuo baogao.”

81. “Guanyu dui Dongbei Riben ren gongzuo de zongjie baogao,” p. 10.

CMJNC's reports again illustrate how the CCP's conceptualization of expatriate Japanese differed from that of the Soviet Union. In contrast to the USSR, the CCP argued that only a small minority of the Japanese in Northeast China posed any kind of threat to China.<sup>82</sup> The CMJNC explained that the "few bad elements" could be isolated and that, by using education and a more unified approach to issues of work, travel, and funding restrictions, the CCP could "transform" any adverse thinking among Japanese in Northeast China.<sup>83</sup>

More broadly, CCP propaganda toward Japanese differed fundamentally from Soviet propaganda because the Chinese Communists believed the "formidable task" of transforming Japanese thinking was deeply connected to the entire Japanese experience in China. Treating the Japanese "boorishly," CCP officials argued, would undermine the "prestige" of the CCP and PRC in Japanese eyes and "jeopardize" their ability to unite with the Japanese people.<sup>84</sup> The CCP disseminated its propaganda via a range of Japanese-led civil society organizations that were designed not only to instill anti-imperialist ideology but also to enhance the Japanese lived experience in China. By 1949 more than 100 different civil society groups for Japanese were active in the Northeast, including 24 Japanese People's New Democracy Youth Alliances and 17 Japanese Workers Small Groups, which had their origins in the "Japanese Workers and Peasants Schools" established by Nosaka Sanzo during World War II.<sup>85</sup> These organizations provided the Japanese with some semblance of community and cultural life. Japanese People's Associations and Cooperatives in Shenyang and Harbin held sporting events and sold food that was "suitable to Japanese tastes," and Japanese-language monthly magazines like *Qianjin* (Advance) and *Xuexi* (Learning) offered cultural articles and political writings by Japanese activists.<sup>86</sup> The CMJNC also provided funding and textbooks for 29 primary schools serving 300 Japanese children in the Northeast so they could continue their Japanese-language education before entering Chinese middle schools.<sup>87</sup> Ultimately, the CCP believed that the Communist

82. Ibid.

83. "Dongbei riben guanli weiyuanhui gongzuo baogao."

84. "Dongbei Ribenren qingkuang he chuli yijian," pp. 10, 18–19.

85. "Guanyu Dongbei Riben ren de qingkuang baogao," pp. 11–14; and "Guanyu dui Dongbei Riben ren gongzuo de zongjie baogao," pp. 12–13.

86. CMJNC reports indicate only the Chinese translation of the titles of these Japanese-language magazines. See "Guanyu dui Dongbei Riben ren gongzuo de zongjie baogao," p. 11.

87. "Guanyu dui Dongbei Riben ren gongzuo de zongjie baogao," pp. 11–13; "Dongbei riben guanli weiyuanhui gongzuo baogao"; and "Guanyu Dongbei Riben ren de qingkuang baogao," pp. 11–16.



Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai meeting in 1963 with a Japanese POW, Furumi Tadayuki, who after his repatriation went on to become a successful businessman in Japan. The photograph was provided by Furumi's son, Furumi Ken'ichi, to the authors in 2014 and is reprinted with his permission.

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project would be received much more favorably if Japanese felt that their lives under Communist rule were comfortable.

The difference between Chinese and Soviet approaches to the Japanese becomes even more evident when we compare how the two governments dealt with the specific category of POWs. In July 1950, the Soviet Union sent 969 Japanese POWs from the USSR to Fushun prison in Northeast China so that China and the Soviet Union could begin cooperating on the process of investigating and prosecuting Japanese war criminals.<sup>88</sup> Although the Japanese prisoners feared they would become victims of violent reprisals in Chinese jails, their experience at the Fushun prison was, they discovered, far more comfortable than life in the Soviet Union. They were well-fed and able to bathe once a week, and they even had access to a “well-skilled” Chinese barber. Indeed, to the great surprise of the Japanese internees who had become accustomed to the “painful hell of starvation” in the USSR, the Chinese guards at the Fushun

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88. Cathcart and Nash, “To Serve Revenge for the Dead,” pp. 1,063–1,066.

prison asked at the end of every meal whether the prisoners had had enough to eat. One Japanese internee recalled that they quickly learned to say “No!” to make the most of the additional servings of rice, vegetables, and meat.<sup>89</sup> Another internee, Furumi Tadayuki, remarked that at Fushun, “I even received 200 cigarettes a month . . . and though we were not given alcohol, it was a comfortable life.”<sup>90</sup> Furumi, who spent a combined eighteen years imprisoned in Soviet labor camps and at the Fushun prison, later wrote that, although the Japanese had to work in the Chinese prison, “the work was nowhere near as brutal as in the Soviet Union.”<sup>91</sup> Japanese convicts in China were typically put to work in agriculture, such as poultry farming or growing vegetables, and the fruits of their labor were made available to them. This not only provided a varied diet to the Japanese internees but also gave them a sense of reward for their work. For this relatively fortunate handful of Japanese who were transferred from the harsher internment camps of the Soviet Union, the contrast of life in Northeast China was striking.

The CCP’s generous treatment of Japanese POWs was, as Barak Kushner has argued, seen as the best way of getting former Japanese soldiers to reflect on the atrocities they had committed in China, as well as a way of getting them to become future messengers promoting friendly relations between Japan and the PRC.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, it was also seen as a way of convincing the Japanese government, with which the PRC badly wanted diplomatic relations, that the CCP was a benign entity that had made great achievements in China since 1949. In the early 1950s, Beijing welcomed Japanese parliamentarians to China on “unofficial” tours, which included visits to Fushun prison, where they could observe the conditions experienced by Japanese POWs. One such tour was made in 1954 by Aoyanagi Ichirō, a member of the Japanese National Diet’s House of Representatives, who spent almost a month in China as part of a parliamentary “study group.” Aoyanagi claimed in his later testimony to the Diet that the Japanese parliamentarians viewed the invitation from the Chinese as a goodwill gesture and strove to take the opportunity “to achieve the settlement of various [bilateral] issues.” After spending days in negotiations with Chinese officials and touring the country, the delegation was allowed to spend an hour observing a prison for Japanese war criminals.

89. Chūkiren, *Watakushitachi wa Chūgoku de nani o shita ka : moto Nihonjin senpan no kiroku* (Tokyo: San’ichi Shobo, 1987), p. 25.

90. Furumi Tadayuki, “Manshūkoku no saigo o mite,” in Handō Kazutoshi, ed., *Bungei shunjū” ni miru shōwashi*, Part 2 (Tokyo: Bunshun bunko, 1995), pp. 153–154.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

92. Kushner, *Men to Devils*, p. 264.



Arriving at Fushun prison, Aoyanagi was pleased to meet his high school friend Furumi Tadayuki, who looked “very healthy.” Aoyanagi described the prison thus:

It was an ordinary prison, relatively new and clean. . . . In smaller rooms I saw four to five Japanese prisoners, and in a big room fifteen to twenty of them were studying something—one could see they were receiving some sort of instruction. . . . These Japanese did not really have to work; they had only to take part in various activities for four hours a day. . . . The prison hospital was also very clean and extremely well-equipped.<sup>93</sup>

Another visitor to Fushun from Japan was Furumi Ken’ichi, Furumi Tadayuki’s son, who travelled in August 1956 with family members of other Fushun detainees on a tour mediated by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Although Ken’ichi’s superiors at the Bank of Tokyo were not happy when they learned that he would be traveling to Communist China, he was surprised at the treatment he received on the mainland. “We were treated as guests of honor,” he remembered with some gratitude. The CCP covered the costs of their stay in China, a special train took the visitors from Tianjin to Fushun and back free of charge, and meals and rooms were provided gratis. Like Aoyanagi, Ken’ichi was pleasantly surprised with the conditions at Fushun.<sup>94</sup>

Unfortunately for the CCP, their efforts to provide this positive experience did not stanch the growing demand for repatriation among Japanese in Northeast China. As the 1950s unfolded, both governments confronted the challenge of whether and how to send the Japanese home.

## Returning Home

Repatriation of Japanese from the USSR and the PRC represents a final point of divergence in how the Soviet Union and the CCP navigated the changing international order and the position of Japan within it. Differences in approach to repatriation were not necessarily conspicuous. Both countries tried to use the Japanese in their custody to achieve favorable outcomes in diplomatic negotiations with Japan, and the Soviet Union’s treatment of Japanese internees began to converge with the PRC’s more magnanimous approach

93. National Diet of Japan, House of Representatives, Session No. 17, “Kaigai dōhō hikiage oyobi ikazoku engo ni kansuru chōsa tokubetsu iinkai,” 30 October 1954, available online at <https://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/>.

94. Furumi Ken’ichi, interview, Tokyo, 29 October 2014.

only after Stalin's death in 1953.<sup>95</sup> However, the way the two Communist states used repatriation as a diplomatic bargaining chip reveals the precarious international status of the PRC relative to the Soviet Union. Moreover, the post-Stalin convergence in Soviet and Chinese treatment of the Japanese further underscores just how different the two governments' approaches had been *before* 1953.

In 1951, the Japanese government urged the United Nations (UN) General Assembly to facilitate the early return of Japanese captives still held in the Soviet Union.<sup>96</sup> The government was aided in these efforts by the Japanese Red Cross Society (JRCS) and other Japanese civil society groups, which lobbied their Soviet counterparts to assist in expediting the return of internees to Japan. In October 1953, seven months after Stalin's death, a delegation from the JRCS visited the Soviet Union and began to help with the repatriation of civilians and POWs.<sup>97</sup> Opportunities to resolve the matter were far more auspicious than during Stalin's lifetime, when the Soviet Union blatantly refused to comply with repeated Japanese requests for information about the Siberian internees and their repatriation. Soviet officials regarded Japanese (and other foreign POWs) as vital in providing a large workforce on industrial and infrastructure projects and in meeting their production plans. Local officials therefore lobbied the MVD and engaged in protracted bureaucratic battles with repatriation authorities to keep the POWs in the USSR.<sup>98</sup> Reluctance to permit the Japanese to return home was also driven by Soviet leaders' fear that former POWs would help the U.S. military in Japan—a concern that loomed large in Moscow as Cold War tensions reached an apogee during the Korean War. This worry was noted in a February 1951 UK Foreign Office special

95. The USSR had repatriated the majority of Japanese by 1950, keeping only 1,500 or so captives under investigation or convicted of committing war crimes.

96. "Announcement of Japanese Foreign Ministry and Letters of Foreign Minister to President of United Nations General Assembly, on Repatriation Problem," 25 July 1951, in Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (Gaikōshiryōkan), Tokyo, Japan, Public Information Division, Japanese Foreign Ministry. Reel K'0001.

97. Correspondence between Shimazu and his Soviet counterparts in the Union of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR suggests that the JRCS played an active part in three key tasks: negotiating the dates of repatriation with the Soviet authorities; requesting registers with the names of the internees, including deaths; and facilitating correspondence between internees and their families. See "Ispolkom Soyuz obshchestv Krasnogo Kresta i Krasnogo Polumesyatsa SSSR," April 1953–May 1955, in GARE, F. 9501, Op. 5, D. 84, Ll. 65–120.

98. Yu. I. Din, "Problema repatriatsii koreitsev Yuzhnogo Sakhalina v 1945–1950 gg.," *Voprosy istorii*, Vol. 8 (2013), pp. 72–81. A 1946 folder from the Russian State Archive of Economics (RGAE) contains the correspondence of Soviet officials overseeing the cellulose and paper industry who wanted the NKVD/MVD to reallocate these POWs to their custody, citing the need to improve conditions for the Japanese POWs. See the correspondence in RGAE, F. 7647, Op. 4, D. 26, January–December 1946.

report: “It is reasonable to assume that the Soviets are afraid that these former military leaders might form the nucleus of future Japanese ministry groups for operations against the USSR.”<sup>99</sup>

In China, CCP officials, too, were reluctant to repatriate the most skilled Japanese, seeing them as valuable sources of technical expertise and vital to rebuilding Northeast China.<sup>100</sup> However, the CMJNC was worried that if China kept the Japanese against their will, it would only detract from the CCP’s efforts to enhance the legitimacy and attractiveness of its ideology and governing ability. Official reports in 1950–1951 acknowledged that, despite the CCP’s efforts to improve the lived experience of Japanese in Northeast China, the mood among Japanese in the region was unfavorable. The reasons for this unhappiness were varied, officials noted. Young Japanese and unskilled workers increasingly thought they had limited prospects in China, and “thus they long[ed] to return home.” Other Japanese had become depressed or even suicidal because of love affairs that had broken down; because they missed their families in Japan; because they were subjected to particularly strict application of travel and work permits by security bureaus in the Northeast; or because they were based in work units that refused to release funds for Japanese-language books, newspapers, and study groups.<sup>101</sup> Many skilled technicians were also increasingly frustrated with the growing presence of rival Soviet technicians in Northeast China whose skills the Japanese felt were inferior to their own.<sup>102</sup> The arrest of the instigators of the 1948 Japanese repatriation petition meant that the Japanese did not dare to campaign publicly for repatriation. Nevertheless, the CMJNC began in late 1951 to allocate resources and ships to repatriate nearly 1,500 Japanese whose lives seemed particularly difficult.<sup>103</sup>

Less than twelve months later, the question of repatriation took on renewed significance for the CCP. In August 1952, Japan entered into formal diplomatic relations with the Nationalist government on Taiwan.<sup>104</sup> These

99. “Repatriation of Japanese Prisoners-of-War Still Detained in Colonial Territories and the USSR,” 23 February 1951, in The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Folder FO 371/92691, Special Intelligence Report No. 379, p. 36.

100. “Guanyu dui Dongbei Riben ren gongzuo de zongjie baogao,” pp. 13–14; and “Guanyu Dongbei Riben ren de qingkuang baogao,” p. 22.

101. “Guanyu dui Dongbei Riben ren gongzuo de zongjie baogao,” pp. 9–10; “Guanyu Dongbei Riben ren de qingkuang baogao,” p. 10; and “Dongbei riben guanli weiyuanhui gongzuo baogao.”

102. “Guanyu Dongbei Riben ren de qingkuang baogao,” p. 8.

103. “Dongbei Ribenren qingkuang he chuli yijian,” p. 20.

104. Japan and the ROC established diplomatic relations after they signed a peace treaty in April 1952 that entered into force four months later.

talks represented a severe blow to the PRC's efforts to establish itself as the sole, legitimate government of China and undermined its efforts to restore relations with Japan. CCP officials now began to view the repatriation issue as a useful way to establish unofficial channels of communication with Japanese civil society groups, which were lobbying for the repatriation of Japanese internees and frequently shared CCP views about the desirability of restoring diplomatic relations between Japan and mainland China. In December 1952, the *Xinhua* news agency announced that China would work with three organizations in Japan—the JRCS, the Japan-China Friendship Association (JCFA), and the Japanese Peace Liaison Committee (JPLC)—to negotiate the repatriation of thousands of Japanese civilians from China.<sup>105</sup> The JCFA and JPLC comprised left-wing Japanese intellectuals, politicians, and business people supportive of closer Japan-PRC relations. Many of them felt remorse for Japan's aggressive role in China during World War II and were highly critical of what they saw as U.S. attempts to "remilitarize" Japan.<sup>106</sup> At the same time, the PRC sought to use the repatriation of Japanese to convey a sense of magnanimity and effectiveness as a government. A statement released by the central government to *Xinhua* highlights China's generous treatment of Japanese internees, as well as the effective functioning of the Chinese state:

Although the militaristic Japanese government waged an eight-year war of aggression and committed unforgettable and heinous criminal acts, the Chinese people clearly distinguish between the Japanese militarists who were once and continue to be the enemy of our country, and the Japanese people who are our friends. The Chinese people hold a friendly attitude toward the law-abiding overseas Japanese in China. They and all law-abiding foreign nationals receive the same protection of the Chinese people's government. The Japanese who work in our public and private enterprises enjoy the protection of our labor laws and labor insurance benefits. Their lifestyles are growing more and more abundant, and one example of this is that in recent months they have remitted large sums of money to provide for their wives and children in Japan.<sup>107</sup>

Over the following six months, as more than 26,000 Japanese were repatriated to Japan, dozens of similar articles appeared in the pages of *Renmin ribao*, all

105. Liang, "Jianguo chuqi waigiao guanli gongzuo shuping," p. 52; and K. W. Radtke, *China's Relations with Japan, 1945–1983: The Role of Liao Chengzhi* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 99–100.

106. Franziska Seraphim, "People's Diplomacy: The Japan-China Friendship Association and Critical War Memory in the 1950s," *Japan Focus*, Vol. 5, No. 8 (2007).

107. "Zhongyang renmin zhengfu youguan fangmian jiu zai Zhongguo de Riben qiaomin de ge xiang wenti da Xinhuashe jizhe wen," 1 December 1952, quoted in Sun et al., *Zhanhou Zhongri Guanxi Wenxianji*, pp. 139–140.

emphasizing to potential supporters in Japan that the CCP was a responsible, effective governing party that respected the rights of Japanese citizens and treated them with dignity.<sup>108</sup>

Since the end of World War II, the CCP's treatment of Japanese internees and its desire to be seen as a legitimate governing party at home and abroad had stood in stark contrast to the Soviet regime's neglect of and mistrust toward Japanese citizens. But this divergence in position came to an abrupt end after Stalin died in March 1953. Stalin's death offered an opening to the new Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, to mend relations with Japan, a country that potentially was of great economic importance for the USSR. The Soviet government used the approximately 1,500 Japanese still in its custody to facilitate the restoration of Soviet diplomatic relations with Japan. Khrushchev's efforts to improve perceptions of the USSR in Japan were distinctly reminiscent of the approach long taken by the CCP.

"We should coexist as friends. We are convinced—if the USSR, Japan and China treat each other well, there will be peace everywhere. Please come to visit us in Japan!" These were the words of an unnamed Japanese major quoted in a December 1956 Soviet report evaluating sentiments among the last group of Japanese officers before repatriation.<sup>109</sup> The major's comments were recorded at a Khabarovsk banquet organized by Soviet officials, who had carefully prepared the occasion. High-ranking personnel from the Soviet General Staff, the MVD, and the Soviet State Security Committee (KGB) arrived from Moscow to gauge Japanese moods before repatriation. In a change unthinkable a few years earlier, the Japanese "war criminals" went on city tours accompanied by Soviet officers, who were responsible for "showing the Japanese the city and helping them buy gifts for their families."<sup>110</sup> Almost every whim of the Japanese officers on the eve of repatriation was considered and often fulfilled. The banquet on 20 December ended with an operetta, which was received well by the audience. Former Kwantung army General Ushiroku Jun—perhaps the highest-ranking Japanese in Soviet custody at the time—made a speech addressed to his host, General Nikolai Gagen, the chief of the Khabarovsk garrison. Ushiroku expressed thanks "for the opportunity to listen to good music, watch beautiful dance performances, and taste exquisite

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108. *Renmin ribao* printed 26 articles on the issue of repatriated Japanese in the first half of 1953.

109. "Spravka-doklad Ministru Vnutrennikh Del SSSR o peredache," in RGVA, F. 1p, Op. 32a, D. 1, Ll. 1–25, quoted in E. L. Katasonova, ed., *Yaponskie voenmoplennyye v SSSR: bolshaya igra velikih derzhav* (Moscow: Institut Vostokovedeniya RAN, 2003), p. 495.

110. *Ibid.*, p. 490.

fare.”<sup>111</sup> It was as if the eleven bitter years of internment had never happened, and those at the banquet were honored guests of the Soviets and not “war criminals” sentenced years earlier to lengthy terms in camps and prisons.

Even though the privations of the Siberian internment were not forgotten by the Japanese, the year that internment finally ended—1956—marked a new beginning. By the time the Japanese were treated as honored guests at the Khabarovsk banquet, Stalin had been dead for more than three years, and the Soviet Union had moved “away from [the] regime of terror and ideological orthodoxy” he had bequeathed.<sup>112</sup> The surreal episode of the banquet demonstrates a far-reaching change in Soviet policy in the post-Stalin era that ultimately led to the restoration of diplomatic relations with Japan in 1956. Yet the Soviet Union’s efforts to improve its image in the eyes of the Japanese were too little and too late. Stalin’s use of the Japanese as forced labor and the Soviet government’s refusal throughout the internment to provide accurate information about the internees’ names, numbers, well-being, and time of repatriation ensured that the USSR continued to have a persistently negative image in Japan long after the final internee had been repatriated.<sup>113</sup>

The CCP, by contrast, went on to be viewed with far less hostility in Japan because of its relatively generous treatment of Japanese civilians and POWs. Groups of returned Japanese POWs from China played an important role throughout the Cold War in working for reconciliation between Japan and the PRC and in educating Japanese society about their country’s wartime atrocities in China.<sup>114</sup> Yet despite the CCP’s concern about the welfare of Japanese on PRC territory and its creative attempts to use them and their repatriation as vehicles of propaganda, officials in Beijing had far less success than the Soviet Union in actually normalizing diplomatic relations with Japan. The CCP’s protracted path to government and statehood left it in a precarious international position, one in which the United States, Japan, and much of the international community did not formally acknowledge its status as the legitimate government of China until 1972.

111. *Ibid.*, p. 493.

112. Kathleen E. Smith, *Moscow 1956: The Silenced Spring* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), p. 6.

113. Tomita, *Siberia yokuryūsha*; and Sherzod Muminov, “The ‘Siberian Internment’ and the Transnational History of the Early Cold War Japan, 1945–56,” in Pedro Iacobelli, Danton Leary, and Shinnusoke Takahashi, eds., *Transnational Japan as History: Empire, Migration, and Social Movements* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 71–95.

114. Kushner, *Men to Devils*, p. 264. For more on the Japanese organizations’ role in postwar Japanese attitudes toward the war and the PRC, see Franziska Seraphim, *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945–2005* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

## Conclusion

The standard narrative in the literature depicts the stoking of hostility toward Japanese war criminals as cementing the foundation of the Sino-Soviet alliance from 1949 to 1950. But this line of argument, focused as it is on the formation of the alliance and the onset of the Cold War, obscures the long and diverse history of CCP and Soviet interactions with the Japanese in their territories, as well as the fluidity and uncertainty of the decade of transition from World War II to the Cold War. By adopting a wider temporal scope and taking an explicitly comparative approach, this article highlights instead the contrast in CCP and Soviet approaches toward the Japanese in their territories and situates the origins of these differences in the major transformations in the international order after 1945; in the legacies of East Asia's recent interstate and civil wars; and in the evolving relationships between the Soviet Union, the United States, Japan, and both Nationalist China and the PRC during this decade.

The differences in how the CCP and the Soviet Union treated the Japanese civilians and POWs under their authority were shaped by the distinct concerns facing both countries in the turbulent international environment after World War II. Soviet officials wanted to force "former enemy soldiers" to compensate for half a century of perceived Japanese aggression against the USSR. They also wanted to ensure that defeated soldiers did not threaten Soviet borders after repatriation and instead would help to advance Soviet interests there. The treatment received by the Japanese in the USSR was largely shaped by the institution that administered them: the Chief Directorate for POWs and Internees of the MVD, which subjected them and large numbers of other enemy POWs to forced labor.

China's direct experience of Japanese colonialism and its highly destructive eight-year war with Japan (1937–1945) gave China much stronger grounds than the Soviet Union for postwar hostility toward remaining Japanese. The CCP, however, could not afford to focus only on Japan's past military atrocities in China. With the resumption of the civil war in China after the end of World War II, the CCP drew on the legacy of Japan's colonial presence in China, using Japanese soldiers in battle against the Nationalists and Japanese skilled civilians to rebuild hospitals, factories, and mines in the areas it controlled. Though the CCP eventually claimed victory over the Nationalists and established the PRC, its experience of the early Cold War was one of struggle for international recognition. In this context, the CCP chose to treat China's former imperialist occupiers magnanimously and sought to



recruit them into building the foundations of a new, egalitarian, inclusive, and successfully modernizing PRC.

The three-sided entanglement between China, the Soviet Union, and Japan (with the fourth side, the United States, a constant presence in the background) offers two broad lessons about the early Cold War in East Asia. First, traditional analytical frameworks used in explaining the Cold War obscure the influences of earlier, longer-term historical interactions between China, Japan, and the two superpowers. These interactions do not easily lend themselves to the traditional dichotomies of ally/rival, Communist/capitalist, and East/West that are typically used in analyzing the Cold War superpower confrontation. As a result, differences in CCP and Soviet approaches toward the Japanese in their territories during the Cold War appear puzzling from the perspective of the extant Cold War literature. By exploring the influence of the Russo-Japanese War, the Siberian intervention, China's War of Resistance against Japan, and the Chinese Civil War on Cold War-era Soviet-Japanese relations and China-Japan relations, this article has demonstrated the importance of expanding the temporal dimension when analyzing these relationships and exploring the influences of earlier historical interactions *alongside* Cold War circumstances.

Second, within this many-sided Cold War entanglement, the China-Japan relationship is usually viewed as secondary to the relationships between the United States and Soviet Union, the Soviet Union and China, and, in the later Cold War, the United States and China, largely as a result of the “junior” status of China and Japan within their respective Cold War “camps.” Although the literature on the superpower relationships is immense, the early Cold War relationship between China and Japan has received far less attention.<sup>115</sup> Yet, CCP policy toward Japan and the repatriated Japanese during this period was not merely a function of China's position within the Soviet “camp.” Instead, our analysis helps to challenge the conventional hierarchies of Cold War relationships and interactions by demonstrating that the historical relationship between China and Japan, coupled with the CCP's civil war experience, goes a long way toward explaining CCP policy, conceptions, and behavior toward the Japanese in the PRC. In his recent world history of the Cold War, Odd Arne Westad calls attention to the role of “events that were

115. Important exceptions here are Yinan He, *The Search for Reconciliation: Sino-Japanese and German-Polish Relations since World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Amy King, *China-Japan Relations after World War Two: Empire, Industry and War, 1949–1971* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016); and Yoshihide Soeya, *Japan's Economic Diplomacy with China, 1945–1978* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1998).

in origin local and specific [but that] metamorphosed into manifestations of a global struggle.”<sup>116</sup> In line with this argument, we, too, have sought to shift our gaze from the “manifestations of a global struggle” to the local and specific historical conflicts, colonial legacies, and domestic contexts that shaped CCP and Soviet policies toward the Japanese in their territories and the ways the two countries navigated the fluid international order from World War II to the Cold War.

## Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful to Rebecca Xu for her excellent research assistance and to Barak Kushner, Caroline Rose, the participants in the 2012 University of Leeds’s Sino-Japanese Relations Research Network conference, and the journal’s anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions. This research was supported by the European Research Council Project “The Dissolution of the Japanese Empire and the Struggle for Legitimacy in Postwar East Asia, 1945–1965” (DOJSFL 313382).

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116. Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), p. 99.