

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Displaced peoples and the continued legacy of the Pacific War: Korean repatriation and the danger element

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(Received 9 March 2021; revised 12 June 2021; accepted 13 June 2021)

Abstract

The battles of the Pacific War formally ended between mid-August and early September, 1945. However, the declarations of peace and surrender ceremonies that occurred during this time did not end informal battles across the Asian continent. Renegade Japanese military personnel refused to lay down their arms and repatriate quietly to their country. Some combed the waters between Japan and Korea in search of returnees attempting to repatriate with financial and material means in excess of that which the United States military governments allowed. Others sought to disrupt the occupation process by patrolling the streets of Korean cities and engaging in illegal and often violent activities. Koreans also caused problems by joining the Japanese in their postwar adventures or by harassing Japanese preparing to return to Japan and the Korean sympathizers who attempted to help them. Reportage of such actions appeared in the *G-2 Periodic Report*, which kept a daily record of such actions. These documents today open windows into the chaotic situation that the postwar era brought to Japanese and Koreans. Primarily through these reports, this paper sees the postwar belligerence that continued beyond official declarations of cease fire and peace in 1945 as kindling that sparked the broader conflicts of the late 1940s, and evolved to all-out war from the summer of 1950.

Key words: Danger element; *G-2 Periodic Report*; *kempeitai*; Korean diaspora; post-Pacific War; repatriation; United States Asian occupations

Conventional war history relies heavily on dates to narrate when a particular act of aggression began and when it ended. Most often these dates correspond with a state's interpretation of the war, with it adjusting the war's starting and ending dates to justify its decision to send its citizens to the battlefield. These dates are logged into the nation's collective memory, etched into monuments, displayed in museums, and entered into classroom textbooks and websites to remind citizens of the purpose of a particular war. Rendering history as such leaves the impression that declarations of war are made in retaliation of a broken peace, and fought with the intention of returning a hostile situation to a state of peace once the belligerent other has been vanquished. War is thus promoted as a means that nations employ to achieve a greater good. Japanese grouped the wars of the 1930s and early 1940s into a fifteen-year war history that situates the Pacific War as a part of this context. The United States, to the contrary, interprets the Japanese "unprovoked" act of aggression as its invitation to join the battles of the Second World War, both in Asia as well as in Europe. Likewise, both the Japanese and the United States find it convenient to date August 14/15, 1945, when its emperor determined it within Japan's interest to terminate the fighting, as the final day of this extended war. The United States also sees September 2, when it hosted a formal surrender ceremony aboard the battleship *USS Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, as a day that officially ended the hostilities.

Wars rarely, if ever, begin and end so conveniently. The first physical shots of the war often evolve after months, even years, of heated negotiations and hostile incidents that gradually drag the

belligerents into confrontation. The violence often outlasts the declarations of surrender or signings of armistices and peace treaties. This was the case following the formal conclusions of the wars in Europe and Asia, particularly for those peoples re-occupied after the Allies defeated the Axis powers. The postwar power void unleashed states of confusion that pitted former colonizers against their former occupiers, and then against the Allied forces that arrived to replace the vanquished subjugators. This violence also targeted peoples attempting to relocate. To them, formal terminations of war that triggered their motivations to relocate to former residences or to new locations initiated the beginning of a new phase of violence.

For both the Japanese and Koreans, the official end of the Pacific War came unexpectedly, even though this result had been under negotiation over the days prior to the emperor's announcement. Many Japanese who had expected their country to fight to the bitter end found the emperor's words that Japan would no longer continue the war a hard pill to swallow. Koreans, on the other hand, welcomed the news as it signaled their country's liberation from colonial rule, but contested the idea that their independence would be indefinitely delayed by a post-liberation Allied occupation. To displaced Koreans, the war's end left them in a state of confusion over whether or not to return to the peninsula, and if so, how best to travel there. The arrival of the United States occupation forces in both southern Korea and Japan complicated, rather than stabilized, matters. U.S. military forces re-empowered the Japanese in Korea by directing the government-general by telegraph from Okinawa to maintain control until they could arrive, thus prolonging direct Japanese rule by three weeks. The U.S. even dropped fliers from an airplane to inform the Koreans of this decision.¹ Ahead of its arrival, U.S. orders from Tokyo directed the colonial bureaucracy to continue its duties indefinitely, until Koreans could be trained to fill their positions. After arrival, the U.S. also established unreasonable regulations regarding the financial and material limitations with which Koreans and Japanese could return. Thirdly, worsening relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union sent signs to both peoples that the next major war lay just over the horizon; for some Japanese following U.S. directives to peacefully disarm ceased to be an option. While the majority of Japanese in Japan as well as in Korea cooperated with the U.S. administration by accepting their country's defeat and cooperating with directives decreed by the new administration, a sizeable number took it upon themselves to prolong this war. Though peace had been declared between the belligerents, the war continued for many Koreans and Japanese. The escalation of violence over the next half-decade suggests that the "first shots" of the Korean War to have grown from the chaotic situation that followed the Pacific War.²

The plight of postwar Japan and the Japanese has been the focus of academic scholarship and the theme of museums around Japan. Korea's post-liberation history, including Korean repatriation from Japan, has received less attention.³ This paper seeks to develop a part of this history by considering efforts by people, taking advantage of the power void that opened with Japan's surrender, to extend

¹Telegrams were exchanged between Japanese in Korea and Americans in Okinawa from September 1, 1945 where General Kosuke Yoshio informed the soon to arrive U.S. forces that "there are Communist agitators among the Koreans who are plotting to take advantage of the situation to disturb the peace and order here." Lieutenant General John R. Hodge responded by instructing the general to "maintain order and reserve the machinery of government in [southern] Korea...until my forces" arrive (RG 554, Box 33, Folder Repatriation and Transfer of Control to US, NARA). See also Cumings (1981, 126–27).

²Tracing the origins of the Korean War to a time before the June 1950 "first shots" of the war is argued by Cumings (1981, 1990) and Merrill (1989).

³For studies on Japanese repatriation see Morita Yoshino 森田芳夫 (1964) and Watt (2009). Watt (2015) contains an interesting discussion on postwar Korea from a Japanese perspective. For a study on the Japanese Sewakai (世話会) activities, see Ch'oi Yŏngho 최영호 (2013). The Heiwa kinen tenshi shiryōkan [平和祈念展示資料館, Memorial Museum for Soldiers, Detainees in Siberia, and Postwar Repatriates] tells stories of the difficult repatriation history of Japanese from the Japanese empire. The Maizuru hikiage kinenkan [舞鶴引揚記念館, The Maizuru Repatriation Memorial Museum] focuses primarily on the return of Japanese forced labor from the Soviet Union. For Korean repatriation, see Anonymous (1960); Nakamura, Ko. "Korean Repatriation Question and Positive International Law." *The Japanese Annual of International Law* 4 (1960): 68–78.; and Caprio and Yu (2009). For a global comparative treatment of postwar people movement, see chapters in Araragi, Kawakita, and Matsuura (2019). The Zainichi Kanjin rekishi shiryōkan [在日韓人歴史資料館, The History Museum of J-Koreans] in Tokyo includes a number of displays that tell the story of Korean repatriation.

the war by first refusing to surrender and then by disrupting the efforts of the occupation forces in both sea and land. It relies heavily on the *G-2 Periodic Report*⁴ (hereafter *Report*) that provided daily synopses of military, political, social, and economic activities primarily in the East Sea/Sea of Japan, and along southern Korea. Though by no means a complete account, the *Record* does offer rare windows into the lives of common Japanese and Korean, particularly how they survived this history under the volatile situation that they faced over the immediate postwar years. While the *Record* offers a variety of angles in which this history can be told, this paper focuses on the danger element that Koreans, but also Japanese, confronted following the end of the Pacific War, primarily over the initial six months following Japan's surrender declaration.⁵ It was over this initial period that decisions made by players among both the victors and the vanquished, as well as the occupied peoples caught in-between, determined in a number of ways the Korean peninsula and the Korean people's history long after voices of surrender had faded and the ink on peace treaties had dried.

Migrations between Japan and Korea

People have been crossing between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago from the earliest of times. In modern times, Japanese began crossing over to the Korean peninsula in significant numbers from the time the two countries signed the 1876 Treaty of Kanghwa (in Korean *Kanghwado choyak* 강화도조약; in Japanese the Treaty of Amity or *Nitchoshūkō jōyaku* 日朝修好条約) that opened three ports in Korea for Japanese residence.⁶ Initially, Japanese settlers concentrated in the southern provinces of the peninsula. From the 1930s, however, when Japan's colonial policies in Korea began to utilize Korea's war-related industrial resources, a greater percentage of this population migrated to the north. At the end of the war, roughly 30 percent of Japanese settlers were residing in Korea's northern provinces. The postwar division of the peninsula disproportionately frustrated their repatriation attempts after their country surrendered.

Koreans began to migrate to the Japanese islands in substantial numbers after Japan annexed the peninsula in 1910. Whereas in 1910 only 2,600 Koreans lived in Japan, by 1922 this number had risen to 90,741. In 1926, just three years after the Great Kanto earthquake, it had reached 241,657. By the end of the war, estimates place around 2 million Koreans as residing in Japan (Nishinarita 1997, p. 42). Koreans at first came primarily for education purposes, as the Japanese had yet to develop the education system beyond the elementary level on the peninsula. Around the time of the First World War, the booming wartime years created a labor shortage that became the primary draw for Korean migration (Pak, Yamada, and Yang 1993).⁷ The economic depression that followed the war's end left many Korean laborers impoverished after their relatively stable regular employment turned to the less stable day labor. The *Naimushō keihōkyoku* (Homeland Warning Bureau 内務省警報局) reported that in 1922 as many as 13,099 Koreans were dependent on day labor against 6,626 who enjoyed regular fulltime employment. By 1933, these numbers had increased dramatically to reach 124,806 day laborers against 65,707 regularly employed Koreans. The Asian and Pacific wars brought increasing waves of Koreans to Japan's shores to fill positions vacated by Japanese males sent to the battlefields. A Japanese labor mobility plan (*Rōdō dōin keikaku* 労働動員計画) projected gathering as many as 1.06 million Koreans for labor-related purposes between the years 1939 and 1945. While correct figures are difficult to calculate estimates range from between 800,000 and 900,000

⁴The *G-2 Periodic Report* 駐韓美軍情報日誌 was collected and bound into seven chronologically arranged volumes by the Institute of Asian Culture Studies at Hallym University dating from the time of the U.S. forces' arrival in Korea until mid-1949 (1945.9.9–1949.6.17). Unless indicated, the parts cited here draw from volume 1 of this series (1945.9.9–1946.2.12) hereafter cited as *G-2 Periodic Report*.

⁵Caprio and Yu (2009) offer a more general picture into the problems that Koreans met in considering repatriation.

⁶In 1907, for example, almost one-third of the employed Japanese in Korea (12,571 out of 38,749) were engaged in commercial-related employment. Labor (4,405) accounted for around 10 percent of this population, and roughly 3 percent (2,562) engaged in the "water-trade" professions as geisha and waitresses (Uchida 2019, p. 67).

⁷For an interesting analysis of interwar Korean labor in Japan, see Kawashima (2009).

Koreans having labored for the Japanese during this period.⁸ Women were also included as laborers as well as “comfort” providers for the Japanese military.⁹ From 1938, Koreans also began to be admitted into the Japanese military as both soldiers and laborers.

Postwar belligerence

Even though the Allies designated May 8, 1945 as V-E(urope) Day, the day when peace was restored in Europe, sporadic fighting continued in some formerly occupied territories on the continent in the months that followed. Keith Lowe writes that “...the war did not simply stop with Hitler’s defeat. A conflict on the scale of the Second World War, with all the smaller civil disputes that it encompassed, took months, if not years, to come to a halt, and the end came in different times in different parts of Europe” (2012, p. xiv). Germany’s defeat also initiated dangerous people movements over both land and sea that were unprecedented in human history. Richard Bessel writes that 16.5 million Germans in Eastern Europe alone greeted the end of their war at a location different from where they would have to relocate. The Allied forces estimated that over 11 million more displaced Europeans were scattered across the continent at this time (Bessel 2009, pp. 68–69, 256).¹⁰ These numbers might not have included the many peoples forced to vacate their homes after national borders were redrawn. These land transfers, which severed as much as “one-fifth of prewar German territory,” initiated one of the “largest forced removals of human being in world history” (Bessel 2009, pp. 210–11, 212). Some people were forced to relocate several times when they discovered that their prewar residence was no longer available to them, the country from which they were displaced no longer welcomed them. Bessel also writes of the innocent victims among the German people who “became targets for revenge for things that *others* had done.” Here revenge was acted out in the form of rape, relocation, and murder at the hands of the victors (*ibid.*, pp. 167–68).

In Asia as well, the wars in the Pacific did not end with the emperor’s appeal in his August 15 “Gyokuon hōsō” 玉音放送 [Jewel voice broadcast] for Japanese to “endure the unendurable and suffer what is insufferable” [*Omomuku tokoro taegataki wo ta e shinobigataki wo shinobi*, 趨ク所堪へ難キヲ堪へ忍ヒ難キヲ忍ヒ]. In the days that followed, Hirohito followed up this broadcast by dispatching members of the royal family to the war fronts and by issuing a “Rescript Addressed to Our Soldiers and Sailors Concerning Surrender” to explain to the military his decision to surrender at this time (Barshay 2013, p. 9). Ronald H. Spector, whose research looks at post-Pacific War belligerence in Asia, writes that any peace at this time was “at best a brief interlude.” He explains: “1945–46 in Asia may have appeared to many not as a time when the war ended, but as a time when the various protagonists switched sides” (Spector 2007, p. xi). While the majority of Japanese accepted the inevitable, and even welcomed the end of the miseries caused by their country’s long war, a minority of them did not; they sought to continue the battles. Some might not have heard the words of their emperor; others deliberately chose to continue fighting in defiance of the imperial directive.¹¹ While some reasoned their obstinance as a way to prepare for the next big war they saw looming

⁸Pak (1993, p. 13) notes that the true figure of Koreans actually mobilized for labor purposes remains unknown. The major reason for the difficulty in establishing accurate numbers is that Koreans came to labor in Japan under various circumstances: many crossed over from Korea but others also were Koreans already in Japan; some were recruited and others conscripted; and many were listed as “recruited,” but forced into doing so. Hida Yūichi 飛田雄一 calculates “forced movement” *kyōsei renkō* (強制連行) as emerging in three stages from 1939. The first was “recruitment” (募集), where companies went directly to Korea to recruit laborers. When this approach did not produce adequate results, companies turned to dealing through “bureaucratic offices” (官斡旋 *kanassen*), before enlisting the military in a “drafting” (徴用 *chōyō*) system toward the end of the war, from around 1944. Hida (2018, p. 104).

⁹Soh (2008, p. 24) notes that defining the parameters of the term “comfort women” raises difficulties similar to those that involved other labor issues.

¹⁰Bessel also notes that many of the 2.6 million German soldiers captured by the Soviets at the end of the war were shipped to Soviet labor camps (202). See also Wasserstein (2011), Lowe (2013) and Shephard (2011).

¹¹Admiral Ugaki Matome, upon hearing the emperor’s radio address, reportedly organized a suicide squad to crash into any U.S. ship in Okinawa. The planes, however, apparently never reached their destination. See Ugaki (1991, pp. 663–64). Also, *G-2 Periodic Report* (August 17/18, 1945) reported that surveillance planes had “received heavy [anti-aircraft] fire from the Yokohama naval base.” At around this time, the *Brooklyn* [New York] *Daily Eagle* ran the headline “Japan

on the horizon, others joined postwar battles that broke out around East Asia.¹² Certain members of the Japanese military stationed in Japan's Asian territories were particularly insubordinate in refusing to follow directives from the U.S. occupying forces.

The relocation of displaced peoples, while less in numbers than those of Europe, nonetheless presented Asia with a serious problem. Estimates generally set the number of overseas Japanese at 6.9 million (roughly half civilian and half military) at the conclusion of the Pacific War. Of these, about one million Japanese settlers and military resided on the Korean peninsula.¹³ Hundreds of thousands of men in northern Soviet Korea and Manchuria, areas that came under Soviet control, were forcibly transported as laborers to various camps across the Soviet Union before being repatriated in the 1950s. Estimates of Koreans in Japan and Manchuria, the two major areas of displaced Koreans, reached between three and four million.¹⁴ One difference between the two peoples was that while almost all Japanese were expected to return to their homeland, Koreans were given the choice of either remaining in Japan or returning to the Korean peninsula. Both peoples included many who prior to this time had no recollection of their ethnic homeland, with some believing that their adopted residence was their true "homeland."

Both Germans and Japanese returned to bombed out cities whose residents faced acute shortages of the basic needs to restart their lives.¹⁵ For Japan-based Koreans, it would be reasonable to expect that repatriating to the peninsula would have been the more attractive option. Southern Korean cities (save for Pusan which sustained minimal war damage), where the overwhelming majority of Japan-based Koreans considered home, had been left virtually unscathed by the war. While it is true that the majority of Koreans did return to the peninsula, it is also true that a sizeable number chose to stay.¹⁶ We can imagine Koreans considering whether to return entertaining concerns such as the following: Would Koreans welcome them as fellow victims or shun them as enemy-tainted traitors? Would they be able to procure the basic living essentials – a home, food, and employment – to start their lives anew? Koreans who had embraced leftist ideological beliefs in Japan might have wondered whether this could work against them in an increasingly more conservative southern Korea, the home region for many. Finally, younger Koreans who had been raised in Japanese society might have questioned whether their Korean linguistic and social skills would adequately allow them to adjust into a society that was essentially "foreign" to them.¹⁷

again Battles U.S. Photo Planes," which was subtitled "Yanks killed 3 days after surrender." For a comprehensive discussion on post-August 15 military activities throughout the Japanese empire, see chapters of Spector (2007).

¹²Sayuri Shimizu-Guthrie (2007), for example, writes that former Japanese soldiers could be found participating on both sides of the Chinese Civil War between the Nationalists and the Communists.

¹³Morita Yoshio offers the figure of 712,583 Japanese in Korea at the end of the war, with females (367,022) surpassing males (345,561) in numbers for the first time. In addition, he notes that there were 255,000 (army) and 16,000 (navy) members of the Japanese military stationed in Korea (Morita 1964, p. 2).

¹⁴The confusing circumstances makes calculating the actual number of Koreans in Japan at the end of the war difficult. The U.S. wartime government paper, *Aliens in Japan* estimated that there were around two million foreigners in Japan, the majority of them Koreans. Morita Yoshio (1964, p. 82) estimates that by the end of World War II over 2.1 million Koreans resided in Manchuria. See Jacob (2014).

¹⁵Harry L. McMasters (September 5, 1945) included in letters to his wife details of postwar Tokyo drawn from surveys he conducted by airplane from August 31. He remarked in one letter that the city was one in which "nobody would want to live." See also Dower (1999, Chapter 1).

¹⁶It is difficult to estimate the number of Koreans who returned to Korea after the war. Many returned by "unofficial" means, those not authorized by the U.S. military governments. Others snuck back into Japan after having repatriated to Korea. One estimate cites a Ministry of Health and Welfare [Kōseishō 厚生省] figure of 1,679,479 returnees to southern Korea and 351 to northern Korea (Kwon 2006, p. 115). *G-2 Periodic Report* published its final count of Koreans crossing over from Japan (909,838) on October 23, 1946. This number, however, only includes Koreans traveling by "authorized" means. This same document estimates that 185,156 Koreans traveled from Japan on "uncontrolled shipping." *G-2 Periodic Report* (October 23, 1946) v. 3, 149.

¹⁷The story of Ch'oe Sōggi fits here. Ch'oe successfully returned to Korea, but upon finding his knowledge of the language and culture insufficient, he decided to sneak back into Japan (Ch'oe 2004, p. 42).

Then there was the danger element. News of violence on the waters leading to their Korean homeland, and on the peninsula itself, much of it in the early months between Japanese and Koreans, must also have factored into their decision. Some Koreans, anticipating the dangers involved with living in wartime Japan, opted to return to the peninsula during the war.¹⁸ The vast majority of overseas Koreans and Japanese, however, flocked to ports close to their respective homelands, primarily Pusan and Shimonoseki, upon hearing the emperor's broadcast. The U.S. administration in Tokyo, which also oversaw the occupation in southern Korea, initiated an official repatriation program from around mid-October 1945. The impossible conditions that it set regarding what returnees could carry with them forced many returnees – both Korean and Japanese – to risk “unofficial” options for repatriating in the hope of retaining their estates. The most crippling of restrictions was the decree that returnees could legally exchange only 1,000 yen upon their arrival at port, and also confiscated “guns, cameras, gems, valuable art objects, stamp collections”.¹⁹ The ridiculously low monetary figure was hardly adequate for them to settle and restart their lives in a new location.²⁰ As we shall see, many Japanese and Koreans with more sizable estates deemed it worth the risk to return by unofficial, and more dangerous, repatriation means.²¹

Dangers on the high seas

Koreans in Japan did not have to wait long before the first major sign emerged that suggested their repatriation could meet with danger, and even be life-threatening – the August 1945 sinking of the *Ukishima-maru* 浮島丸. Even today the cause of this incident remains in dispute. Was the ship's fatal end accidental, the result of it contacting a sea-mine? Or was it intentional, the result of explosions planted by the Japanese navy?²² Rumors of the latter gained credibility when the basic facts of the incident, such as the number of people who had boarded the ship, were either questioned, or went unanswered.²³ The account entered in the *Report* one month after the ship's sinking read as follows:

On 22 August 1945, some 6700 Korean laborers and factory workers and their families of the OMINATO Naval Yards were told that they would be returned to KOREA. They departed aboard the UKIJIMA [*sic* Ukishima] with a crew of Japanese sailors and officers. The warship arrived and anchored outside the harbor of MAIZURU (KYUSHU) [*sic* Honshu] JAPAN. After dumping the cargo overboard, the workers and their families were ordered to go to their compartments where they were beaten with swords and bamboo spears. The Japanese crew then debarked in small boats. Immediately after they left, a terrific explosion on the UKIJIMA caused it to sink, causing heavy casualties. The informant believes that this was planned because of the sailors' remarks, “WE FEEL SORRY FOR THE CHILDREN” (*G-2 Daily Report*, September 24, 1945, p. 70).

A follow-up study conducted by the U.S. authorities in Japan ruled the evidence insufficient to prove the Korean's case. It was, however, convincing enough to a number of Koreans who chose to

¹⁸One example is seen in Sunny Che who of as a boy left his “home” in Nagoya, Japan to “return” to Korea in March 1944 in advance of aerial bombing by the United States. See Che (2005, pp. 87–90). Kwon In-sopu notes that the Japanese government directed an order to stop Koreans from returning to the peninsula as the aerial bombings intensified (2006, p. 113).

¹⁹A report compiled by William Gane dates Compliance SCAP Order A-6 091.31 at October 12. See Foreign Affairs Section, Headquarters, United States Army Military Government in Korea (1946).

²⁰An undated Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) report listed the following four-week incomes of Koreans in different professions: merchant 1279 yen, official 975 yen, secretary-clerk 681 yen, and laborer farmer 659 yen. General HQ, Far East Command, Supreme Commander Allied Powers, and United Nations Command (undated).

²¹The Japanese in Korea organized Sewakai groups to facilitate repatriation efforts (Ch'oi 2013).

²²One film released by the North Koreans titled *Souls Protest* (K. *Sar'a innün ryōng'hondül*, 2000) argued that the ship's sinking was indeed an act of sabotage plotted by the Japanese navy (Caprio April 2019).

²³The initial report on the sinking appeared in the *Pusan ilbo* 부산일보 on September 18, 1945 just under one month after the incident (Kim 1994, p. 16).

forego repatriation and remain in Japan (Caprio 2019; Kim 1994).²⁴ This fear was hardly abated when the seas claimed a number of other ships and their passengers mostly due to adverse weather conditions such as typhoons (Chöng 2010).²⁵ However, human-induced incidents also occurred.

Among the human-induced incidents were those instigated by “pirates,” described in the *Report as ex-kempeitai* 憲兵隊, who combed the high seas in search of profitable targets. We can imagine that the unauthorized ships were seen as more attractive due to their transporting returnees carrying cargo deemed “illegal” by the Allied forces. Much of this cargo was smuggled products such as rice destined for the Japanese, but also the Korean, black markets. Occasionally travelers included information on these hazardous experiences in letters exchanged between Japan and Korea that U.S. administration officials intercepted.²⁶ One letter dated November 3, 1945 advised the recipient on the best way to return to Japan, through a “secret [unauthorized] ship,” and on how to smuggle unauthorized goods past border inspectors. A Takemoto Hirō instructed as followed:

There are many secret ship companies in PUSAN. The prices are posted on bulletin boards and are usually about 150 yen per person. In going by secret ship you also avoid inspection by the military police and Korean women. The “Nippon Sewakai Relief Society” will tell you what companies to go to for secret passage. The relief society is located in front of the PUSAN railroad station. ... P.S. If you are smart you can carry a large sum of money with you (*G-2 Periodic Report* November 3, 1945, p. 227).²⁷

Another letter was written by Dewake Masako, a female Japanese living in Ishikawa, Japan, to a Dewake Yoshishiro living in Seoul and most likely preparing to repatriate. She advised his using women and bribery to smuggle goods past the American inspectors:

American soldiers do not inspect Japanese women or girls returning to JAPAN from PUSAN, so if Miss UTAKO hides her money on her person it should be safe. If a woman hides a camera properly in her clothes, the Americans will never find it. Before I went aboard ship, I gave one of the inspecting soldiers a beautiful fan and he did not bother to inspect my mother’s baggage (*ibid.*, January 29, 1946, pp. 599–600).

Information regarding the smuggling of personal finances through checkpoints on either side understandably provided the content for much of this correspondence. The following is just one example of many on this subject.

Shin Tatsuma has sent several hundred yen to his relatives in JAPAN by bribing a nurse on a hospital ship. The nurse was paid 10,000 yen to smuggle the money to JAPAN and I believe you can find receipts in Shin’s house as proof of this (*ibid.*, December 20, 1945, p. 461).²⁸

²⁴Kim (1994, pp. 73–74) writes of one survivor, Yi Yöngchul 李英出, who decided to remain in Japan rather than risk boarding a ship to return to Korea. Kim estimates that more than 2,000 Koreans used the explosion as a reason to forego repatriation (*ibid.*, 200).

²⁵Duró (2018, p. 22) writes that 241 Korean laborers perished in a ship wreck caused by the Makurazaki Typhoon of September 1945.

²⁶Soon after arriving in southern Korea and Japan, the United States began (probably at random) to intercept letters and telegraphs, and listening in on telephone conversations between Japanese and Koreans. The *G-2 Periodic Report* recorded the content of much of this information. An early *Report* admitted, however, that officials were only able to check a small percentage of the estimated 100,000 outgoing letters (*G-2 Periodic Report* September 13, 1945, 12.) On September 14, it admitted being able to check but 82 pieces of mail.

²⁷This particular record identified the “Nippon Jin Sewakai” as being connected with an underground organization run by a Nishihiro Tadeo, and one connected with black marketing schemes. Smuggling Koreans back into Japan, being riskier, became much more expensive, with a report issued just weeks later citing the average figure at 2,000 yen (*G-2 Periodic Report* November 22, 1947 v. 5, 243).

²⁸A memo attached to this letter suggested that its author meant to say “several thousand [rather than hundred] yen.”

Other intercepted correspondences demonstrate that some Koreans, as well, had accumulated a small fortune to protect.

It is true that my friend, Mr. KIM, Bok Soon, has 500,000 Japanese Yen and that one of his friends, who was introduced to me as Mr. YU, Ok Dong, has 6,000,000 Japanese Yen. If you can exchange such a large sum of money for Korean Yen immediately, I will take the responsibility of bringing both the 6,000,000 Yen and the 500,000 yen to you. I beg you to answer quickly. Since the larger sum can be exchanged later, I wish that you would exchange the 500,000 Japanese Yen immediately (*ibid.*, February 7, 1946, p. 635).

Later that month, a summary of letters included in the *Record* captured the severity of this problem.

Letters telling of efforts being made by Koreans to illegally exchange Japanese Yen for Korean notes continue to be intercepted. KIM, Choo Teh'an [of TAEGU] informed KIM, Dei Song [of Pusan] on 27 January, that 114,760 Japanese Yen was going to be exchanged by YANG, Chang Il, of PUSAN. In another intercepted letter, TAMAGAWA, Mizo [of OSAM-MI] eagerly inquired of TAMAZAWA, Keiichi [of PUSAN], on 4 February, if he could exchange approximately 20,000 Japanese Yen. A third letter further indicated ...that large sums of Japanese Yen are being exchanged for a charge of 50% of the money involved. SON, Ki Tai [of Masan], informed CHO, Tch'ang [of MIRYANG], on 30 January, that CHO could exchange 500,000 Yen at a 50% discount, plus the fee of a mediator. These three letters have been referred to Military Government (*ibid.*, February 11, 1946, p. 645).

More than just money, reports by U.S. authorities indicate that people from both sides were also shipping large quantities of goods, as well. A November *Report* also indicated that the Sewakai 世話会 was involved in more than simply providing means for Japanese to return home, but also in delivering material goods to black markets (*ibid.*, November 3, 1945, p. 227). On another occasion, authorities uncovered on three intercepted ships a rather interesting collection of human, monetary, and material cargo.

At MASAN, three ships were impounded and their captains and crews arrested when they arrived on 27 January without a sailing permit. A search of the ships disclosed that they were carrying Japanese wire, cables, machinery, 3 motorcycles, and tangerines. 22 passengers were removed from the ships and sent to Pusan by rail. Two of the ships had illegally departed from SHIMONOSEKI and OSAKA, Japan on 18 and 19 January respectively. The third had come from CHINHAE. Also at MASAN, a complete search of a 20-ton ship which was impounded when it attempted to illegally depart for JAPAN on 19 January, resulted in the confiscation of 1,475,000 yen. The money was hidden in various places throughout the ship, including a false-bottomed tub (*ibid.*, February 5, 1946, pp. 627–28).

The rice that was transported from Korea to supply Japanese black markets was a particularly delicate issue given that the Korean people were already quite sensitive over the Japanese having “stolen” rice from them during their tenure in government. One intercepted ship was found carrying a cargo of 370 straw bags of rice, valued at an estimated 237,000 yen (*ibid.*, February 5, 11, 1946, p. 648). At this time, Korean farmers often sold their rice to black marketeers, probably due to the higher returns they received over contributing it to the occupation-organized rice collection plan. The U.S. Commanding Officer John R. Hodge first denied such actions, particularly when his men faced accusations of abetting the illegal activity. Hodge would later criticize the “Korean smugglers,” but not the U.S. soldiers under him, over their “unpatriotic” behavior (Hodge 1995, p. 113).

It is a small wonder that these ships became the pirates' main targets. They were much smaller than the authorized ships, averaging between 10 and 20 tons, and carried fewer passengers (*G-2 Periodic*

Report November 20, 1945, p. 308).²⁹ These factors along with the potentially higher returns must have made them particularly attractive targets to the pirates. Also, the Allied occupation authorities, in Japan primarily from the United States but also the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces (BCOF), had enough to do in dealing with land-based problems to worry about problems at sea. Crimes committed by these pirates did not stop at mere theft, but also included the murder of passengers, such as the following entry included in the *Report*:

Koreans arriving in PUSAN aboard the TAIHO MARU during the period told a story of tragedy encountered en route. The ship left OSAKA, Japan on 22 Oct carrying 60 passengers. En route to PUSAN, 3 robbers aboard the ship began singling out passengers, robbing them, and throwing the live victims overboard. The passengers became aware of what was occurring and attempted to mob the robbers. The three men managed to escape in a rowboat, however, off the island of OSHIMA. When the boat docked at PUSAN, 11 passengers were missing. Bodies of three individuals who had apparently been shot, were found in the hold (*ibid.*, November 10, 1945, pp. 262–63).

That same month another refugee ship, also targeted by these gangs, met a similar fate. It sailed into Pusan Harbor with three dead and one wounded Korean. Thirty of the other passengers had been thrown overboard along the way. Witnesses blamed the Japanese crew, who were later arrested by the U.S. Military Police (*ibid.*, November 15, 1945, p. 281).

Some letters challenged the near impossible task of estimating the extent of the crimes committed in the waters separating Japan and Korea. One letter suggested, perhaps with a little exaggeration, that by early December 1945 as many as a thousand “former members of the Japanese Military Police, [who] are active in the Korean Straits” are responsible for the deaths of up to 10,000 Koreans returning from Japan (*ibid.*, December 4, 1945, p. 376). Another letter, citing media sources, estimated that “5,000 Koreans returning from Japan in November were robbed by bands of pirates while crossing the Strait” (*ibid.*, December 20, 1945, p. 461). Regardless of their accuracy, we can imagine that rumors of these atrocities circulated through Korean communities, and no doubt influenced decisions regarding repatriation: the means they would use to do so, as well as whether they should repatriate at all. Some who had successfully returned home used postal mailings to warn people of the perils of repatriation. One Tei Gin Rei [Ch’oe Kin-rei?] of Pusan advised Takasaki Yuriko (quite possibly a Korean using her adopted Japanese name) in Gunma as follows: “When you return to Korea from Japan, avoid the secret [unauthorized] ships because there are many pirates at sea. The best way to go is by official steamer” (*ibid.*, November 26, 1945, p. 339).

The *Report*, attempting to record these crimes, filled its pages with such actions committed by both Japanese and Koreans against travelers on the seas between Japan and Korea in the immediate aftermath of the Pacific War. However, the compilers of this information could only include information on ships that they had managed to intercept. The number of ships which escaped the authorities’ eyes is, of course, difficult to estimate.³⁰ For example, the *Report* included few mentions of people like Ch’oe Soggi who along with countless other Koreans managed to return to Japan after having repatriated to Korea (Ch’oe 2004, p. 42).³¹ The information contained in the intercepted correspondence

²⁹In comparison, the *Ukishima-maru* weighed 4,700 tons.

³⁰For example, the Makurazaki Typhoon of September 1945 (noted above) did not gain mention in the *Report* at least through November 1945 although the *Report* did include mention of a number of other ships that had succumbed to typhoon and sea-mines. In early October, for example, it listed the sinking of the *Takasaki maru* (typhoon) and *Koto maru* (mine explosion) (*ibid.*, October 1, 1945, 102).

³¹Tessa Morris-Suzuki, emphasizing the influence of a cholera outbreak, found that over 17,000 Koreans were captured by occupation authorities trying to return to Japan (May 11, 2004). Fukumoto Taku estimated that 20,000 Korean “illegal aliens” [不法人国者, *fuhōnyūkokuisha*] had attempted to return to Japan (2008, 154). Yi Yōn-sik 이연식, looking at re-immigration of Koreans to Japan and Manchuria, found that between April 1946 and 1950 as many as 46,156 Koreans were arrested for trying to re-enter Japan (2018, p. 107).

does offer us examples to assist in our understanding of the challenges that repatriating people faced and the ways they sought to circumvent them. It would be interesting to know whether the content from the intercepted letters helped the occupation authorities curb such actions. However, to date I have not encountered a report that suggested the occupation authorities taking advantage of this information. Another area of danger, one that proved easier to contain once the instigators had been apprehended, and either imprisoned or “advised” to return to Japan, was that which took place in Korea’s metropolitan areas, and particularly Seoul.

Peninsular dangers

Others continued the war on land. Both northern and southern Korea encountered factional struggle following their country’s liberation from colonial rule, much coming from different Korean groups vying to fill the power voids that evolved during the change from Japanese to Allied (U.S. and Soviet) administrations.³² In addition, there were Japanese who chose to remain in southern Korean cities where they engaged in a wide range of criminal activities. Soon after Japan’s defeat rumors began to spread that predicted a resurgence of Japanese armies to the battlefields. These appeared in two forms: one centered on Japanese regaining their lost pride, and another of their joining the United States in battle against the Soviet Union. The former spread the optimistic prediction that Japan would soon rise from the ashes. One letter urged the following: “We must rebuild Japan as it was before the war. We must put America out of the way. Spiritually, we have never been defeated” (*G-2 Periodic Report* October 10, 1945, p. 128). Another Japanese in Seoul predicted just when the country’s resurrection would commence: “The Japanese have no way to relieve the shame of losing the war except by rising again. I deeply believe that the gods will help us. 1948 will probably be that year” (*ibid.*, October 26, 1945, p. 200).

Others saw war emerging over the ideological differences that separated the Soviet Union and the United States, with the Japanese now fighting on the side of their former U.S. enemies. A November 1945 *Report* noted the following:

Japanese civilians continue to write that the United States and Russia will soon be at war with each other. Reports one such person, “In case of war we, the Japanese, will fight with the Americans.” The majority of the statements are based purely on rumors. Some Japanese, who have seen Russian or US troops and weapons particularly near the 38th parallel, have assumed from their observations that Russia and the US are preparing for war (*ibid.*, November 26, 1945, p. 339).

Credibility supporting these rumors increased when, on at least one occasion, its source was a member of the U.S. armed forces.

OGAWA, Yaeko, a Japanese employed at the Bizanya Hotel, SEOUL, stated in a letter written to his mother on 20 Oct: “The Bizenya Hotel is now occupied by 125 US soldiers from the captain to colonel. An American soldier told me that America may wage war with Russia before long.”

The entry ended with a note that reflected on the problems that such “loose talk” created (*ibid.*, November 8, 1945, p. 253).

The rumors continued and intensified as differences between the two superpowers grew. A late April 1946 *Report* carried the following excerpt from a piece of correspondence that was to be passed between two Koreans residing in northern Korea, one residing in Kaesong and the other in Sangch’on

³²One of the largest revolts in northern Korea was the Sinuiju Incident of November 1945. For a report on this incident (Cathcart and Kraus 2008, p. 1). Also, a number of violent incidences that targeted northern Korean leaders broke out in March 1946. Erik van Rhee describes these incidents as manifestations of the tension caused by northern Korean reforms that targeted the top echelons of the Soviet military (General Ivan Chistiakov) and North Korean political leadership (Kim Il Sung) (Rhee 1989, pp. 151–53).

[Sanguch'on?]. Its contents, which noted both Soviet and U.S. troop buildup in the Kaesong area, connected the ideological differences that the two occupations were facing with the probability of war.

Korea has become a battle-ground for the right and left wings, and if a provisional government in South KOREA is established in a month as reported, Communists and Democrats will be separated by the line at the 38th parallel. According to rumor in KAESONG, a war between RUSSIA and the UNITED STATES will surely start within three months.... Personally, I am going to move to CHUNGJU in CH'UNGCH'ONG-PUKTO Province as quickly as possible (*ibid.*, April 30, 1946, v. 2, 233).

Beyond simple rumors, Commanding Officer Hodge also reported to his superior, General Douglas MacArthur in Tokyo who in turn forwarded his message to General Dwight Eisenhower, a warning that increasing evidence showed the Russians training a large contingent of Koreans in the north to "liberate" Koreans in the south.³³

In a possible preparation for war, Japanese squirreled away caches of weapons in caves and even schoolhouses, such as the following that was discovered in the extreme southern city of Mokp'o 목포 in November:

At MOKP'O, weapons and equipment were confiscated by US troops from the Japanese commercial school and the elementary school on 17 Nov. 160 rifles, 200 bayonets, and 16 sabers were taken at the commercial school. 540 wooden rifles, 3 sabers, 1 bayonet and 50 steel helmets were found at the elementary school. Those responsible for not previously reporting the location of these weapons to the US authorities were apprehended (*ibid.*, November 18, 1945, p. 296).

Over the following months, the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) would confiscate similar caches of weapons hidden first by Japanese, but then later by Koreans after the majority of the former colonizers had been repatriated.

Postwar violence also resulted in gangs forming in Korean cities. Similar to the pirate gangs discussed above, the *Report* characterized many of these gang members as rogue *ex-kempeitai* who roamed the streets of Korean cities seeking to instigate conflict between the occupation armies and the Korean people.³⁴ The U.S. Military Government learned early on of this potential problem. On September 12, just days after arriving in Seoul, the commanding officer of Japan's 17th Area Army, General Kosuke Yoshio, informed that about 100 *kamikaze* pilots who remained at large could "cause considerable trouble" (*ibid.*, September 12, 1945). From early October until mid-December, the *Report* carried news almost daily on the arrest, interrogation, and trials of members of "secret organizations" that operated along the southern half of the Korean peninsula. The first such report appeared on October 1, just three weeks after the USAMGIK's arrival.

An organization built around the KEMPEI TAI and the TOKUMU KIKAN [intelligence agency] has been uncovered in SEOUL, and several of its members arrested. An interrogation of those apprehended, nine Japanese men and two women, revealed that these people, together with 15 others still at large, were organized 1) To collect information and weapons; 2) To assassinate US army personnel and prominent Koreans in a manner to make it appear to be strife between Americans and Koreans, and 3) To accomplish this at the sacrifice of their own lives, if necessary. Two machine guns and several pistols were found at the homes of the suspects. Investigation is continuing (*ibid.*, October 1, 1945, pp. 97–98).

³³General of the Army Douglas MacArthur to the Chief of Staff (Eisenhower) (October 28, 1946) FRUS, 750.

³⁴Morita Yoshio, citing U.S. reports (SCAP: Summary of Non-Military Activities in Japan and Korea), traces the activities of Japanese colonial-era government-general (*sōtokufu*, 総督府) and the Japanese *kempeitai* at the time of Japanese surrender (1964, pp. 831–40).

It followed up on this story four days later by announcing that the suspects had “confessed to the charge of illegal possession of arms and ... to being members of an organization whose aim was to create strife between Americans and Koreans by means of assassinations and terrorism.” The gang members further admitted to having committed “terrorist acts prior to the arrival of the American occupation force” (ibid., October 5, 1945, p. 114). Subsequent issues of the *Report* contained updates on the past activities of these individuals that, in addition to listing names and nationality, developed them into a much more diverse and organized operation. The deeper the *Report* entered the story, however, the more confusing it became as to the group to which the defendants belonged and who actually was controlling these operations. The following day it revealed that all eleven of the defendants, who were to be tried in a few days, were “Japanese... members of an underground organization bent on subversive activity...” It further revealed information gleaned from the interrogation of a Nishihiro Tadao, who had been deposed as Chief of the Bureau of Police Affairs within the Japanese bureaucracy. Nishihiro listed three of the organization’s primary purposes:

1. To establish dance halls, cabarets, theaters, hotels, and other places of amusement for the purposes of obtaining information from U.S. personnel;
2. To create strife between the Korean people and the American occupational forces;
3. To do away with any person that stands in the way of their accomplishing their purpose.

Nishihiro also named additional gang members, including a Korean, Kim Ke Cho (alias Nakamura), who allegedly was the “head and go-between of the organization.” Funding for the operations passed through a complicated arrangement of channels that involved the Sewakai and other individuals. In total, the organization had accumulated “8,000,000 yen [that] was distributed among approximately 100 parties” (ibid., October 6, 1945, p. 118).

The investigations continued to make progress the following day with further arrests of additional members of underground gangs. In early October, the *Report* added the name Saitō Toshinaru, now recognized as the leader of the previously arrested Japanese, to the list. Saitō was apprehended for his role in the “killing of one Korean and the wounding of another” on October 5. He revealed under interrogation that his group was “only a small clog in a larger organization.” Saitō also named a number of others with Japanese names who were involved in its operations, and revealed that there were “more than 700 [armed] Japanese soldiers and KEMPEITAI who were roaming the streets of SEOUL...” (ibid., October 9, 1945, p. 124).

A later report suggested the amount of ammunition that the underground gangs had at their disposal. At the time of the arrest of two other Japanese, Sagoya Yoshisaki 佐郷屋嘉昭 [Also known as Tomeo] and Fujimoto Akiri, the U.S. military confiscated the following: “76 pistols, 300 rounds of ammunition, 30,000 yen and approximately 55 boxes (18 kg per box) of opium...” The weapons had been obtained from the Japanese military and were to be used for terrorist purposes. This *Report* also revealed financial connections between the gangs and the Sewakai, and suggested that the Korean, Kim Ke Cho, held a most prominent position in these operations (ibid., October 10, 1945, p. 128).

The case of Sagoya Yoshisaki proved interesting, while suggesting the power that the Japanese military had wielded from the late 1930s. The inquiries revealed that Sagoya, who was a member of the Aikokusha [愛国社, Patriots society] in Japan, had previously spent ten years in prison for his involvement in the assassination of Japanese Prime Minister Hamaguchi Osachi [浜口雄幸] in 1931. His death sentence issued in 1933 had been reduced to a life sentence by the emperor sometime later. He was finally pardoned in 1940, after which he traveled to Manchuria before making his way at an undisclosed time to the Korean peninsula. After returning to Japan he spent his remaining days promoting ultra-right activities, becoming a leader in the ultra-nationalist parliamentary group, the National Protection Corps (護国団 *Gokokudan*) (ibid., October 13, 1945, p. 143; Fetherling 2006, pp. 321–22).³⁵

³⁵For information on the National Protection Corps, see Victoria (2020, pp. 173–75). Morita Yoshio reports that Saoya was found guilty in December 1945 for illegal possession of weapons and ammunition, as well as opium. The court gave him a three-year sentence and fined him 50,000 yen (1964, p. 833).

The investigation continued. The confusion caused by these rogues, who were primarily, but not exclusively Japanese, intensified and their connections with the Japanese military strengthened when the authorities arrested a Major Kawai Chudo in Taegu, who had previously served as the chief of the *kempeitai* in Seoul. This *Report* now affirmed that it was Kawai, rather than Saitō Toshiharu, who was the head of this “terrorist organization.” Below him were a number of other *ex-kempeitai* officials. Kawai had been in Seoul awaiting orders to repatriate when he suddenly fled south with his mistress to Taechōn (G-2 Periodic Report October 15, 1945, pp. 152–52). This same report carried updates on information regarding the money flow. Most interesting was Nishihiro Tadao’s explanation that he was using part of the money for “protecting Japanese women.” However, his idea of “protecting” these women was to have them prostitute for him. This was, according to Nishihiro, the idea behind the organization’s establishing entertainment programs for American troops. To this end, he purchased the services of 150 girls at 10,000 yen apiece to engage in “sexual diversion.” Nishihiro explained that the protection angle of this scheme was that “the women concerned would engage in this prostitution only [by] choice” (*ibid.*, p. 152).³⁶ The next day the *Report* carried the news that 60 Japanese who were working under Major Kawai had been arrested (*ibid.*, October 16, 1945, p. 155).

Over the following days, new reports confirmed the existence of yet more gangs operating with similar objectives. On October 20, for example, the occupation authorities uncovered another underground gang led by a Hokuda Hitomi who had in his possession a knife and pistol at the time of his arrest. Hokuda and his gang of 20 members had organized in Taegu to “cause strife between RUSSIA and AMERICA, and KOREA and AMERICA, and to propagandize against the US in the interests of making JAPAN a great nation again” (*ibid.*, October 21, 1945, p. 181). He revealed under interrogation that his particular organization was “nation-wide” (*ibid.*, October 23, 1945, p. 188), and that the Hokuda gang had begun organizing as early as June 1945, months before Japan’s formal surrender (*ibid.*, October 26, 1945, p. 199).³⁷

Information on Japanese gang-related terror diminished as suspects were brought to trial and Japanese residents in Korea repatriated. The *Report* had the trials beginning on November 24 and ending by December 18, after which the story faded from its pages.³⁸ On the first day, 42 Japanese were arraigned before a Provost Court in Seoul on charges of belonging to the terrorist organization headed by Major Kawai Chudo. Of these defendants, 25 pleaded guilty, including Saitō Hoshihiro (*ibid.*, November 24, 1945, p. 328). Those found guilty were sentenced to prison terms of hard labor and in some cases fined. Those who had been found not guilty were “advised” to immediately leave Korea. The *Report* indicated that the majority of those indicted were released either before or after being tried due to insufficient evidence. This included the alleged ringleader, Major Kawai, who was released without appearing in court (*ibid.*, December 5, 1945, p. 379). A similar conclusion was reached for Nishihiro Tadao and Kim Ke Cho, with the former Chief of Police Affairs returned to Japan and the Korean released from the Kyonggi-do Provincial jail (*ibid.*, December 18, 1945, p. 452).³⁹

The degree that this danger element filtered back into the Korean community in Japan is impossible to ascertain. It most certainly added one more factor for those Koreans considering to repatriate to consider. Occasionally the *Report* included parts of letters that mentioned such activity, suggesting Japan-based Korean awareness. The following letter, that appeared as early as October 1945, provides one such example.

³⁶This *Report* also noted that Nishihiro admitted paying off Korean leaders, including Yuh Woon Hyung [여운형 Yŏ Un-hyŏng], to “protect property and prevent bloodshed.”

³⁷This *Report* also included a list of six of his groups’ goals, many of which overlapped with those of other groups regarding their aim to disrupt relations between U.S. officials and Koreans and to assassinate Korean leaders. One additional aim of the group was to have Japanese soldiers in Manchuria rise up against the American military in Korea.

³⁸Morita Yoshio provides sketches of these and other trials (1964, pp. 831–54).

³⁹The *Report* noted that Nishihiro returned to Japan on November 13, a little over a month previous.

It is already long since the United States Army entered, but still now Japanese soldiers with weapons roam about in the street; Japanese imperialistic devils, at their last gasp, doing such barbarious [*sic*] acts as setting fires, discharging rifles, killing by thrust, throwing bombs and so on by night, crawl in the city of KEIJO. Oh! What hateful acts they are (*ibid.*, October 13, 1945, p. 144).

Violence on the peninsula continued even after many of the Japanese had been repatriated, much of it revenge-driven actions by Koreans upon Japanese. While at first Koreans took their anger out on the lingering Japanese settlers, later it took the form of ideological struggles amongst Koreans vying for political power.

Korean-initiated violence

The *Report* also included acts of violence that Koreans committed, first against the Japanese in the early months following liberation, and then against fellow Koreans. Much of this violence involved retribution toward the people who had victimized Koreans and Korean society during the war. Korean laborers made efforts to collect wages – both past and future – from their employers. Other cases saw Koreans searching out the people responsible for sending them to Japan for labor purposes. At times this violence appeared as an apparent random act triggered by a general hatred of the Japanese as a people, or of Koreans who had collaborated with the colonizers. As Korea's period under USAMGIK administration advanced ideology increasingly became a factor that pitted Koreans of different political suasions against each other.

During the war, U.S. officials anticipated the possibility that liberated Koreans might inflict violence upon their former Japanese occupiers. Interviews that they conducted with people familiar with Korea – businessmen, missionaries, and POWs – often included a question regarding whether Koreans would seek retribution against the Japanese following liberation. The general view expressed by the interviewees was negative: Koreans would not seek such revenge. However, a minority felt differently. One informant predicted that Koreans “would turn against [the Japanese] at the first opportunity.” As older Koreans who had not been influenced by Japanese-led education might turn to massacring Japanese, this person advised that they be “placed in protective custody in internment camps...to avoid mob rule” (Yi 1992, p. 161).⁴⁰ This view was slightly tame when compared to another extreme opinion:

The Korean population in general is extremely hostile to the Japanese. Nearly all Koreans would take the first chance to massacre Japanese citizens. So many Koreans have been killed by the Japanese that the population would be eager for revenge.

This person advised the Americans to “put [Japanese] in larger internment centers during and immediately after hostilities” (*ibid.*, p. 174).

Soon after Japan's defeat, Koreans initially attacked important symbols of Japanese presence, such as the Shinto shrines, before turning to the Japanese settlers themselves. The *Report* told of labor wage demands that some Koreans made of their now former employers. On one occasion 300 Korean laborers kidnapped their former boss at Hitachi Iron Works and, after beating him, led the executive from bank to bank in an attempt to squeeze from him three million yen, of which they were able to collect a third of this amount (G-2 Periodic Report October 2, 1945, p. 101). Another *Report* told of 5,800 Korean laborers in the city of Kunsan 군산 abstracting 12,261,536 yen from wealthy Japanese (*ibid.*, November 24, 1945, p. 329).⁴¹ Retribution toward those who wronged the laborers during the war provided another motivation for this violence. One entry reported on recently repatriated Koreans attempting to collect 2,500 yen each from the Japanese mayor of Kunsan, who was responsible for arranging their forced passage to Japan (*ibid.*, October 6, 1945, p. 119).

⁴⁰The report of this interview, like many others, was “sanitized” to hide the identity of the informant.

⁴¹This was just over one-third of the 43 million yen the laborers had originally demanded.

A second form of violence was seen in apparent random acts committed against Japanese settlers preparing to return home, and against fellow Koreans who assisted them by purchasing or assuming control over their property. In late September, the *Report* told of complaints by Japanese in the Seoul-In'chön area of the "unlawful entry and looting" of their homes by groups of Koreans. Armed Koreans gained entrance to the house by "falsely stating that they are acting on U.S. Army orders" (ibid., September 25, 1945, p. 77). In October of this year, it reported that outside of Pusan, Koreans "seized all Japanese males over 17 years of age and all Japanese military personnel, and jailed them. Some of the Japanese soldiers had been beaten and some Japanese property appropriated." To protect the Japanese, U.S. officials placed them in "protective custody" within the confines of a Shinto shrine (ibid., October 19, 1945, pp. 166–67).

From the earliest days following defeat, Japanese took measures to protect themselves from possible Korean retribution. They dressed in Korean fashion so as to blend in with the native population. They also secured weapons and received protection from the Japanese military and police in Korea. At first the Japanese settlers were advised by the Sewakai to remain on the peninsula to assist Koreans in building their post-liberation country (Ch'oi 2013, 99, p. 114).⁴² Following its arrival, however, the USAMGIK ordered all Japanese to prepare to repatriate. While some Japanese residents in southern Korea encountered danger as they made their way to ports in the south, this danger paled in comparison to that endured by Japanese forced to travel the length of the Korean peninsula to ports at the southern-most tip of the peninsula to repatriate as the Soviets had not provided the means for return from the northern half of the peninsula.⁴³

Koreans organized into groups to prey on these Japanese as well as Koreans who had formed contacts with them. A November edition of the *Report* carried news of a "Young Men's Suicide Alliance" [決死青年同盟, *Kyölsa ch'öngnyön tongmaeng*], an "underground organization with terroristic intent," whose members had been beating and robbing Japanese civilians, and warning Koreans not to deal with the Japanese settlers. The *Report* linked the organization with the left-wing Korean People's Republic that had created similar disturbances across southern Korea (G-2 Periodic Report November 12, 1945, p. 270).⁴⁴ Just days earlier, the *Report* revealed that this group had posted signs warning Koreans that they were risking their life should they assist departing Japanese by purchasing their property (ibid., November 10, 1946, p. 263).

An early U.S. intention to utilize experience by retaining members of the Japanese administration, including their Korean collaborators, motivated further violence in southern Korea. As this included Japanese-trained police, disgruntled Koreans frequently targeted their offices of employment. One organization, the "Secret Killing Party" (암살단, *Am sal tan*), left the following message at a police station in Taechön that targeted Korean officials over their strong Japanese ties.

- 1) "Vice Governor WHANG, In Sil –
Strike down the head of the traitor of the Chungch'ong Namdo Province.
- 2) Vice Police Chief PARK, Pyun Pai –
"You are pro-Jap. You are mixed Jap-Korean boy. Take your father's memorial stone and go back to JAPAN."
- 3) Major of TAEJON PANG, Doo Whan –
"You are traitor and Pro-Japan. We object [to] you!" (ibid., January 14, 1946, p. 548).

An editorial that appeared around the same time in *Yöngnam ilbo* 영남일보 newspaper directed Koreans to "sweep away" such residue of Japan's colonial era and replace them with "capable people"

⁴²In North Korea, a small contingent of Japanese remained to assist Koreans in technical areas (Satō 2009).

⁴³Mizuno Naoki estimates that at present the remains of 30,000 Japanese are scattered around present-day North Korea (January 2014). I review the experiences of a number of Japanese residents in northern Korean (Caprio 2009).

⁴⁴The leader of this group, a Kim Nichi Sei (金日成, Kim Il-song?, most probably different from the North Korean leader) had attended the Japanese Military Academy before deserting that fleeing to the Soviet Union.

(*Yōngnam ilbo* January 18, 1946). Yet, the Japanese would physically retain significant numbers on the peninsula for another year, and even after rumors persisted that accused the USAMGIK of continuing to seek influence from their former Japanese enemy.⁴⁵

Conclusion

For many Koreans in Japan and Korea, the imperial broadcast and official surrender ceremony signaled the start of a new phase of the war. The violence felt in the months, and even years, that followed resulted from a void in power brought by Japan's defeat, the transfer of authority, and bad policy decisions made by the United States occupying administration in Japan and in southern Korea. Decisions over what was to be considered "illegal" or "unauthorized" perhaps made sense to a defeated Japanese army, but not to a liberated Korean people. Particularly unacceptable to the returnees was the absurd monetary limitation, one that hardly reflected what the people needed to restart their lives. After arrival in southern Korea, the U.S. retention of Japanese and the Japanese-trained Koreans in positions of authority, even if in the name of efficiency by their experience, could only be interpreted by Koreans as their being subjected to a U.S. administration that favored the defeated Japanese over the liberated Korean elements. The minority of Japanese military forces who refused to accept defeat and continued to abuse Koreans signaled further to this people that though as a people most Japanese had accepted defeat, its imperial influence continued on the peninsula.

The postwar chaos also divided overseas Koreans, predominantly those who had migrated to the Japanese islands during Japan's 35 years of colonial rule. There were many reasons why a significant number had decided to remain in bombed-out Japanese cities over confronting the uncertainties of repatriation to Korea. This paper focused on one particular element: the extension of violence in the postwar period that enhanced the danger element on both the high seas and across southern Korea. One important factor highlighted here was the influence of a large number of Japanese identified in the *Report as kempeitai* who chose to engage in activities aimed at disrupting the postwar occupations rather than cooperate. It might be argued that these Japanese simply took advantage of the U.S. Military Government's initial directive instructing the Japanese to maintain control until after the U.S. occupying forces arrived. Rogue Japanese used this three-week window of continued Japanese rule to re-organize. The mixed messages that this sent to the peninsula in the defeated Japanese continuing to have influence over the "liberated" Koreans frustrated peninsula-based Koreans who had believed that their country's independence would soon follow Japan's capitulation. The post-liberation period instead subjected Koreans to a three-year occupation that left the peninsula divided geographically and ideologically at the 38th parallel, and even among Koreans in each sector as well as in Japan.

This decision to divide Korea, and the subsequent failure of the United States and the Soviet Union to "fix" the divided Korean peninsula presented further problems. The two-Korean state system eventually extended the immediate post-liberation violence in different forms to the entire peninsula. The continuation of this violence continued into the civil war that broke out in late June 1950. In this way, the Pacific War and the Korean War feed into each other, like two belligerent bookends linked by the violence that broke out in the immediate postwar period and gradually escalated over the five-year interval. Might, then it be reasonable to consider that the "initial shot" of this future war was "fired" in mid-August 1945, when the U.S. decided that the two Allied forces would occupy Korea independently in the North and South, at a time when the two occupiers were finding it increasingly difficult to communicate, much less cooperate, with one another?

I am particularly grateful for the comments provided by three anonymous reviewers that greatly improved many aspects of this paper. I also thank Frank Hoffmann for his assistance in the romanization of Korean works cited in the references.

Conflict of interest. None.

⁴⁵Yi Yōn-sik (2008) writes that rumors circulated among Koreans that the U.S. administration was allowing Japanese to return to Korea, and preparing them to reassume their dominant role in the region.

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