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Enemy Alien Internment, Decolonization, and the Uprooted Elite of Treaty Port China under Japanese Occupation, 1941–1945

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Abstract

This article addresses the process of decolonization carried out by wartime Japanese occupation authorities, exemplifying how it played out on the ground in 1940s China with a focus on the ‘uprooted elite’ – that is, the former Western colonists of the treaty ports. After the outbreak of hostilities in December 1941, these civilians were haphazardly categorized as ‘enemy nationals’ and subjected to enemy alien regulations. This culminated in a far-reaching general internment policy from early 1943 until mid- to late 1945, when a bittersweet Allied liberation shut Japan’s ‘Civil Assembly Centres’ down. Despite Western imperialists’ desires to resurrect racial privilege and recapture a modicum of their colonial possessions, the process of ethno-political and socio-economic relegation and replacement initiated loosely under the political schema of Imperial Japan’s ‘Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere’ proved to be largely irreversible as post-imperial domestic regimes advanced nationalization agendas. The uprooted elite were not merely passive objects enduring racial upheaval, removal, and ‘reparation’. They navigated a complex and changing reality, exercising what rights they could in order to try to improve their lot. They benefited from humanitarian aid, administered by neutral Swedish and Swiss consular networks and the International Committee of the Red Cross operating on a global scale.

This article focuses on a peculiar group of political refugees described here as the ‘uprooted elite’ of treaty port China. The aim is to situate their experience as interned ‘enemy aliens’ in the wartime empire of Japan, highlighting critical entanglements with the latter’s official pronouncements and actual progress in decolonizing China and the Asia-Pacific region en bloc. Following the citation of Aristide Zolberg’s pioneering essay on the ‘refugee-generating process’ of state formation in this special issue’s introduction, this group of civilian war victims fits the mould, constituting a by-product of Japanese military and political elites’ hegemonic empire- and state-building project.¹ They fared little better in the early Cold War period, as Chinese successor regimes – both exhibiting authoritarian

¹Introduction to this special issue; Aristide R. Zolberg, ‘The formation of new states as a refugee-generating process’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 467 (1983), pp. 24–38. Page 30 features a striking passage: ‘[T]he formation of nation-states out of the debris of empires usually entails

tendencies – fought a bloody civil war in the areas vacated by the crumbled Japanese empire to establish a single nation-state and nationalized economy. Thus, in the Japanese-initiated process of dispossessing and uprooting this former colonial elite, we see ‘continuities between imperial and post-imperial statebuilding’ across these key decades of the mid-twentieth century in China, as in other world regions studied in the current special issue.² At the intersection of total war, decolonization, and forced displacement in East Asia, this article contributes to global refugee history, an advancing field progressively overcoming several historiographical disjunctures and blind spots pertaining to ‘histories of forced migrations due to colonialism, civil war and partition’ in this key region, as it is reconciled with the traditional focus area of ‘the holocaust and...forced migrations in European contexts’.³

Shuvatri Dasgupta’s contribution to this special issue steps into this space too, addressing important topics like the forced displacement of masses of civilians as a result of Japanese military incursions into continental Asia and the collusion of state officials and economic elites engaged in (post-)imperial state building and capital accumulation. The reprehensible consequences of British colonialism throughout Asia is an inescapable conclusion to be drawn from both articles. There is, however, a key difference in the refugee-political actors on whom Dasgupta focuses, namely, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay (1903–88) and Lakshmi Sahgal (1914–2012). These women’s revolutionary political activities sought to aid and emancipate ordinary people under the trying circumstances and upheaval of imperial collapse, while facing repression from elites actually bearing more resemblance to the political refugees discussed below. Indeed, the uprooted elite’s pursuit of the resurrection of colonial privilege meant the ends of attempted political action were less democratic than the local means – within the confines of the surprising forum of North China’s Weihsien internment camp. Hence, despite undeniable crossovers in the lived-experiences of all victims of war and political repression, we encounter entirely different relational links to subalternity.

The term ‘uprooted elite’ could equally apply to the aristocratic Baltic-German refugees at the centre of Dina Gusejnova’s comparative biography in this issue, but part of their elite status derived from a transnational intellectualism similarly reflected in the two inspiring biographies Dasgupta presents. A ‘peculiar combination of cosmopolitanism and uprootedness’, in Gusejnova’s words, is common to all, demonstrating the global connections and commonalities of experience that can be drawn between very diverse groups of displaced people, irrespective of their supposedly fixed and defining loyalties to certain empires and nation-states.⁴

the abolition of an ancient regime, a partial or thoroughgoing revolution, in the course of which entire social strata may come to be viewed as obstacles.’

²Introduction to this special issue; and Kerstin von Lingen’s and Laura Robson and Arie M. Dubnov’s articles. ‘Terminal declines’ of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires and the violent breakdown of the wartime Nazi empire resulted in many new nation-states, attendant refugee displacements, and other slowly dissipating legacies of imperialism and violence.

³Milinda Banerjee and Kerstin von Lingen, eds., ‘Forced migration and refugee resettlement in the long 1940s: an introduction to its connected and global history’, *Itinerario: Journal of Imperial and Global Interactions*, 46 (2022), pp. 185–92, at pp. 186–7.

⁴Dina Gusejnova, contribution to this special issue.

To these fruitfully converging elements of global refugee history, therefore, one ought to integrate the historiography of so-called ‘enemy aliens’: a specific type of political refugee found throughout the modern world, wherever transnational migration, globalization, and/or imperialism had brought different people together prior to the destructive nationalism of total war.⁵ A nuanced epistemological relationship exists between prevailing conceptions of refugees and enemy aliens. Simply put, the terms are not synonymous since not all enemy aliens can be considered refugees, but there is considerable overlap – not least from the perspective of the civilian war victims themselves. Dina Gusejnova noted in a previous analysis of the *Onchan Pioneer*, an internee newspaper from the Isle of Man, that self-descriptions such as ‘refugees’, ‘internees’, ‘Europeans’, and (as the case may be) ‘Jews’ were all commonly employed, and these inconsistent and interchangeable (self-)descriptions of (interned) enemy aliens as refugees broadly align with the current author’s observations from the Asian-Pacific theatre.⁶ Therefore, the current study employs the middle-ground notion of being forcefully ‘uprooted’ as a conceptual expedient in recognition of the unmistakable commonalities of lived-experiences encountered.

The article proceeds first by discussing the privileged colonial citizenship the uprooted elite enjoyed in the century before the treaty ports’ occupation by Japan in December 1941. The new occupier intended to quickly rein in the citizenry and institutions of these complex, globally entangled spaces using the crude organizing principles of nationality and ‘race’. Secondly, the focus shifts to the Japanese military’s early experiments in civilian detainment on the China coast – an exceptional zone of occupation insofar as widespread internment was not undertaken during the first year of the Pacific War.⁷ The interim period spanning 1942 represents a rich area for further research on uninterned enemy aliens. Eventually, a general internment

⁵Advanced research on this modern phenomenon up to the First World War has flourished, e.g., Matthew Stibbe, *Civilian internment during the First World War: a European and global history* (London, 2019); and Daniela L. Caglioti, *War and citizenship: enemy aliens and national belonging from the French Revolution to the First World War* (Cambridge, 2020). Noticeably fewer studies have been published on (un)interned enemy aliens during the Second World War, but the historiographical gap is closing with work like Gilly Carr and Rachel Pistol, eds., *British internment and the internment of Britons: Second World War camps, history and heritage* (London, 2023).

⁶Dina Gusejnova, ‘Gegen deutsches K.Z. Paradies: thinking about Englishness on the Isle of Man during the Second World War’, *History of European Ideas*, 46 (2020), pp. 697–714, at p. 706. Lamentably, German and Austrian Jews and other ‘genuine’ refugees who fled to the British empire prior to the outbreak of war were indiscriminately designated enemy aliens alongside even card-carrying Nazis. On the repetition of Britain’s indiscriminate civilian internment policy in mid-1940, see Carr and Pistol, eds., *British internment*, pp. 1–4; and Rachel Pistol, ‘Enemy alien and refugee: conflicting identities in Great Britain during the Second World War’, *University of Sussex Journal of Contemporary History*, 16 (2015), pp. 37–52. Perhaps more systematic conceptual analysis of this issue is needed, also in connection with post-war conceptions of refugees and the UN definition based on Art. 1 of the 1951 Convention (<https://unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/1951-refugee-convention>, accessed 13 May 2024), but this falls beyond the scope of the current work.

⁷The swift internment of Allied enemy aliens by Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) or Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) forces was the norm from the early weeks of the Pacific War. A rich literature – to which this article owes much – compares myriad internment experiences under these detaining authorities: Bernice Archer, *The internment of Western civilians under the Japanese, 1941–1945: a patchwork of internment* (London, 2004); Geoffrey Charles Emmerson, *Hong Kong internment, 1942–1945: life in the Japanese civilian camp at Stanley*

order was issued in early 1943. Comparatively lenient Japanese consular officials presided over the full-scale segregation of those formally listed as British, American, Dutch, Belgian, etc. These approximately 10,000 men, women, and children received better treatment than Allied personnel imprisoned in detention facilities run by the military, such as Shanghai's notorious Haiphong Road camp. The notion that the specific detaining authority was consequential in the treatment accorded to war prisoners in Japanese-occupied Asia, as previous research has indicated, is further reinforced in the next section.⁸

The third section contextualizes the *comparatively* decent conditions prevailing at camps administered by Japanese consuls – and buttressed with humanitarian resources from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and neutral Swiss ‘protecting power’ – against evidence of widespread hardship for people living ‘outside the wire’ under the strains of wartime occupation. In the fourth section, too, the inconsistent influence of the Tokyo regime’s pan-Asian state ideology is encountered in local-level policy-making. This had highly discriminatory consequences, particularly for Americans publicly deported from Peking (Beijing) in March 1943. Forcibly resettled in the remote Weih sien internment camp, they managed to find just a little empowerment, but refugee agency often intersected with vain hopes of reclaiming seized colonial privileges. The uprooted elite’s liberation was thus bitter-sweet, as Allied forces arriving in August 1945 became – along with food and clothing supplies – the bearers of bad news.

A concluding fifth section broaches the mostly irreversible process of decolonization that Imperial Japan instigated during the Second World War, taking a preliminary bird’s eye view of the ‘New China Policy’ and the final termination of the treaty system and extraterritoriality. Japan’s entangled wartime diplomacy with China and these political refugees may have been overlooked. Meanwhile, recent research has noted much continuity, in political-economy terms, between the Japanese colonial state and the aforementioned post-war regimes’ efforts to nationalize China’s economy, indicating further possibilities for synergy between the schools of ‘new (global) history of capitalism’ and global refugee history with regard to China during these key decades.⁹ Totally unsustainable and aggressive state-sponsored capital accumulation was the lowest common denominator of wartime empire and post-imperial nation-state in the making, entailing destructive human and environmental consequences in war and peace.

(Hong Kong, 2008); Felicia Yap, ‘International laws of war and civilian internees in British Asia’, *War in History*, 23 (2016), pp. 426–38.

⁸Utsumi Aiko, ‘Japanese army internment policies for enemy civilians during the Asia-Pacific War’, in Donald Denoon, Mark Hudson, Gavan McCormack, and Tessa Morris-Suzuki, eds., *Multicultural Japan: palaeolithic to postmodern* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 174–209, esp. pp. 179–86. Great variation existed between camp regimes in areas under Japanese occupation and across twentieth-century Asia in general. See Robert Cribb, Christina Twomey, and Sandra Wilson, eds., *Detention camps in Asia: the conditions of confinement in modern Asian history* (Leiden, 2022), pp. 1–21, 199–218.

⁹Victor Seow, *Carbon technocracy: energy regimes in modern East Asia* (pbk edn, London, 2023; orig publ. Chicago, IL, 2021); Andrew B. Lui, *Tea war: a history of capitalism in China and India* (New Haven, CT, 2020). My thanks go to the issue’s editors for bringing these books to my attention.

In homage to Michel Foucault, one passage in the first book in Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* series declares the camp as 'the most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realized, in which power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation', since 'its inhabitants were stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life'.¹⁰ Citizenship is this mediating factor in democratic polities, of which there were unfortunately few in the early 1940s. Hundreds of millions of people were subjected to colonialism, in which system even more 'political status' could be stripped away from the ethno-economic elite occupying a privileged citizenship.¹¹ Where anti-enemy alien measures tore asunder the racial 'solidarity' at the top of the colonial order, ensnaring some of the elite and relegating them vis-à-vis their supposed racial inferiors, the relative losses of power, privilege, and so-called 'prestige' were tremendous.

Examples from both world wars abound, reflecting the countless global entanglements of European colonialism(s) and enemy alien regulatory regimes – usually synonymous with civilian internment. Instructive case-studies have shed light on British enemy aliens interned in 'German' East Africa during the First World War as well as their German counterparts over the border in the 'British' East Africa Protectorate and across the continent in British-governed Cameroon and Nigeria.¹² West Africa, previously neglected in the scholarship, witnessed an intercontinental deportation of 328 German and Italian enemy aliens, including 66 women and 38 children, to civilian internment (CI) camps in Jamaica during the Second World War.¹³ Another reckless trans-oceanic CI camp transfer was undertaken in the Indo-Pacific region a year later. Dutch colonial officials in Indonesia made a deal with their British allies under which almost 2,400 Axis nationals, mostly Germans, were whisked away across the Indian Ocean to camps in the internment hub of India.¹⁴ The plan was thrown together to pre-empt their probable release upon the arrival of the advancing Imperial Japanese Navy. Their costly indefinite detainment was apparently preferable to their potential contribution to the Axis war effort. The third and final high-seas voyage under this scheme ended tragically:

¹⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: sovereign power and bare life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roasen (Stanford, CA, 1998), pp. 166–80, at pp. 170–2. Originally published *Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* (Turin, 1995), this theoretical work is increasingly a port of call for camp regime scholars, e.g., Gabriele Anderl, Linda Erker, and Christoph Reinprecht, eds., *Internment refugee camps: historical and contemporary perspectives* (Bielefeld, 2022), pp. 10–11.

¹¹ Different gradations in this hierarchical order exist, entailing varying degrees of complicity and structural exploitation of indigenous (and other) people.

¹² Daniel Steinbach, 'Challenging European colonial supremacy: the internment of "enemy aliens" in British and German East Africa during the First World War', in James E. Kitchen, Alisa Miller, and Laura Rowe, eds., *Other combatants, other fronts: competing histories of the First World War* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2011), pp. 153–75; Olisa Godson Muojama, 'From West Africa to West Indies: the movement of German and Italian internees in the British empire during WWII, 1939–45', *KIU Journal of Social Sciences*, 6 (2020), pp. 399–407.

¹³ Muojama, 'From West Africa to West Indies', pp. 401–2.

¹⁴ Kim Wünschmann, '"Enemy aliens" and "Indian hostages": civilians in Dutch-German wartime diplomacy and International Law during the Second World War', *German History*, 39 (2021), pp. 263–83, at p. 275.

all but 65 of the 473 civilians aboard the SS *Van Imhoff* perished at sea after the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on 18 January 1942.¹⁵

Prior to this ill-fated maritime deportation of civilians described by Kim Wünschmann, a startling phenomenon was witnessed in the Dutch East Indies that entailed:

‘native’ Indonesians either as officials implementing the restrictive measures [against German enemy aliens] or as eyewitnesses to [them, bringing] a radical loss in social status and authority to the ‘white’ colonizers, a reversal of the power relations they expected vis-à-vis the colonized. Racial distinctions broke down when enemy civilians were forced to travel in third-class carriages or when *Inlanders* (indigenous people) exercised command over them, in particular as armed camp guards.¹⁶

It is not only unmistakable that the ‘colonial setting added insult to injury’, but that a number of modalities existed through which it was actively and instrumentally manipulated to inflict more humiliation on enemy aliens.¹⁷ The motivation was vengeance. The over-riding strategic objectives of internment policy pertained to wartime ‘economy-security’ considerations mentioned above and the global dimension of holding enemy aliens captive as political hostages that Wünschmann has carefully analysed. Perhaps these might have been realized – even in a harsh colonial environment – without heaping on additional ill-treatment. It is unclear what reservations were expressed in the Netherlands East Indies concerning, firstly, the probability that such deliberately discriminatory policies might backfire upon the colonial authorities who enacted them, with the infighting of the European elite undermining the supposed ‘prestige’ on which their order rested. Secondly, more than a few individuals must have been troubled by ethical questions about the way innocent civilians – undoubtedly including friends and trusted neighbours in better times – ought to be treated in a time of war.

Concerns about collateral damage to the authority of the existing colonial order did not afflict Japanese occupation authorities tasked with enforcing punitive measures against ‘enemy nationals’ on the China coast after 8 December 1941. On the contrary, they *officially* sought to implement the Tokyo regime’s Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (GEACPS) (大東亜共栄圏/*Dai Tōa Kyōeiken*) scheme on the ashes of Western imperialism.¹⁸ Consequently, the GEACPS’ proclaimed political agenda of decolonization became enmeshed with the securitarian, illiberal, and prejudicial impulses pervading all enemy alien governance structures.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 273.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸See Eri Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan’s war, 1931–1945* (New York, NY, 2007); and Kevin M. Doak, ‘The concept of ethnic nationality and its role in Pan-Asianism in Imperial Japan’, in Sven Saaler, and J. Victor Koschmann, eds., *Pan-Asianism in modern Japanese history: colonialism, regionalism and borders* (Abingdon, 2007), pp. 168–81.

Rather than citizenship, nationality was the currency of the Pacific War. More problematic and arbitrary still were concomitant notions of 'race' – an obsession unfortunately not confined to the Axis Powers' elites. In Nazi Germany, Agamben explains, 'if the person entering the camp was a Jew, he had already been deprived of his rights as a citizen and was completely denationalized at the time of the Final Solution'.¹⁹ This does not correspond to the status of enemy aliens, who become excessively defined by their nationality in wartime rather than losing it. Nationalism afforded them a little protection under modernizing systems of international relations and humanitarian law that prioritized nation-states and their nationals as basic constituent units.²⁰ Stateless civilians – most notably denationalized Jewish and other victims of what Kerstin von Lingen describes in this special issue as 'one of the heinous mechanisms of Nazi policy' – were denied even this scrap of protection under prevailing international legal norms.²¹ Globally interconnected humanitarian organizations like the ICRC sometimes represented their last hope, with operations as transnational as the war victims they assisted – including China's uprooted elite.

Westerners in Japanese-occupied Asia were frequently reduced to an ascribed identity entailing a crude combination of *de jure*, on-paper nationality and a *de facto*, ostensible membership in a European ethnic group.²² People not conforming with these pillars of haphazard identity to the satisfaction of the authorities on the spot could face myriad difficulties. This affected misidentified Axis or 'neutral nationals' of European ethnicities and Asian or Eurasian people – most callously, those whose family members were designated 'enemy nationals' and later deported to sites of internment, the gates of which were shut to Asians on ideological grounds.²³ Totally avoidable hardship ensued for many separated mixed-ethnicity families throughout the war. Commonly, 'oriental wives and children of Allied husbands', all technically British and American nationals, were forced to get by alone outside the barbed wire, where the situation could be much worse than at camp.²⁴ Engaging in a tenacious form of decolonial politics, this policy had little to do with impartial, pragmatic wartime governance of a diverse population and apparently everything to do with establishing the GEACPS and a 'New Order in East Asia'.

It had its equivalent in an earlier measure 'obviously intended to alienate the sympathies of the local and mostly Chinese population'.²⁵ In an edict from the

¹⁹Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 170–1.

²⁰For how this manifested itself for enemy aliens in Occupied China and neutral protective powers' role, see Chan Yang, 'Japanese internment of Allied civilians in the Second World War China: perspectives on the enemy aliens protection mechanism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 57 (2022), pp. 387–411.

²¹Kerstin von Lingen, article in this special issue.

²²Regarding notions of 'race', see Paul Spoonley, *Racism and ethnicity* (rev. edn, Auckland, 1993), pp. 1–11. Pages 1–2 elucidate how '[s]ociologically and politically, the idea of "race" is problematical [and] derives from a period of colonial expansion when classifying people according to their appearance, or "race", helped Europeans to make sense of human diversity. As part of the ideological justification for colonial exploitation, arguments were developed to explain the "advanced" civilization of Europeans and the "inferiority" of practically everyone else.'

²³'Report of the Swiss Consulate General in charge of British, American and Netherlands interests during the Pacific War, 1941–1945', Feb. 1946, Shanghai, Swiss Federal Archives / *Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv* (BAR), Bern, E2200.290A#1970/121#155*, Az. IX.F, 1921–62, fo. 53.

²⁴*Ibid.* Section III further details civilian hardship outside the wire.

²⁵*Ibid.*, fo. 36.

first year of occupation, 'the Japanese ordered all "enemy" nationals to wear red armbands'; however, to the Swiss consular staff, this move 'failed in its purpose and, as a general rule, wearers of armbands were treated with every consideration and courtesy by the public'.²⁶ The 'mostly Chinese' public exhibited quite some agency in rejecting at least one of the occupation authorities' crude political schemes, foisted on them from above.

Even if officials' intentions had mostly been good and the intertwined political objectives of the GEACPS could be momentarily set aside, they were employing the imprecise and inefficient administrative tools of nationality and 'race' in their efforts to impose order on the remnants of treaty port China – one of the most culturally diverse and transnational spaces in the world. The epitome had long been the International Settlement of the global metropolis of Shanghai. Equal part cosmopolitan and colonial, for close to a century Shanghai had been a treaty port par excellence, described by some – like an inordinate number of cities worldwide – as the 'Paris of the (Far) East'.²⁷ This designation is more justified considering the prominence of the city's French enclave. One of many so-called 'treaty port concessions' scattered along the China coast and as far upriver on the Yangtze as Hankow (Wuhan), it was essentially an inner-city microcolony, governed by local foreign residents in (an oftentimes uneasy) partnership with the local consul(s) assigned by the 'home' government.²⁸

Joined later by Imperial Japan, the West aggressively negotiated 'unequal treaties' to the detriment of the Late Qing empire across the era of high imperialism; a paradoxical semi-cooperative geopolitical struggle ensued. The resulting treaty system, a unique cumulative corpus of international law built on the foundations of Britain's pioneering Treaty of Nanking (Nanjing, 1842), was held together by the 'most favoured nation' principle that extended any imperialistic concessions extracted by one treaty power through 'gunboat diplomacy' to all signatories that had concluded bilateral treaties with the imperial court in Peking.²⁹ This remained the *legal* framework of Western colonialism until the Pacific War, fully thirty years after the collapse of the last Manchu Dynasty. It guaranteed extensive extraterritorial, commercial, and residential privileges to these states' nationals, who formed the colonial elite of the emerging network of treaty ports, over which no formal state monopoly was exercised.³⁰ At the high-water mark of the early twentieth century, the British empire had come close. Having established a formidable position, however, British commercial interests exploited the fabled 'China market' with ease. Its 'open door' was also sponsored by the purportedly anti-colonial United States into the interwar period, as Japanese enthusiasm waned, supplanted by increasingly militaristic means to unilateral imperialistic ends.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Similarly, Osaka was to some the 'Manchester of the Orient' but not for positive reasons; see Seow, *Carbon Technocracy*, p. 139.

²⁸Albert Feuerwerker, 'The foreign presence in China', in John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Cambridge history of China*, XII (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 128–207.

²⁹Robert Nield, *China's foreign places: the foreign presence in China in the treaty port era, 1840–1943* (Hong Kong, 2015), pp. 1–22, esp. pp. 1–6.

³⁰Feuerwerker, 'The foreign presence in China', pp. 128–30; Robert Bickers and Isabella Jackson, eds., *Treaty ports in modern China: law, land and power* (Abingdon, 2016), pp. 1–42.

Shanghai's nationally denominated French and (de facto) Japanese concessions bore more resemblance to traditional colonial territories than the International Settlement (proper), on which they bordered.³¹ However, this cosmopolitan space was fundamentally a shared area of British and American commercial settlement. British subjects were numerically over-represented among Westerners in the International Settlement and in China generally. The culture, traditions, lifestyles, local institutions, and the very vocabulary of the colonial elite were often imported directly from India, meaning – quantitatively and qualitatively – colonialism had an unmistakably British flavour.³²

It would be remiss to underestimate the influence of the Chinese people comprising the majority of the urban population, but the wilful ignorance of the foreign elite was remarkable. They fervently avoided engaging with local culture. This dovetailed with outright racist bigotry well exceeding the standard structural racism that greases the wheels of every (neo)colonial system. Robert Bickers, in an interesting sociological remark, attributes noticeably stronger everyday racism from lower-middle-class Britons to their own insecurities within the internal social hierarchy of the ethno-economic elite.³³ The social dynamics of the treaty ports are difficult to gauge and generalize as analyses usually must look beyond a single national community, taking stock of the consequential global and cosmopolitan influences swirling around the International Settlement and smaller 'outports'. Geographically, the China coast (including Hong Kong) was imbedded in the vast interconnected maritime space of the 'Far East' that stretched from icy Eastern Siberia to the tropical Indonesian archipelago – known in Tokyo as 'Greater East Asia'.

II

In spring 1944, one of Japan's vice consuls in Shanghai, Mr M. Sano, sent the local ICRC office a message forwarded by his colleagues at the Tsingtao Consulate General. It was penned by Oreste Petit, 'Chairman of the Italian Committee at Weih sien Civil Assembly Centre'.³⁴ Until recently, Mr Petit (49) had been a manager at the Shanghai branch of the Italian Bank for China (*Banca Italiana per la Cina*), working

³¹The 'Japanese concession' was actually part of Shanghai's International Settlement, specifically consisting of much of its Hongkew district and 'external roads' zone, 'north of the [Soochow] creek'. Many Japanese settlers resided in these areas; local Japanese authorities exercised effective sovereignty from 1932 onwards, while strategically continuing to rely on the Shanghai Municipal Council for other services. See Mark R. Peattie, 'Japanese treaty port settlements in China, 1937–1945', in Peter Duus, Ramon H. Myers, and Mark R. Peattie, eds., *The Japanese informal empire in China, 1895–1937* (Princeton, NJ, 1989), pp. 166–209, esp. pp. 181–6.

³²Robert Bickers, *Britain in China: community, culture and colonialism, 1900–1949* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 1–21, 67–114. A useful table on p. 13 records the British resident population of mainland China in 1910 at 10,140 of 141,868 (total) 'foreign residents'; it mostly relies on Chinese Maritime Customs data. This number appears underwhelming at first but reflects the increasing diversity of foreign residence as the twentieth century progressed – with notable growth in the White-Russian, European-Jewish, and Japanese populations.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 97.

³⁴Vice Consul M. Sano to ICRC delegation, 20 Apr. 1944, Shanghai, ACICR (Archives du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge), D AO CHINE1 01-073, 'Japanese Consulate General Shanghai, general correspondence: IN, 1942–1945'.

under long-serving general manager Ugo M. Tavella (57) for the past five or six years.³⁵ A latecomer to the China market, the Sino-Italian bank was akin to the other colonial banking houses; it was founded in their long shadows in the early 1920s. By contrast, Chinese investors constituted the majority of shareholders of another interwar Italian bank, *Corporazione Bancaria Sino-Italiana*, with which *Banca Italiana* competed in Tientsin's Italian concession.³⁶ Apparently, the commercial landscape of the treaty ports had undergone some change since the nineteenth century, when the major European treaty powers set up their mainstay clearing houses of informal empire. Chief among them were the British Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China (est. 1857) and Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (1865) that still operates globally today under more or less the same banner. *Banque de l'Indochine* (1875), *Deutsch-Asiatische Bank* (1889), and *Русско-Китайский банк* (Russo-Chinese Bank, 1895) similarly represented the mercantilist interests of the respective French, German, and Russian empires in the cut-throat business scene, in which US initiatives – the International Banking Corporation and National City Bank of New York – partook just the same.³⁷ An Italian-owned business interest, *Banca Italiana*'s future in Japanese-occupied China rested on the fascist 'home' government's diplomatic relations with Tokyo, epitomized by the Axis's infamous Tripartite Pact of 27 September 1940.³⁸

The Italian bankers faced an abrupt demotion. Japanese authorities seized the bank's properties and assets after the Badoglio Proclamation that ended hostilities between the existing Italian government and the United Nations reached East Asia over the airways on 9 September 1943.³⁹ They not only lost their jobs but became enemy aliens. Unlike the Allied internees most Italians joined in camp, who were ordered to 'assemble' following an uncertain year in limbo, Italians in Occupied China did have a choice: they could declare loyalty to the Nazis' North Italian puppet state, thus retaining their status as 'Axis nationals', or face immediate internment. The Italian community was split, but most civilians and almost three-quarters of the 600-strong Tientsin garrison repudiated fascism.⁴⁰ As camps around Shanghai were at capacity, a logistical question now confronted Japanese officials: how would Italian nationals be fitted into the existing internment infrastructure?

The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Gaimushō*) tasked its consuls with over-seeing the general internment of enemy nationals in Shanghai from January 1943

³⁵'List of foreign residents', *The Chronicles & Directories of Asia (C&Ds)* (Hongkong Daily Press, 1938), p. 2389. Pagination refers to the PDFs publicly available at <https://asia-directories.org/focal/> (accessed 4 Dec. 2024). Other annual volumes consulted: 1941, pp. 2191, 2226; and 1939, pp. 2372, 2391. Mr Tavella is first listed as 'general manager' in the 1928 edition of the *C&Ds* (p. 1513), three years after the bank was renamed and established its main branch in Shanghai.

³⁶Orazio Coco, 'The penetration of Italian fascism in nationalist China: political influence and economic legacy', *International History Review*, 43 (2021), pp. 264–80, at pp. 272–3.

³⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 272–3. In addition, Imperial Japan's Yokohama Specie Bank facilitated an escalation of colonialism on the Asian mainland from 1880 to 1945.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 275.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 274; William S. Linsenmeyer, 'Italian peace feelers before the fall of Mussolini', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 16 (1981), pp. 649–62, esp. pp. 649–50. Though not his main goal, Linsenmeyer provides a concise summary of the peace actually eventuating.

⁴⁰Greg Leck, *Captives of empire: the Japanese internment of Allied civilians in China, 1941–1945* (Bangor, PA, 2006), pp. 98–9.

and in North China two months thereafter. Military authorities had previously detained civilians. The former US Marine barracks at 372 Haiphong Rd were repurposed for approximately 300 male enemy nationals targeted in a shocking early-morning sweep by the Shanghai-area *Kempeitai*.⁴¹ The gendarmerie's round-up of 5 November 1942 stood as one of the first major internment actions in Occupied China. According to the Swiss Consulate General's post-war report, Japanese authorities had maintained, in response to enquiries from the neutral protecting power's consuls, that 'these men were politically suspected and that consequently their confinement was necessary on military grounds'.⁴² They were then 'put under Japanese military control, in fact under the same Japanese Commandant as the Prisoner-of-War Camp at Kiangwan', Col. Otera Satoshi.⁴³ Notwithstanding the worrying observation that Haiphong Rd inmates 'lived under the constant threat of interrogation by the Japanese Gendarmerie and quite a number of them suffered at their hands', there remained 'hopes that a general internment of all civilians [including] women and children might still be avoided', since arrests were highly selective.⁴⁴

Army and gendarmerie units had imprisoned 867 'key' or allegedly 'suspect' Allied civilians by 24 February 1942, based on Chan Yang's recent estimate.⁴⁵ Otherwise, Allied civilians in China had been spared internment in marked contrast to the rest of the Asia-Pacific under Japanese rule. The situation changed in autumn 1942.⁴⁶ Taking a broader view, the nominally independent state of Manchukuo (Manchuria), Formosa (Taiwan) and Hong Kong should be included in an objective definition of 'Occupied China'. Employing this conception momentarily, we see 'internment began immediately' in Mukden (Shenyang), for instance. Two improvised facilities were already in use by 12 December 1941: 'Businessmen were interned in the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank building' and thirty-five missionaries at the Mukden Club, over the road from 'the Standard Oil Company on Naniwa-dori', later 'known as the Hoten Camp'.⁴⁷

The first comparable confinements of enemy nationals in Occupied China – as normally and narrowly defined – were ordered by military units stationed in Shantung (Shandong) Province. In Tsingtao (Qingdao), 147 'Allied citizens were interned, with virtually no notice, on 27 October 1942', while shortly thereafter in Chefoo (Yantai), 239 pupils and staff of the China Inland Mission School became internees of the Temple Hill Camp.⁴⁸ The children now fell under the authority of

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 449. Imperial Japan's *Kempeitai* were akin to military police or 'gendarmerie' as Swiss consuls and ICRC employees frequently termed them. Enjoying a broad mandate, they developed into something of a force unto themselves despite being an IJA branch.

⁴² 'Report of the Swiss Consulate General', BAR, fos. 50–1. See 'Ch. X – civilian internment'.

⁴³ *Ibid.*; Leck, *Captives of empire*, p. 449. Some sources transliterate the colonel's surname as 'Odera'.

⁴⁴ 'Report of the Swiss Consulate General', BAR, fo. 50.

⁴⁵ Chan Yang, 'Japanese internment of Allied civilians', pp. 396–9. A table on p. 399 quantitatively outlines the 'key' individuals (civilians) detained during winter 1941–2 (while the majority remained 'at liberty'). Military imprisonment often entailed harsh treatment. War crimes committed against Western (and other) civilians at the *Kempeitai*'s 'Bridge House' HQ, near Shanghai's Bund, were brought before the IMTFE.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Leck, *Captives of empire*, p. 485.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 485–7.

a Japanese commandant, the role filled by an army officer with his headquarters in town but replaced in March 1943 'by Kosaka, an officer of the Consular police', who 'established an office in compound number 2'.⁴⁹ An effect of the new *Gaimushō* administration, the changing of the guard at Temple Hill coincided with the transfer of the Tsingtao internees at Iltis Hydro Hotel 160km north-west to 'Civil Assembly Centre' (CAC) Weihsien (濰縣集中營/Wéixiàn, near Weifang).

Once an American Presbyterian mission station, these premises also housed Shanghai's Italian community after months of interim confinement at *Casa d'Italia* social club in the French concession. Several hundred Roman Catholic clergy and a smaller number of American repatriates had departed CAC Weihsien, providing *Gaimushō* officials with one outlet for the overcrowding in Shanghai.⁵⁰ The two bankers and their wives were among the deportees. More specifically, the women 'assembling' at the *Shantung Compound* in January 1944 were Kathleen Petit (46) and Lena Tavella (56); their assumed, de jure Italian nationality ought to be studied further because the latter's place of birth is listed as Scotland.⁵¹ In this case, the prevailing paternalistic legal norms regulating marriage and nationality worked in Mrs Tavella's favour: were she not married to an Axis national whose nationality she adopted, ipso facto, she would have been deported to one of Shanghai's CI camps alongside other British nationals in early 1943. This only reinforces the arbitrary nature of the institutions of citizenship and nationality and their deficiencies in capturing the complexity of transcultural communities.

Until August 1945, the *Gaimushō*'s consuls and armed consular police force, who primarily guarded the perimeter fence, maintained jurisdiction over most matters of civilian internment; although, the bulk of everyday administration was delegated to internees via their (s)elected camp committees. Haiphong Rd remained the regrettable exception. Among the inmates was Maurice George Gordon (41), a British sub-accountant ('sub-acct.') of the Chartered Bank of India, China & Australia, whose name appears in the final 'Foreign Residents' List' of the *Chronicles & Directories of Asia's* 1941 edition.⁵² He was essentially a counterpart of the Italian bank officers, but no Italian nationals appear to have been imprisoned there.⁵³

No account of Haiphong Rd can omit the reprehensible killing of detainee William Hutton. His battered body was dumped in the compound in a 'comatose state' after he 'was tortured and beaten while held at [76] Jessfield Road' – seemingly the local headquarters of the (pro-Japanese) Nanjing regime's secret police.⁵⁴ Inspector Hutton once worked in a rather senior capacity for the Shanghai Municipal Police force, for which reason he was sent to the detention camp.⁵⁵ Dying shortly after this bout of extreme violence on 16 August 1943, the 45 year old was not the only British SMP fatality in camp: former Police Sergeant Sydney Harry Holtom (36) died a month

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 98–9. Similarly, the American 'Columbia Country Club' was used to temporarily accommodate US nationals awaiting repatriation.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 674, 679. See fn. 72 for *Shantung Compound*.

⁵²Ibid., p. 557; 'List of foreign residents' (C&Ds, 1941), p. 2121.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 555–61.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 451–2.

⁵⁵'List of foreign residents' (C&Ds, 1940), p. 2378.

earlier, but the circumstances are unclear.⁵⁶ Many visited the *Kempeitai* downtown at Bridge House.

Such extreme repression was not a feature of the so-called 'Civil Assembly Centres', Weihsien being the only major 'centre' in North China once Chefoo's Temple Hill camp population was transferred there in August 1943.⁵⁷ Perhaps the chosen terminology stemmed from the authorities' pioneering efforts to patently reject Haiphong Rd's labelling as a 'civilian internment camp' out of some awareness of attendant responsibilities, liabilities, and culpabilities under international law. Beyond doubt was the enduring bewilderment of Swiss consular agents, who remained baffled at war's end that '[t]he Japanese for some strange reason took objection to the use of the expression "internment" or "internee", and instead used first the designation of "segregation" and later of "Civil Assembly"'.⁵⁸

Recalling the global entanglements of Pacific War internment, across the Pacific, the US government had excelled in coining innovative new euphemisms for the indiscriminate deportation of Japanese enemy aliens from most of the Western hemisphere and the 'relocation' of Japanese-American (former) citizens from Pacific states to CI camps in the interior.⁵⁹ Whether awaiting removal to a War Relocation Authority 'Project' in the USA or panic packing in response to a hasty English translation of a Japanese order to 'assemble', the question before enemy aliens worldwide staring down imminent internment was likely the same: how could they best cope in their new-found home, when how long they would remain there and under what conditions were anyone's guess?

III

Returning to Oreste Petit's ICRC enquiry forwarded by Japanese consulates, we see the ICRC offered some hope of lessening the deprivations of camp life as did neutral states: Swiss consuls administered most enemy aliens and POWs, whereas their Swedish colleagues represented Belgian, Norwegian, Greek, and, eventually, Italian interests. A leading figure in the self-administration of the Italian group at Weihsien, Mr Petit sought to confirm whether the ICRC 'could extend to the Italian residents in the centre all Red Cross facilities, especially for exchanging messages with their families concerning their health and to receive comfort parcels from time to time'.⁶⁰ Japanese government officials were not always so supportive.

They were responsible for many hardships experienced by people living outside the wire. Those towards whom occupation authorities expressed strong racist

⁵⁶ Leck, *Captives of empire*, p. 557.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 655–84. Evidence for this camp amalgamation is deduced from Leck's 'Nominal Rolls – Weihsien Camp' section.

⁵⁸ 'Report of the Swiss Consulate General', BAR, fo. 52.

⁵⁹ On the separate internment regimes for Japanese enemy aliens (proper) and effectively denaturalized Japanese-Americans in the USA (primary focus), see Greg Robinson, *By order of the president: FDR and the internment of Japanese Americans* (Cambridge, MA, 2001). On the hemispheric dimension of US enemy alien internment, see Marilyn Grace Miller, *Port of no return: enemy alien internment in World War II New Orleans* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2021).

⁶⁰ Vice Consul M. Sano to ICRC delegation, 20 Apr. 1944, Shanghai, ACICR. Mr Sano described the potential recipients of relief as 'Italian residents in the Centre' rather than 'internees in the camp', 'Italian inmates at Weihsien', or a similar phrase. The vocabulary of enemy alien governance can be revealing.

and/or political prejudices suffered most, such as Filipinos in occupied Shanghai, 150 of whom signed a conjoint letter on 15 January 1945 pleading to the ICRC's Edouard Egle for emergency assistance. In response to his advocacy on their behalf, an indiscernible staff member of the Japanese Consulate General returned the starving Filipinos' letter to sender, politely informing Mr Egle that they appreciated the ICRC's offer to 'render their services in this matter' but were 'unable to consider the appeal in question'.⁶¹ In other words, the distribution of Red Cross relief funds and supplies to these destitute people was not permitted. Close scrutiny of the community's plea is unnecessary to determine that it is not characterized by political considerations whatsoever. Simply a desperate appeal to 'the only charitable organization that can probably help', the hope was that 'a fund for the starving Filipinos in Shanghai or a Community Kitchen' could be created once the ICRC assisted them in reaching out 'to the American Red Cross or to the Philippine Red Cross' for donations.⁶² To the men and women who signed their names, the origin of the urgently needed welfare is utterly immaterial. Not so to the Japanese official, who does not mince his words in stating the exact political reason why help would not be forthcoming:

an arrangement for relief is being contemplated for Philippinos [sic] in Shanghai who had pledged their allegiance to the [Japanese-aligned] Republic of the Philippines. It must be pointed out, however, that the majority of signatories to the above-mentioned appeal are those who have refused to recognize their government when the registration of the local Philippinos was called for in spring last year.⁶³

A number of the Filipinos, if not indifferent (the signatories' children, for example), might have tacitly supported the pre-war status quo in the Philippine Islands since the signing of the Tydings–McDuffie Act of Congress in March 1934, with which the US government had finally fixed a decade-long pathway to independence for the archipelago.⁶⁴ In any event, the cited passage indicates an uncompromising reading of Tokyo's political line regarding the Philippines but should not necessarily be interpreted as typical of local-level policy-making. The process of translating the official pan-Asianist ideology of the GEACPS into concrete policy – where it had a discernible influence at all – was rife with inconsistencies and contradictions at the point of implementation.

The next document in the archival dossier, probably misfiled, is another reminder of the pernicious racial hierarchy and hardship pervading everyday life in wartime

⁶¹Japanese Consulate General to ICRC, Shanghai, 31 Jan. 1945, *ACICR*, D AO CHINE1 01-073, 'Japanese Consulate General Shanghai, general correspondence: IN, 1942–1945'.

⁶²*Ibid.* See appended letter.

⁶³*Ibid.*

⁶⁴For an official US history of the eventual independence attained by the Philippines, see Ronald E. Dolan, ed., *Philippines: a country study* (4th edn, Washington, DC, 1993), pp. 27–45. The book's second paragraph already reveals the limitations to the independence declared on 4 July 1946, insofar as it bemoans damage to two large US military instalments – Clarke Field and Subic Naval Base – from the mid-1991 volcanic eruption of Mt Pinatubo in central Luzon (intro., p. xxiii). The bases were shut down thereafter, but the US Navy is reoccupying the latter under a 2022 treaty.

East Asia, despite the proclamations of the GEACPS.⁶⁵ Hans Jost, the backbone of the ICRC delegation, sought permission from the camp-consular authorities regarding the 'foreign' – that is, Western – 'representatives' of the ICRC who accompanied a supply truck each on typical supply runs to the approximately eight CI camps in the broader Shanghai area. He wanted these men – two Danish, two Portuguese, and three Swiss nationals (himself included) – to be allowed to monitor the vehicles' unloading to ensure 'no coolies who accompany the trucks [were] in a position to tamper with the comfort parcels despatched to Civil Assembly Centres'.⁶⁶ Clearly, the distribution of scarce wartime resources, particularly foodstuffs, reinforced prevailing ethnic and social inequities. Moreover, the limits to Japanese decolonization are apparent insofar as the contemptible colonial institution of 'coolie' labour, long-standing and global in scope, was never seriously challenged; its normalization remained unblemished.⁶⁷

Ironically, Japanese consular officials often prioritized CAC inmates' needs over the welfare of the local population, on whose behalf they had supposedly uprooted this colonial elite.⁶⁸ Though in a much stronger socio-economic position than the impoverished Chinese labourers implicated in the theft of food earmarked for Shanghai's detainees, evidence from North China suggests the authorities pushed the financial burden of feeding CAC Weihsien onto the local Chinese community. Mr V. E. Egger, the Swiss consul general's 'Representative for Shantung' and the ICRC's Tsingtao delegate,⁶⁹ believed his 'previous secret information' was proven correct at the end of the war, when Japanese camp personnel confirmed practically all supplies received since March 1943, 'such as meat, vegetables, eggs, cereals, etc.', had been provided by the mayor of Weihsien via the town's Chamber of Commerce, which 'collected funds from their members in the surrounding villages'.⁷⁰ Additional key resources, notably flour, had been subsidized by occupation authorities, rather than purchased outright with locally levied taxes.⁷¹ If correct, this could point

⁶⁵ Assist. Delegate Hans Jost to Mr Banjo, Japanese Consulate Gen./HQ of Civil Assembly Centres, Shanghai, 11 Jan. 1945, *ACICR*, D AO CHINE1 01-073, 'Japanese Consulate General Shanghai, general correspondence: IN, 1942-1945'. This dossier mostly contains *inbound* correspondence from the Japanese consulate, but this is a stand-alone *outbound* letter.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ The military expanded this institution: Japanese field commanders were 'encouraged to allow Caucasians to be seen by locals as helpless and abject captives' in ideological furtherance of the GEACPS. POWs were assigned 'coolie'-like menial work, Wilson observes, 'not only because of critical labour shortages' typically encountered in war. See Sandra Wilson, 'Detention camps in the Japanese empire, 1941-1945', in Cribb, Twomey, and Wilson, eds., *Detention camps in Asia*, pp. 207-8.

⁶⁸ A related irony concerns dissatisfaction with the insufficient quantity and 'oriental' quality of meals provided for Western POWs despite these often being superior to local people's diets and even that of some Japanese garrison troops – e.g., at Shanghai's Kiangwan POW camp. See *ibid.*, p. 214.

⁶⁹ Occupying both roles simultaneously, he symbolizes the pragmatism and co-operation required by Swiss actors operating under difficult wartime circumstances in China. Perhaps the relationship between the Swiss protecting power and ICRC delegate in Australia represents something of a counter-example; see Christine Winter, 'Limits of impartiality: the delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Australia during the Second World War', *History Australia*, 10 (2013), pp. 56-74.

⁷⁰ V. E. Egger, 'C.A.C. Weihsien: comments for the month of August 1945', report of Swiss consular rep., 14 Sep. 1945, Tsingtao, BAR, E2200.290A#1970/121#88*, Az. IX.F, 1921-62 (box: BD28), fo. 4.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* Bread baked by internees themselves was a crucial staple of the daily diet. Hence, the Japanese flour subsidy is worth acknowledging.

to an area for further research at the intersection of the Japanese government's obligations under international law for the maintenance of war prisoners and the *modi operandi* of local economic governance in occupied zones.

IV

While internees' relative living conditions within the regional context of Weih sien may have been good *despite* Japanese propaganda related to the GEACPS, their deportation from Peking had been an absolutely terrible ordeal *specifically because* of this decolonization project and its politics. The utter embarrassment of the uprooted elite was planned and executed. In Langdon Gilkey's words:

The Japanese had lined up most of the city's Chinese population along the street to view our humiliation...[R]uled so long by the West, they must have had mixed emotions as they impassively watched these four hundred white Westerners stagger weakly through their streets...the era of Western dominance in Asia ended with that burdened crawl to the station.⁷²

Male and female deportees of all ages were denied any assistance whatsoever with their baggage – unbearably heavy owing to the strict internment order that authorized only what they could carry themselves. This orchestrated public spectacle would 'not soon be forgotten' by Americans in the first party marched out to Weih sien on 24 March 1943, nor 'those who watched helplessly from the side-lines', Ms Mary E. Ferguson (46) among them. The US State Department's 'Special Division' received details of a subsequent policy reversal in her report written aboard the MS *Gripsholm* repatriation ship later that year.⁷³ The eviction of hundreds of British, Belgian, and Dutch enemy aliens four days later was rather different:

The collapse of Mr. Gillis [an American, aged 70] and the unfavorable impression on the Chinese and foreign communities of the inhumane treatment of the first group resulted in very much better handling of the second group on March 28 – heavy pieces of hand baggage were taken to the station by truck, persons unfit to walk were allowed to ride, the pace for the walkers was slowed down, and escorting Japanese consular police were in a few instances seen helping internees who were finding their bags hard to handle.⁷⁴

Extreme disempowerment was encountered on the way to Weih sien – under the pragmatic officials' watered-down eviction procedure too. Once imprisoned, some agency and personal autonomy survived the inherently repressive environment of the CI camp. One American internee, a former psychology professor at Peking's Yen ching University, designed a remarkably sophisticated questionnaire under the

⁷²Langdon Gilkey, *Shantung Compound: the story of men and women under pressure* (London, 1966), pp. 3–4.

⁷³'Internment of Americans and Allied nationals at Peiping, China in British embassy internment camp', 30 Nov. 1943, US National Archives & Records Admin. (NARA), College Park, MD, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, A1–1357: 'Subject files, 1939–1955', dossier: '1 Peiping', fo. 6 (not to be confused with the adjacent 'Peking' folder in box 90).

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

noses of the consular police guards. Randolph C. Sailer (43) continued to ply his trade in camp, actively undermined the detaining power's prerogatives, and even hand delivered data to US officials.⁷⁵ In answering his twelve questions, which certainly would not have pleased the Japanese authorities, his 205 respondents (about 10 per cent of inmates) engaged in their own defiance, thinking beyond the epistemological shackles the regime tried to impose. They answered questions on post-war political arrangements, prosecution of war criminals, and provided estimates of when the Allies would conclude an 'armistice' with each respective Axis Power and what the '[c]hances of repatriation for any more Americans [20 per cent], or British [0 per cent]' were in the meantime. Question Four was comparatively mundane. It gauged the quantity and quality of food emerging from the camp's kitchens – one of which Dr Sailer controlled for, so as not to skew his survey results, since the kitchen in question was widely known to be bad.⁷⁶

Unsurprisingly, foodstuffs were at the forefront of black-market trade across the wire, but escape is the zenith of internee agency, the most blatant contravention of the detention regime. Laurence Tipton (British, 36) and Arthur M. Hummel (American, 25) 'escaped the Centre' in June 1944, remaining 'in close contact with the internees' and organizing support from 'some small Chungking army near the camp'.⁷⁷ In mid-August 1945, they 'unexpectedly returned to camp' after its liberation by a small team of paratroopers sent by the US Army's China Command under Lt-Gen. Wedemeyer. Not only upon the surrendering Japanese guards did these young American soldiers project authority. They left no question about who was in charge. To the Swiss representative and others, the relegation of the escapees-cum-resistance members was symbolic: the commanding officer, Maj. Stanley A. Staiger, considered 'both gentlemen now again as internees' having to 'accept the same ruling as all others'.⁷⁸ Martial routine – albeit under improved conditions – remained the order of the day. Internees' initial enthusiasm towards the 'seven men who ruled the camp for the next two weeks', and whom Gilkey remembered being 'like gods among us' after their descent from the heavens, predictably fell by the wayside.⁷⁹

Allied liberation forces ironically came to represent the next hindrance between the uprooted elite and the quick re-establishment of their old colonial lives – however fanciful such notions were. The situation had drastically changed since the detainees entered the isolated compound in 1943. While Guerrillas of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) Eighth Route Army had long been active in the area, US military personnel and their new Japanese allies regarded them as a particular threat to the main route out of CAC Weih sien via the Tsinan–Tsingtao railway, thus preventing a safe and swift evacuation. An understandable degree of frustration set in, and former internees did not exactly sit idly by. Not for the first time did these refugees'

⁷⁵'Opinion survey in Weih sien camp – 205 personal interviews, 12 questions', June–July 1943, NARA, RG 59, A1-1357: 'Subject files, 1939–1955', dossier: '1 Weih sien', fos. 1–6. Evacuating aboard the same late 1943 exchange ships as Ms Ferguson, it remains unclear precisely how he smuggled the survey out of China.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, fos. 1–2.

⁷⁷Egger, 'C.A.C. Weih sien: comments for the month of August 1945', BAR, fo. 4.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*

⁷⁹Gilkey, *Shantung Compound*, pp. 210–13.

initiative intersect with colonial ambitions. In early September, they lobbied the new camp authorities – now under Lt-Col. Weinberg's command – to allow them to petition their embassies in Chungking (Chongqing) in a joint letter. Of the total roll of 1,497 (74 per cent), 1,109 voiced their intention to remain in North China. Insisting their situation 'differs from that of Prisoners of War camps', they were 'desirous for various reasons of returning to their places of origin as soon as possible'.⁸⁰ Most internees therefore wanted to reinstate the ethno-economic privileges Imperial Japan had taken from them – if only their on-paper 'home' governments' officials would stop interfering.

One response from Chungking arrived on 'a chilly gray day in mid-September', when 'a British colonel showed up to address the British subjects', stipulating at the outset 'that this would be a sobering hour for them'.⁸¹ In Gilkey's recollection, the officer said:

I must say to you with all the force and authority at my command, that the days of 'colonial life' in Asia are over. Our rule in the treaty ports is a thing of the past; favoured treatment of foreign firms under British law is gone; our control of residential areas has become impossible...Those of you, however, whose roots lie in China alone had best resign yourselves to the loss of the old life.⁸²

V

In late 1945, the Italian Bank for China's board of directors in Milan were handed grim assessments of the bank's future prospects under Chiang Kai-shek's post-war Guomindang administration. The potential threat of Mao Zedong and the CCP's military gains were apparently a non-issue. *Banca Italia*'s fate was already sealed. 'On 2 July 1947, following the management proposal', Orazio Coco notes, 'the assembly of *Credito Italiano* deliberated the transfer of the legal domicile from Shanghai to Vaduz in Lichtenstein, under the denomination of *Italianische Bank für China*, declaring the de facto end' to the 'wholly Italian-owned' bank – thereby contributing to the broader nationalization of China's economy across the middle decades of the century.⁸³

The end of the colonial system of extraterritoriality was decisive in the pessimistic bank managers' recommendation to shut it down. Two mid-war developments in international relations spelt its permanent demise: first, the Chungking regime secured long-overdue treaty revisions from Britain and the USA in January 1943 on which the Western Allies were unlikely to renege, even if they could

⁸⁰ Egger, 'C.A.C. Weihsen: comments for the month of August 1945', BAR. See appendices, 'Copy of letter dated September 2nd, 1945, addressed by the Weihsen Committee, to the diplomatic representatives at Chungking of the American, British, Dutch and Belgian Governments'.

⁸¹ Gilkey, *Shantung Compound*, pp. 221–2.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Coco, 'Italian fascism in nationalist China', pp. 274–5.

re-muster sufficient power and resources in the 'Far East' to do so.⁸⁴ They could not. Japan's initial military successes and their much-propagandized construction of the GEACPS prevented a full revival of Western colonialism in Asia.⁸⁵

A second, more decisive blow to the remnants of the treaty system materialized under the broad GEACPS scheme. A consequential policy turn in Tokyo's bilateral relations with Nanjing, the so-called 'New China Policy' (NCP), did restore the foreign concessions along with the international settlements of Kulangsu (in Amoy, today's Xiamen) and Shanghai to the 'Chinese' administration of Wang Jingwei's collaborationist government around mid-1943.⁸⁶ That the major treaty ports were under Japanese occupation facilitated the regime's biting propagandistic denunciations of genuine yet ultimately on-paper Western pledges to retrocede the last-remaining juridico-political pillars of the existing colonial order.⁸⁷ They could not give back what they no longer possessed.⁸⁸

Beyond 'pouring scorn on' Allied treaty diplomacy 'as mere empty gesture' compared to Japan's 'real' efforts, propaganda outlets like Singapore's *Syonan Sinbun* newspaper emphasized the 'co-prosperity' benefits accruing from acquiescence to Japanese political designs in tandem with the sacrifices necessary to build and defend the GEACPS.⁸⁹ To this end, F. C. Jones notes that after President Wang Jingwei's late 1942 invitation to Tokyo including 'an audience with the Emperor' himself and Tōjō Hideki's cabinet, a 'formal declaration of war' on the Allies was forthcoming. Tōjō's public relations response carried by *Syonan Sinbun* on 23 December 'hailed' this diplomatic breakthrough, in which the NCP was rooted, as a 'great step forward in the prosecution of the war of Greater East Asia'; he thought it 'only natural and proper that Nippon should at this juncture resolutely re-establish her relations with China upon new foundations'.⁹⁰ Behind the scenes, according to one *Gaimushō* official Jones cites, the NCP was for Shigemitsu Mamoru aimed more at bringing

⁸⁴The Chinese people's agency and efforts in their long struggle against foreign imperialism – regardless of political allegiance – ought to be acknowledged. In a narrower sense, the Guomindang's achievements have been the subject of many studies; during the period before the Japanese military aggression of 1931, for example, see Edmund S. K. Fung, 'The Chinese nationalists and the unequal treaties, 1924–1931', *Modern Asian Studies*, 21 (1987), pp. 793–819. A classic study on treaty revision is Wesley R. Fischel, *The end of extraterritoriality in China* (Berkley, CA, 1952).

⁸⁵See Aron Shai, *Britain and China, 1941–47: imperial momentum* (London, 1984), especially pp. 106–25 on the exceptional situation in Hong Kong. Although intended and attempted across the region, complete Western imperial revival was curtailed; the multifarious reasons for this are beyond the scope of the current article, but the Japanese role should not be underestimated.

⁸⁶F. C. Jones, Hugh Borton, and B. R. Pearn, *The Far East, 1942–1946* (London, 1955), pp. 4–97, at pp. 16–17.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁸⁸Retrocession negotiations regarding the French concessions got underway shortly thereafter in Nanjing. See Christine Cornet, 'The bumpy end of the French concession and French influence in Shanghai, 1937–1946', in Christian Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh, eds., *In the shadow of the rising sun: Shanghai under Japanese occupation* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 257–76, esp. 263–4. Spurred on by Shigemitsu Mamoru (see n. 91), Vichy consular officers were in a position to 'give back' their colonial possessions to the Wang Jingwei regime. French foreign residents in Shanghai had practically no say over their municipal affairs since the 1927 adjournment of their municipal council, but neither they nor diplomatic officials unequivocally gave up on the settlement, hoping to at least 'save something from the [ship]wreck'.

⁸⁹Jones, Borton, and Pearn, *The Far East, 1942–1946*, p. 17.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

about peace with Chungking 'as a prelude to a general pacification' built on the 'underlying concept' that

Japan would abandon – or at any rate materially modify – her ambitions for the political and economic control of Asia; on the other hand, she would secure that there should be no return of the Western Powers to their former position. [While] Tōjō...saw in [the NCP] a means of making the Pan-Asiatic propaganda more effective and hence securing a real measure of collaboration.⁹¹

The NCP could not tip the scales in Gen. Tōjō's favour. Neither China nor the continent would forget the immense hardships, subjugation, exploitation, and atrocities visited on them. Nor, historiographically, would post-war writers: their well-intentioned preoccupation with war crimes has engrained this aspect of the Pacific War in the popular consciousness and imagination.⁹² It has been detrimental to a more nuanced academic and public understanding of Japan's wartime empire, which was riddled with contradictions and geographical and temporal diversity, as this current contribution to global refugee history has intended to show.

In considering these specific political refugees, we see that 1940s Asia continued to be, despite and (paradoxically) because of total war, defined by global interconnectivity. The nationalism unleashed when Tokyo violently severed 'Greater East Asia' off from the Allied geopolitical and wartime economic sphere in 1941 simultaneously activated a worldwide system of strict reciprocity – even retaliation – in the treatment of enemy aliens. Whether subjected to prejudicial 'emergency' restrictions or indiscriminately imprisoned in camps, hostage civilians represented a valuable wartime resource to be jealously denied the enemy or sometimes a commodity to be traded.⁹³

In Asia, internment regimes and (de)colonialization processes intersected like nowhere else. Tens of thousands of 'enemy nationals' and POWs became a doubly valuable resource for the state, whose propaganda machinery churned out spectacles of racial upheaval and the uprooting and replacement of erstwhile colonial overlords with the New Order in East Asia. GEACPS propaganda aside, many enemy nationals quite unapologetically constituted this elite, wanting to get straight back to business in the shadow of the atomic bombs. However, the Axis Powers' ultimately

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 16–17. Shigemitsu Mamoru served as ambassador to Wang Jingwei's Nanjing regime until April 1943; a *Gaimushō* reshuffle resulted in him switching positions with Tani Masayuki to become Japan's minister of foreign affairs for the following two years.

⁹²Iris Chan, *The rape of Nanking: the forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (New York, NY, 1997). On war crimes in the Pacific War, see Edward Frederick Langley Russell (Lord Russell), *The knights of Bushido: a history of Japanese war crimes during World War II* (New York, NY, 2008). Originally published by E. P. Dutton & Co., 1958. He largely achieved his stated goal of raising public awareness of Axis crimes against humanity in a more digestible format than the IMT transcripts (as an earlier book attempted, covering war crimes in Europe vis-à-vis Nuremberg). Perhaps this approach was a victim of its own success and might have benefited from more self-criticism.

⁹³For detailed analysis of the 1942–3 US–Japanese exchanges of enemy aliens and officials, see Scott P. Corbett, *Quiet passages: the exchange of civilians between the United States and Japan during the Second World War* (Kent, OH, 1987). On the British equivalent of mid-1942 and (failed) 1943–4 negotiations, see Kent Fedorowich, 'Doomed from the outset? Internment and civilian exchange in the Far East: the British failure over Hong Kong, 1941–45', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 25 (1997), pp. 113–40.

unsuccessful prosecution of the war was ‘a catastrophic event for foreign interests in China’ just the same.⁹⁴ The profitability and survival of *Banca Italiana*, like other Western commercial enterprises, was in jeopardy following the wartime forfeiture of extraterritorial colonial privileges.⁹⁵ Managers’ and employees’ families directly affected by firm closures and the foreign community more broadly had their economic foundations removed from underneath them, meaning a de facto uprooting. Nonetheless, plenty of former beneficiaries of the treaty system were not entirely pessimistic, seeing little alternative to sticking it out on the China coast, come whatever may.⁹⁶ To many, it was the only home they had ever known.

Competing interests. The author declares none.

⁹⁴Coco, ‘Italian fascism in nationalist China’, p. 275.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Jonathan J. Howlett, ‘“Decolonisation” in China, 1949–1949’, in Robert Bickers and Jonathan J. Howlett, eds., *Britain and China, 1840–1970: empire, finance and war* (Abingdon, 2016), pp. 222–41. On p. 224, he notes: ‘Despite the departure of large numbers of foreigners before the CCP takeover, China remained home to extensive networks of foreign businesses, diplomats and missionaries.’

Cite this article: Matthew J. Craig, ‘Enemy Alien Internment, Decolonization, and the Uprooted Elite of Treaty Port China under Japanese Occupation, 1941–1945’, *The Historical Journal* (2025), pp. 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X24000736>