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KOREAN SOIL, JAPANESE FACES, AMERICAN EMPIRE:
REPATRIATION AND THE KOREAN WAR EXPERIENCES OF JAPANESE LABORERS
AND JAPANESE AMERICAN SOLDIERS

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Abstract

This paper compares the Korean War experiences of two ethnically Japanese groups that served the US military on the Korean Peninsula – second-generation Japanese American (Nisei) soldiers in the US Military Intelligence Service (MIS) and Japanese laborers – to demonstrate the salience of citizenship in the post-1945 Asia Pacific. In particular, this research addresses the question, “how did the politics of repatriation differentiate the experiences of Japanese Americans from those of Japanese nationals, both serving the US military during the Korean War?” This service ranged from (Nisei) American repatriation interrogators of Korean and Chinese civilians, to prisoners of war (POWs), and included clandestine Japanese laborer-repatriates, respectively. Archival material (Harrington Files 1940s-1970s), biographies (McNaughton 1994, 2007), declassified military documents and ground-breaking histories (Takemae 2002; Fujitani 2011; Morris-Suzuki 2011, 2012; Kim 2013; Jager 2013) are viewed through critical discourse analysis (CDA) Fairclough 1989, 1995; Janks 1997) to develop a transregional decolonial framework that reimagines critically the role of the US military in unresolved conflicts over sovereignty and identity formation in the Asia Pacific. Findings reveal that experiences with repatriation reinforce and challenge racial constructs differently for Japanese and Japanese Americans. Finally, they expose distinctions in labor, as well as individual yearnings for postwar mobility.

(Word count: 200)

Keywords: repatriation, Nisei, WWII, MIS, Korean War, Japanese, transregionalism, prisoners of war, race, ethnicity

TIMELINE

- 1894-1895** *First Sino-Japanese War*: Nationalist China and Japan compete over regional territorial interests, as well as for influence on the Korean Peninsula. China concedes the Liaodong Peninsula and Taiwan to Japan the victor. Russia initiates the Triple Intervention with France and Germany and succeeds in securing access to the strategic Liaodong Peninsula.
- 1904-1905** *Russo-Japanese War*: Competition between Russia and Japan after the First Sino-Japanese War leads the two states to war over regional influence and territorial claims to Manchuria, the Liaodong Peninsula, and Korea. Japan reclaims the Liaodong Peninsula and secures further claims to both Manchuria and Korea.
- 1941** *November 1*: US Fourth Army establishes the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) in San Francisco Presidio. This unprecedented program aims to recruit and train American military linguists in Japanese language, in anticipation of conflict with Japan.
- December 7*: Japan attacks Pearl Harbor in Hawai'i (American annexed territory, not yet an incorporated state) and Manila Bay in the Philippines. US now at war with Japan.
- 1942** *February 19*: President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 authorizes military authorities to remove civilians without trial or hearing. Japan bombs the Port of Darwin in Australia.
- March*: "All persons of Japanese ancestry" on the West Coast (more than 120,000 Americans of Japanese descent) are unconstitutionally incarcerated across ten prison camps, built and administered by the War Relocation Authority (WRA).
- 1945** *Yalta Conference*: In February, President Roosevelt and President Stalin agree upon a Soviet liberation of Korea and American invasion of Japan. In April, Roosevelt dies.
- August*: US drops an atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6. Second bomb is dropped on Nagasaki on August 9; Soviet Invasion of Manchuria begins. On August 14, Japan officially surrenders to the US, ending World War II. The public announcement on August 15 liberates Taiwan, Manchuria, and Korea from Imperial Japan. Stalin agrees to US Colonels Bonesteel and Rusk's proposal to divide influence on the Korean Peninsula at the 38th parallel and facilitate decolonization towards eventual reunification. On August 28, US Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) led by General MacArthur lands at Wakayama, Japan. General Headquarters (GHQ) are established in Tokyo. MIS support mass post-war repatriation efforts under SCAP.
- 1945-1950** *Interwar Period*: In March 1946, the last WRA incarceration camp closes at Tule Lake.
- 1950-1953** *June 25, 1950*: Soviet-backed DPRK Invasion of South Korea marks beginning of the Korean War against ROK Army with US-UN Joint Command. China joins DPRK.
- August 24, 1950*: Soviet military government is declared in Pyongyang.
- September 8, 1950*: US Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) declared in Seoul.
- July 27, 1953*: Armistice is signed at Panmunjom, located roughly at the 38th parallel on the Korean Peninsula, terminating the conflict. Korean War is technically ongoing.

GLOSSARY

GHQ	General Headquarters. The identifying acronym used by the SCAP American Occupation government headquarters based in Tokyo. ¹
Issei	Japanese immigrants who arrived to the US prior to the termination of immigration from Japan under the US Immigration Act of 1924. Most arrived after 1885 and were middle-aged or older during World War II. Meaning “first generation” (一世) in Japanese language, this group is differentiated from post-war immigrants from Japan, often referred to as Shin-Issei (“new first generation,” 新一世). ²
MIS	Military Intelligence Service. Founded in San Francisco in 1941 as a pre-emptive project of the US military to train Japanese language wartime linguists. Formally known as the Fourth Army Language School, the MIS is the precursor to the Defense Language Institute (DLI) in Monterey.
MISLS	Military Intelligence Service Language School. Established at Camp Savage in Minnesota in 1943 following the West Coast imprisonment of Japanese Americans.
Nisei	American-born children of pre-1924 Japanese immigrants who are US citizens. Meaning “second generation” in Japanese language (二世), most Nisei were young adults during World War II, spoke English as a first language and were raised bi-culturally. Often differentiated from “Kibei Nisei,” or simply “Kibei” (帰米) who were mostly American-born and educated in Japan. ³
POW	Prisoner of war. Also abbreviated “PW” in some military documents.
SCAP	Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers. US General Douglas MacArthur’s Occupation Government in Japan following the September 1945 surrender of the Japanese Emperor to American forces.
USAMGIK	United States Military Government in Korea. US General John Hodge established this governing body in Seoul on September 8, 1950, following the declaration of a Soviet military government in Pyongyang on August 24, 1950. ⁴
WRA	War Relocation Authority. Established under the Roosevelt Administration to coordinate the forced removal of people of Japanese ancestry from the American West Coast.

¹ Adapted from Eiji Takemae, *The Allied Occupation of Japan* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002), xiv.

² Adapted from “Issei,” *Densho Encyclopedia*, <http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Issei/>.

³ Adapted from “Nisei,” *Densho Encyclopedia*, <http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Nisei/>.

⁴ Adrian Buzo, *The Making of Modern Korea* (London: Routledge, 2016), 50.

“Certain forms of knowledge and control require a narrowing of vision. The great advantage of such tunnel vision is that it brings into sharp focus certain limited aspects of an otherwise far more complex and unwieldy reality.” – James Scott, Seeing Like a State⁵

Korean Soil, Japanese Faces, American Empire

In Korea in 1950, what do ‘Peanuts’ the Japanese child soldier, top MIS interrogator Sam Miyamoto, and Colonel Lee Hak Ku of the North Korean Army have in common? Along with thousands of American and Allied troops who fought under the US-UN Joint Command against the Communist Bloc, the Korean War and interrelated struggles against the post-1945 nation-state system were endured and managed on the Peninsula by over one thousand Japanese American military linguists,⁶ more than 30,000 Korean child soldiers,⁷ and at least 120 Japanese civilians including five children – all with destinies ultimately assigned by a singular form of control: repatriation.⁸ Beneath the narrative of the War that we are familiar with, this transregional web of actors and their stories teach us about the complexities of attempting to restore or return an individual to a country of origin, allegiance or citizenship, until the visceral transregional migrations and identity reformations that characterize and bookend the Korean War are painfully tangible.⁹

This paper will shed light on this process by comparing in particular the lesser-known contributions of second-generation Japanese American (hereafter Nisei) linguist-soldiers in the US Military Intelligence Service (MIS) with the experiences of their Japanese national (hereafter

⁵ James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1998), 2. This current project was inspired by decolonial histories of refugees, repatriations, and “borders,” and grew out of a 2016 MIS research fellowship at the National Japanese American Historical Society in San Francisco. Any errors are my own.

⁶ Sam Miyamoto, “Korean War Military Intelligence Service (MIS),” last modified 2005, http://www.javadc.org/korean_war_military_intelligence%20Miyamoto.htm.

⁷ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, 10. In 2012, the South Korean government recognized the recruitment of nearly 30,000 child soldiers (ages 14-17) in the South during the Korean War, which was also practiced in the North.

⁸ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “Post-War Warriors: Japanese Combatants in the Korean War,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 10, no. 1 (July 2012): 1.

⁹ “Repatriate,” *Merriam-Webster*, Accessed April 15, 2017.

Japanese) counterparts also serving the US military as laborers during the Korean War.¹⁰ While obviously distinct, these two groups are connected in their experiences of repatriation on and from the Korean Peninsula under the direction of the US military – as the American repatriation interrogators of Korean and Chinese civilians and prisoners of war (POWs), and the clandestine Japanese repatriates. But just how did the politics of repatriation differentiate the experiences of Japanese Americans from those of Japanese nationals, both serving the US military during the Korean War? I use a transregional decolonial framework to highlight critically the role of the US military in unresolved conflicts over borders and identity formation in the Asia Pacific, particularly along the mechanism of repatriation. Beginning with a literature review of the framework undergirding this research and the histories of the MIS Nisei and the Japanese who served the US Occupation Forces after World War II, this paper then describes the roles of both groups in Korea in relation to repatriation. It concludes with a reflection upon the contrasts and commonalities between both groups’ experiences of the Korean War and the continued relevance of these experiences to current repatriation cases in the Asia Pacific.¹¹

The Politics of Reimagining the Korean War

Critical Transregional Decolonial History of US Occupations in Northeast Asia: A Framework

How do we reconsider critically some of the more fossilized historical narratives that have forged ‘modern history’? What are the possibilities and consequences of doing so? Existing decolonial scholarship has aired the complex politics of identity that unfolded in the repatriation rooms of the Korean War, across transregional battlegrounds, within individual army units, and

¹⁰ In *Redefining Japaneseness* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017), Jane Yamashiro uses this sociological concept to explain how Japanese and Japanese Americans, as “members of a global ancestral group are historically and culturally linked, but their histories and identities have diversified due to different local contexts and the fluidity of culture in general.”

¹¹ The concluding summary raises questions about the current situation of North Korean defectors who are caught in China and doomed to a system of ‘automatic repatriation.’ Elsewhere in the region, forced repatriation is a leading cause of diplomatic breakdowns, as is the case with the ongoing Afghan refugee crisis in Pakistan.

even in the civilian sphere via newspaper discourse.¹² In a similar vein, this research develops upon a framework that challenges popular knowledge about US military occupations of the 1940s and '50s that mapped new borders, real and imagined, onto Northeast Asia.

The declassification of military documents in the 1970s and '80s has been significant in this process. In 1973, records of the Nisei soldier linguists under the MIS branch became declassified, revealing long-kept secrets about the strategic advances of the US military in the Pacific Theater of World War II.¹³ These American soldiers of Japanese ancestry were also primarily responsible for providing key language and administrative support for both the Allied Occupation of Japan and the Occupation of Korea. Those who served on the Korea Peninsula during and after the Korean War as 'repatriation interrogators' were primarily tasked to send captured communist North Korean and Chinese soldiers and civilians, as well as self-declared Korean communists, to either the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea) or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea).¹⁴

Under similarly clandestine conditions, US military involvement in the Korean War also introduced Japanese nationals to the conflict. Japanese and English scholarship on Japan's role in the Korean War has primarily addressed economic relations and public discourse.¹⁵ However, recent findings from newspapers, US military records, and other sources demonstrate the extent

¹² Monica Kim, "Empire's Babel: US Military Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War," *History of the Present* 3, no.1 (2013). See also Takeda (2012), Morris-Suzuki (2015), McNaughton (1994, 2007).

¹³ Kayoko Takeda, "The Role of Nisei (Second-Generation Japanese American) Linguists during World War II and the Allied Occupation of Japan." Paper presented at the annual Taiwan Tati LTTC Conference, Taipei, Taiwan, May 4, 2012: 2. See also Ozawa (2009, 37).

¹⁴ Kim, "Empire's Babel," 1. Despite the logic behind sending self-declared "communist" Koreans north of the 38th Parallel to join the communist North Korean state, the US-UN Joint Command sought ways to increase voluntary repatriation to South Korea to grow a Korean support base for liberal democracy.

¹⁵ Masuda Hajimu, "Fear of World War III: Social Politics of Japan's Rearmament and Peace Movements," *Journal of Contemporary History* 47, no. 3 (2012): 551. See also Cumings (1981), Drifte (1989) and Wada (2002).

to which Japanese civilians worked unofficially for US Forces in Korea before being repatriated to Japan.¹⁶

While this subject of Japanese involvement in the Korean War merits further study, there is a greater range of diverse, interdisciplinary scholarship from the mid-90s onward that has examined the contributions of the MIS Nisei in World War II and Occupied Japan, the colonial legacy of Imperial Japan in the Koreas, and the role of the US military in Northeast Asia.¹⁷ Archival letters and interviews with the MIS Nisei from the National Japanese American Historical Society add depth to the present study. Moreover, this research seeks to draw new connections between existing threads of scholarship on US influence in postwar repatriation.

History of the MIS Nisei: Formative Years and Activities

An understanding of the roles of the MIS Nisei in the Korean War necessitates a brief review of their earlier contributions during World War II. The evolution of American military intelligence through the 1940s is a complex story, revealing deep racial divisions in the US and the fragility of Constitutional protections for citizenship; yet, this process ultimately brought new recognition to American cultural and linguistic diversity.¹⁸ In anticipation of conflict with Japan prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, US military intelligence officers conducted Japanese language proficiency surveys among army personnel and American university students in early

¹⁶ Morris-Suzuki, "Post-War Warriors," 15. At least 120 Japanese civilians traveled to Korea, serving in capacities that ranged from base laborers to impromptu combat soldiers, with some even participating in the famed Incheon Landing alongside supervising US soldiers. These roles will be explained in greater detail later.

¹⁷ Tad Ichinokuchi and Daniel Aiso, eds. *John Aiso and the M.I.S.: Japanese-American Soldiers in the Military Intelligence Service, World War II* (Los Angeles: The Club, 1988). See also McNaughton (1994, 2007), Cumings (2004), Bradsher (2005), Robinson (2007), Hasegawa and Ozawa (2008), Seth (2009), Takeda (2012), Kim (2013), Jager (2013), and Buzo (2016).

¹⁸ McNaughton, "Nisei Linguists and New Perspectives," 2. As McNaughton recounts, the toxic mainstream discourse on both the US mainland and in Hawai'i, including the phrase "a Jap is a Jap," moved many Nisei volunteers to enlist in the American military as proof of national loyalty. He contends that, "they had to confront issues of identity and heritage in ways that most other American soldiers could not even imagine... They had a capacity, all too rare at that time, for seeing their [Japanese] opponents as human beings, rather than animals."

1941, quickly concluding that these candidates would not meet the demand for qualified Americans.¹⁹ The Fourth Army Division then received a budget of \$2,000 to establish a classified Japanese language program and expanded recruitment to West Coast Japanese Americans. On November 1, 1941 – a month before the attack on Pearl Harbor – the first MIS Language School opened in an abandoned hangar bordering Crissy Field in San Francisco²⁰ with the first class (Sempai Gumi) of 58 Nisei and two Caucasians, under the instruction of four Nisei administrators. MIS candidates studied five days a week and most nights to master “the Naganuma readers, Creswell’s Japanese-English military dictionary, various Japanese and American training manuals, Ueda’s *Daijiten* (dictionary), and several other books.”²¹ The December 7, 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor catalyzed President Roosevelt’s declaration of war with Japan and the February 1942 issuance of Executive Order 9066, ahead of the graduation of the first class in April 1942. In addition to the unconstitutional imprisonment²² of over 120,000 Americans of Japanese descent on the West Coast and in Hawai’i, the Order forced the MIS Language School to relocate in May 1942 to Camp Savage in Minnesota, where it was formally re-established under the acronym “MISLS.”²³ Of the original sixty, 45 graduated in six months and 35 of these graduates were swiftly dispatched to the Pacific, with a few staying on as

¹⁹ Takeda, “The Role of Nisei,” 2.

²⁰ Today the hangar, also known as Building 640, is the site of the National Japanese American Historical Society’s MIS Historic Learning Center (MISHLC) museum. The author of this paper operated the museum on weekends during Fall 2016. In many conversations, MIS veteran Warren Eijima stressed the timeliness of this school’s establishment. I am indebted to Mr. Eijima for sharing of his time, his wisdom, and the spirit of the MIS Nisei with me over the last several months while I conducted research and composed this paper.

²¹ Tomoko Ozawa, “Nisei Interpreters/Translators of the U.S. Military,” *海外移住資料館 研究紀要* 第3号 (2009): 39.

²² Many historical narratives, including those of the US War Relocation Authority (WRA) and Roosevelt administration, have euphemistically referred to this scheme as “evacuation” and “internment.” This process of violating constitutional citizenship rights and the right to due process imprisoned thousands of innocent American citizens. The motion for reparations was initiated in the 1980s with the landmark case *Korematsu v. the United States* that revealed the use of falsified documents to support Executive Order 9066. Congress then voted to compensate each surviving victim with a \$20,000 settlement sum.

²³ McNaughton, *Nisei Linguist*, 12. Camp Savage was a former homeless men’s colony that MIS students and faculty were responsible for cleaning and maintaining during its use as the MISLS.

instructors.²⁴ The successes of the Sempai Gumi (“First Class”) demonstrated the need for Japanese language interpreters, and this feedback grew enrollment by the hundreds.²⁵ The MISLS relocated again in 1945 to Fort Snelling near Minneapolis, where Mandarin Chinese and Korean courses were added.²⁶

But how did the US military manage to recruit Japanese-proficient students in these numbers? While a considerable number of Nisei soldiers in parts of the country, such as New York, were unaffected by Executive Order 9066 and volunteered for service with less difficulty, those who volunteered from the ten War Relocation Authority (WRA) camps were often caught between the suspicions of the mainstream American public and the disbelief of their incarcerated families.²⁷ During World War II, a total of more than 6,000 Nisei were trained in Japanese military linguistics for six to nine months before translating captured Japanese military documents, breaking codes, “flushing” caves to rescue civilians, interrogating Japanese POWs, engaging in combat, and even impersonating Japanese soldiers to obtain intelligence and execute ambushes across the Asia Pacific.²⁸ From the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section (ATIS) Australian offices at Indooroopilly and Brisbane to major campaigns across the South Pacific, and even the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theatre of War, MIS Nisei worked alongside international teams that include the British Army, the Chinese National Army, and Indian

²⁴ Takeda, “The Role of Nisei,” 3. Nisei women were also recruited as language instructors for Caucasian soldiers and taught at domestic posts including the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. For more information on the wartime and post-war service of Nisei women and WAACs, see Ozawa (2009).

²⁵ McNaughton, “Nisei Linguists and New Perspectives on the Pacific War,” 1. McNaughton explains how the successes of the first 35 graduates at Guadalcanal and Buna-Gona in the Pacific persuaded the US War Department to form the now-legendary Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team that served in Germany, France, and Italy. By 1945 when US forces moved onto Iwo Jima and Okinawa, there were more than 2,000 MIS Nisei graduates, serving in every Pacific Theatre campaign.

²⁶ Ozawa, “Nisei Interpreters,” 40.

²⁷ Harrington Files.

²⁸ McNaughton, *Nisei Linguist*. See also McNaughton (1994), and Takeda (2012).

combat divisions.²⁹ The MIS interception and translation of the Japanese Navy's "Z Plan" document, in particular, is attributed for the turning point in the conflict that reduced of the length of the Pacific War by two years.³⁰

In addition to military-issue tasks, the MIS Nisei often encountered situations that required significant improvisation, including assisting a rescue of "comfort women" who were forced to work in Japanese military camps as sex slaves. Following the August 1944 capture of Myitkyina in Burma, US Sergeant Grant Hirabayashi sought out Captain Chan of the Myitkyina Task Force, stating, "Captain, you aren't going to believe this, but I've got about twenty female, I think Korean, POWs down at the center and I need help."³¹ Interviews with the Nisei explained:

These frightened young women were forced prostitutes, or 'comfort women,' for the Japanese Army. The Nisei showed them photographs of Japanese officers, but they learned little of value because the women spoke little Japanese. The last evening before the women were flown out to India, the Nisei threw a small going-away party. The Nisei sang American, Japanese and Hawaiian songs accompanied by a guitar. The Korean women responded by singing the Korean folksong, 'Arirang.'

While these encounters are not widely known, recognition of such histories could add contours to the present discourse on the wartime experiences of "comfort women."

By the Pacific War's end in August 1945, these soldiers contributed tremendously to civilian protection in the Asia Pacific, and continued to provide administrative support for MacArthur's SCAP government.³² MISLS enrollment peaked during the Occupation with over 5,000 Nisei "bridging" Japanese collaborator-officials, civilians, and the SCAP government in

²⁹ Harrington Files. The author was originally tasked to read the Harrington Files as a MIS Research Fellow at the National Japanese American Historical Society in Fall 2016 to conduct a medal count in conjunction with the Japanese American Veterans Association (JAVA) in Washington, D.C. Medals include the Bronze Star, Legion of Merit, Purple Heart, Silver Star, Combat Infantry Badge, and the Order of the British Empire, among others.

³⁰ McNaughton, *Nisei Linguist*. MIS autobiographies describe this master document as 'the jackpot.' Translation scholars rate this accomplishment as, "one of the single greatest intelligence feats of the war in the Southwest Pacific Area." This code-break allowed US Forces foresight into the coming attacks planned throughout the Pacific Theatre of War and make key advances after a period of significant hardship.

³¹ McNaughton, *Nisei Linguist*, 282.

³² Harrington Files. These efforts include the establishment of schools for Okinawan and Korean children on Okinawa, where some of the MIS Nisei were raised before enlisting in Hawai'i. See also Takeda (2012, 5).

every sector from counter-intelligence and war trials, to atomic post-blast investigation and policy issuing.³³ Japanese as the post-colonial lingua franca also positioned one thousand MIS Nisei as first-responders on the Korean Peninsula in late 1945, where interpreters were required in the process of repatriation (see figure 1).³⁴



Figure 1. Children of repatriated families on the deck of the Koan Maru before disembarking at Maizuru Bay, Japan on March 24, 1953. The first 2,000 Japanese repatriates from North China arrived at Maizuru on the Koan Maru after being stranded since the end of World War II in 1945.

Source: AP Photo / Y. Jackson Ishizaki

Japanese Laborers in Occupied Japan

In contrast with the Occupation roles of the MIS Nisei, tens of thousands of Japanese civilians were recruited to work for the SCAP government and on US military bases within a separate, more clandestine process. In his landmark account of the Occupation, *Inside GHQ* (reworked into *The Allied Occupation of Japan*) Eiji Takemae details how Japanese civilians operated via a labor network for Allied troops. On-base work included kitchen duty, cleaning barracks, and other menial errands, with thousands of additional laborers cast as maids, babysitters, masseuses, gardeners, cooks and ‘houseboys’ to serve the 700 American families

³³ McNaughton, *Nisei Linguist*, 282.

³⁴ Kim, “Empire’s Babel,” 3. Limited scholarship has addressed the linguistic aspect of post-war transition.

who arrived in 1945-1946 alone – “at the height of the Occupation, some 14,800 families employed a total of 25,000 Japanese servants to ease the ‘rigours’ of overseas duty.”³⁵ Although interactions between civilians and military personnel were initially limited through the use of segregated doors and facilities, barriers were mostly eliminated after area restrictions were lifted by SCAP in September 1949, allowing the Japanese public to participate in social activities on bases for the first time.³⁶ Takemae also notes that Japanese civilians gained certain protections under the SCAP constitution while on US bases; for instance, “Article 15 allowed the US military to arrest Japanese nationals *outside* of base areas,” [emphasis is my own] thus providing incentives beyond economic drivers for Japanese civilians to seek work with the US military.³⁷

Within SCAP itself, headquartered at the Dai-Ichi Sogo Insurance Building in Tokyo’s Marunouchi District (see figure 2), the G-1 Section of the Military General Staff worked most closely with Japanese civilians as the primary advisory section on “personnel policies and the administrative functions of occupation,” including but not limited to regulating “entry into and exit from Japan of individuals not connected with the Occupation, including Japanese nationals.”³⁸ Relatedly, the mobility of Koreans in Japan was policed especially heavily during the Occupation; however, it has been noted that the G-1 section, in conjunction with the US Eighth Army in Korea, oversaw the deportation of “tens of thousands of illegal [Korean] immigrants” to the southern half of the Korean peninsula.³⁹ These details reveal a complex image of Occupied Japan as a place of ambiguous legal restrictions, glaring inequality, and, ironically, opportunities for Japanese civilians to partake in forms of neo-colonial servitude that would soon carry some to one of Imperial Japan’s former colonies.

³⁵ Takemae, *Allied Occupation of Japan*, 75.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 506.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

³⁹ *Ibid.*



Figure 2. Dai-ichi Sogo Building, Marunouchi, c. 1949. [“G.H.Q. Building at Tokyo /總司令部”]
 Source: *Old Tokyo, Vintage Japanese Postcard Museum 1900-1960*.

Comparing Repatriation Narratives

To make sense of the tangled web of revelations revealed in the narratives at hand, I use a methodology based in sociolinguistics. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) and narrative analysis (NA) were combined into a framework for comparing the Korean Wartime repatriation narratives of the MIS Nisei and their Japanese laborer counterparts serving the US military. As an analytical framework for examining the movement and consequences of power through language, Norman Fairclough’s CDA model evaluates: “(1) the object of analysis (including verbal, visual or verbal and visual texts); (2) the processes by which the object is produced and received (writing/speaking/designing and reading/listening/viewing) by human subjects; (3) the socio-historical conditions that govern these processes.”⁴⁰ Mirroring the transregional decolonial nature of the body of research in which this investigation is situated, this model “provides multiple points of analytic entry ... It is in the interconnections that the analyst finds interesting

⁴⁰ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Longman, 1995). See also Fairclough (1989, 1992), van Dijk (1993) and Janks (1997) for other applications of critical discourse analysis as a research model.

patterns and disjunctions that need to be described, interpreted and explained.”⁴¹ This methodology takes a sociolinguistic view of narrative analysis, which “refers to a family of approaches to diverse kinds of texts, which have in common a storied form ... the concept of narrative is restricted, referring to brief, topically specific stories organised around characters, setting, and plot.”⁴² Narrative data is sourced from archival files (MIS Nisei wartime and postwar letters, declassified documents and interview material from the 1940s-1970s) and scholarship from the mid-1990s onward capturing Korean War repatriation narratives of the Nisei interrogators and Japanese laborer-repatriates.

MIS Nisei in the Korean War: Repatriation Interrogators

During the Korean Interwar Period (August 1945 – June 1950), the process of ‘decolonizing’ the Asia Pacific region was forced through disproportionate military influence.⁴³ Mainland Korean aspirations for sovereign independence, and Japanese citizenship in the case of some Koreans in Japan,⁴⁴ were not only ignored but also swept beyond reach by the neo-colonial agreement between the US and the Soviet Union.⁴⁵ Within this context, the activities of the MIS Nisei and Japanese laborers on Korean soil under the US military – both voluntarily and reluctant – can be viewed with a degree of criticism. Yet, in addition to their interrogation work, Nisei testimonies demonstrate their civic service during the early days of the US Occupation of Korea. Masami Tahira recounts in his autobiography:

Came August 1945, and the war with Japan ended. It wasn’t too long before we could be heading for home. I was ordered to Pusan Harbor, Korea, as an interpreter, attached to the

⁴¹ Hillary Janks, “Critical Discourse Analysis as a Research Tool,” *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 18, no. 3 (1997): 329.

⁴² Catherine Kohler Riessman, “Narrative Analysis,” in *Narrative, Memory & Everyday Life* (Huddersfield, UK: University of Huddersfield, 2005), 1. British English used in the original.

⁴³ Jager, *Brothers at War*.

⁴⁴ Takemae, *Allied Occupation of Japan*, 498.

⁴⁵ Kim, “Empire’s Babel,” 2.

40th Division Headquarters. I spent three or four months there and helped with the shipping back of the Japanese Nationals for Japan. There were thousands of dislocated people, both Japanese and Korean, hordes of them all piled up at Pusan Harbor. I acted as interpreter, guide, health official and coordinator, liaison officer between the civilians, Japanese troops and our forces ... All I can say is that I tried my best to help those thousands of homeless, up-rooted people.⁴⁶

Once the Korean War broke out in June 1950, dozens of MIS Nisei were also attached to US combat regiments and worked alongside ROK army units to provide language assistance using their multilingual training as interpreters in English, Japanese, Chinese and Korean. Through this assignment, many Nisei also leveraged their combat training, including Shogo Iwatsuru (see figure 3) who perished in Korea. Among these Nisei, Frank Teruo Tokubo, who previously served in India, Burma, China, at Japan's Sugamo Prison, and later published a story about the Korean War in a Japanese magazine, became renowned for leading a language team on an infamously dangerous mission.⁴⁷ While they were ordered not to operate behind enemy lines in Korea in order to obtain intelligence, Tokubo's colleagues reported that, "In the Korean War, he took a language team all the way up to the Yalu [River] when the Chinese air-raided. Of the 4,000 men of the 1st Regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division, only 86 survived."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Masami Tahira, "Vignettes of Life: A Long, Four-year Soldier's Journey from Hawaii to Far Off Lands (Condensed)," *Sempai Gumi Booklet*, 22-36, Harrington Files, folder "Tekawa, Paul." Tahira later served as Interrogation Officer of Japanese "special repatriates" from Soviet Russia.

⁴⁷ Joseph Harrington, "Interview notes," Harrington Files, folder "Tokubo, Frank Teruo."

⁴⁸ Joseph Harrington, "Note about Tokubo," Harrington Files, folder "Tokubo, Frank Teruo."

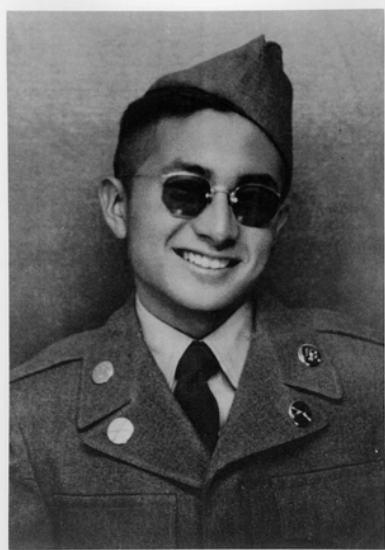


Figure 3. Portrait of Nisei Shogo Iwatsuru, 23rd Infantry Regiment in Military Uniform (Died of Wounds, Korean War, 1951).

Source: California State University, Sacramento Library

Sam Miyamoto has also highlighted their multi-faceted role, with emphasis on the linguistic roles of the Nisei and the value they provided:

I was one of over one thousand Japanese American linguists [who] served in the Korean War as interrogators, translators, message interceptors, or interpreters within all branches of the Armed Forces ... At the time, the U.S. was fighting two Asian [a]rmies, North Korean and Chinese, with hardly anyone able to communicate in the other's language. The Nisei were the only ones available who were able to bridge the communication gap using [a] ... fourth language: Japanese.⁴⁹

Masaji "Gene" Uratsu further described the diversity of their work in an autobiographical letter:

I was a highly specialized officer mostly dealing in the linguistic area and not much else. Here in Korea, I had varied assignments such as command of radio monitoring on the line, intelligence analyst in [the] G-2 [Intelligence] Section and eventually the command of IPW [Interrogation of Prisoners of War] Team, which had three other US officers, 10 EM [enlisted men], a dozen Korean linguists, one ROK officer and two Chinese Nationalist officers.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Sam Miyamoto, "Korean War Military Intelligence Service (MIS)," *JAVADC*. Twelve major US units were deployed in the first six months of the Korean War: Eighth Army, IX Corps, X Corps, 1st Cavalry Division, 2nd Infantry Division, 3rd Infantry Division, 7th Infantry Division, 11th Airborne Division, 24th Infantry Division, 25th Infantry Division, 1st Marine Division. See also Department of the Army (1997, 281).

⁵⁰ Masaji "Gene" Uratsu, "Autobiographical Letter," Harrington Files, folder "Uratsu, Masaji."

Testimonies also clarify that the process of conducting interrogations across three languages (Chinese, Korean, and Japanese) was oftentimes more of a multi-team “triangulation.”

Describing the system to the Subcommittee on War Atrocities, Colonel James Hanley stated:

You might be interested in how we interrogated these prisoners. We used Koreans, of course, to carry on the preliminary investigations of the prisoners, and in the case of the Chinese used the Chinese, or at least Chinese-speaking Koreans. Some of the work, interrogation, was done by American Nisei, speaking Japanese, with the Koreans who understood and spoke Japanese, many of whom did.⁵¹

Beyond the necessity for language fluency, the Nisei also realized the importance of possessing cultural capital as interrogators. Well aware of the disrespectful implications of using Japanese language to open interrogations with recently ‘decolonized’ Korean prisoners, they innovated a unique approach. Sam Miyamoto described this ‘performance,’ in which he first called out to another Nisei to bring coffee and donuts for the prisoner, in Japanese, within earshot of the interrogation table. After sitting down, he then inquired about the prisoner’s linguistic repertoire in Mandarin Chinese, French, and German, before offering to use Japanese. This made for a smoother interrogation process.⁵² Ironically, pamphlets circulating among US military officers at this time insisted that, “The average intelligence of Orientals is lower than that of Caucasians,” and that, “When the Nisei interrogated the Japanese PW, a psychological advantage has been lost to a degree, in that the average Oriental feels inferior to an American [Caucasian], and when a Nisei confronted the PW, this advantage was lost, and they were on equal footing.”⁵³ Aside from the racism behind these assertions, the success of the Nisei interrogators suggests that being “on

⁵¹ Kim, “Empire’s Babel,” 5. Prior to the Japanese colonization of Korea in 1910, a process of linguistic colonization had already been occurring in educational circles, wherein it was a common practice for the Korean elite to study in Japan before returning to the Korean Peninsula. As the colonial process expanded to the Korean mainland, Japanese language education did, as well, leaving lasting imprints on Korean vernacular and an entire generation’s linguistic repertoire to this day.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 11. During WWII, MIS Nisei interrogators learned that providing food and cigarettes to Japanese POWs made a significant impact on the quality of the information they received. Miyamoto also emphasized, “You had to know history to survive.”

⁵³ Kim, “Empire’s Babel,” 17.

equal footing” with one’s interrogation subject is mutually beneficial. In fact, biographies also reveal how Miyamoto’s interactions with Korean prisoners signify solidarity:

[A]lmost without fail in the other US military interrogators’ rooms, the Korean Communist prisoners of war would spit upon the floor before entering. However, when these very same POWs came to Miyamoto’s interrogation room, instead of spitting, they would instead ask him why he was working under the US Army when as a Japanese American, he had been forcibly moved to internment camps by the US government during World War II.⁵⁴

To this, Miyamoto responded, “I’m here because I was ordered to come here. I didn’t come here by choice. I was ordered to join the army and I was ordered to study the Korean language, and I was ordered to come here and talk to you about this.” This work continued even after the 1953 Armistice, when repatriation evolved into a tool of the anti-communist regime. In a letter, Roy Toshitsura Uyehata explained the hierarchy in which he operated:

My most interesting personal experience occurred during the Korean War or shortly after the armistice. I was responsible for identifying two North Korean spies who had crossed into South Korea disguised as refugees. Our CIC [Commander-in-Chief] agents had interrogated them, but could not find any evidence to hold or arrest them. I was requested to find out if they were actually spies or innocent civilians. My interrogations revealed that they were truly spies, so the two men were held in custody. Later other enemy agents tried to communicate with the suspected spies so my suspicions were confirmed. The CIC agent who was directly involved with the case thanked me for making the determination which I made, but Army Intelligence did not make any effort to thank me for my action during the investigation.⁵⁵

Uyehata was later denied the opportunity to re-interrogate a captured communist Chinese commander at Incheon who was mistakenly released as a civilian. Evidently, tensions remained high during the transition to containment, which coincided with the US military’s repatriation of remaining Japanese civilians from the Korean Peninsula.

⁵⁴ Kim, “Empire’s Babel,” 4.

⁵⁵ Roy Toshitsura Uyehata, “Letter to Harrington, 8/21/77,” Harrington Files, folder “Uyehata, Roy.”

Japanese Laborers in Korea: Involuntary Repatriates

Widely unknown beyond post-Occupation Japanese sources and the initial reports of their sightings in Soviet, Chinese and North Korean newspapers in the 1950s, the Japanese civilians who were brought as laborers to Korea by US military personnel offer insight into the undercurrents of mobility during the Korean War. Eminent decolonial scholar Tessa Morris-Suzuki's account of the "Post-War Warriors: Japanese Combatants in the Korean War" provides highly intimate portraits of these men and their activities under the US military in Korea. In August 1950, General MacArthur and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshida shot down two US Senate bills aimed to recruit Japanese civilians to fight in Korea at half-pay. They maintained that, "no Japanese were to be employed with the army in Korea," yet Japan's *Asahi Shimbun* identified "120 Japanese citizens who served in Korea in US uniforms," and a figure of "8000 Japanese engaged in military activities" were reported in the Soviet *Pravda* in October 1950.⁵⁶ The true figure is indeterminable, but likely somewhere between the two. As Takemae noted, tens of thousands of Japanese were already employed by American military families in Japan before the Korean War began, and many were hired to work in Korea through a "labor requisition program."⁵⁷ To get to Korea, many Japanese traveled as driver-operators of the massive American landing ship tanks (LSTs) that were used to transport repatriates at the end of World War II, or as supply movers for shipping companies with army contracts such as Tozai Kisen. Although 56 were killed in the first six months of the Korean War, "about one thousand

⁵⁶ Morris-Suzuki, "Post-War Warriors," 1-2. Morris-Suzuki's paper provides the most comprehensive account of these individuals, thus I frequently reference the narratives that she has compiled through archival data.

⁵⁷ Takemae, *Allied Occupation of Japan*, 75. See also Morris-Suzuki (2012, 3), who cites a figure of 3,922 Japanese workers who were hired through the labor requisition program and operated LSTs at the Incheon Landing.

Japanese labour recruits still engaged in this work in Korea” by 1953, according to an *Asahi Shimbun* article.⁵⁸

Some traveled to Korea without knowing where they were headed. US military personnel testimonies suggest that the process of negotiating travel for Japanese laborers was of a “casual nature,” and that they needed only secure permission from their supervising officer. This later raised problems for many Japanese who found themselves in uncomfortable positions with Korean counterparts, as was the case for “Jones” who fell in with a South Korean army unit and was later arrested in Pusan after fighting an officer. Some were even forced by their American supervisors to wear ROK military uniforms.⁵⁹ There were also cases of mistaken identity that allowed Japanese to ‘pass’ as Korean, in front of those who could not distinguish between the two groups, and at least two were actually of mixed descent since they had Korean mothers and Japanese fathers.⁶⁰ In fact, ethnic Koreans were also recruited at the beginning of the war, primarily through the pro-South Korean community organization Mindan in Japan. Only 644 volunteers applied, but recruitment schemes such as these inspired Japanese civilians (including former imperial army officers) to attempt identity fraud. A few were able to conceal their identities, until it was finally discovered in Korea that they could not speak Korean; at this point, they were re-designated as ‘houseboys’ for South Korean military officers.⁶¹

A number of Japanese laborers were brought as servants to military personnel, but most of these individuals were forced into combat at some point during the war. Ito, who was hired as a ‘houseboy’ before joining the 21st Infantry Regiment, told an interviewer that he “was

⁵⁸ Morris-Suzuki, “Post-War Warriors,” 3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4. One Japanese national was given an ROK uniform and instructed by his American supervisor, “now you are a Korean.”

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

wounded once and received the Purple Heart.”⁶² For some, facing combat also raised issues of being undercover Japanese. One laborer named Takayama went on military patrols with his American supervisor until he “decided that ‘there would be trouble if the Communists found out I am Japanese.’”⁶³ Ueno, who came to Korea as an interpreter was lost near Daejeon for multiple days before being reunited with his American unit, explaining that he used an automatic weapon, “all the time. I don’t know how many North Koreans I killed.” Out of 72 Japanese repatriates, 15 reported using weapons they received from US military personnel.⁶⁴

There are also exceptional cases, such as the youth who were brought onto US bases as child ‘mascots.’ One of these boys was Takatsu (nicknamed “Benny”), an orphan raised in a foster home before being hired as a teenager to do kitchen duty at a US base.⁶⁵ “Peanuts,” who was 15-years-old in 1951 when he was repatriated to Japan, joined an American lieutenant in the 32nd Infantry and the two participated in the Incheon Landing and crossed into North Korea. After the lieutenant was wounded and evacuated, “Peanuts” stayed in Korea as a kitchen worker. There is also “Corky,” a 10-year-old Korean-Japanese boy who said in his 1951 repatriation interview that he was brought to Korea by an American “Colonel” whom he called “Papa San.”

The youngest recorded ‘mascot’ repatriate is a 9-year-old orphan named Mamoru, who was “found alone and crying in a street in Korea in November 1950.” His traumatic six-month journey began in Shimane Prefecture earlier that year, when he was taken to Korea by US military personnel, stranded on a battlefield in Daegu, carried to Pyongyang with another military unit, and finally ended up in an orphanage in Seoul before escaping and returning to

⁶² Morris-Suzuki, “Post-War Warriors,” 6. The Purple Heart is a US military medal given to soldiers who are wounded in combat.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 5. T. Takayama was interviewed on February 23, 1951.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 5-6. T. Ueno was interviewed on February 17, 1951.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

surviving relatives in Japan with the help of American staff.⁶⁶ Another teenager named Taira described his US military labor as part of a personal mission to find his sister, whom he was separated from during a prison break in North Korea. He explained, “With 300 Japanese people I escaped into South Korea. I was a small boy. An American truck stopped and picked me up. The three American men in the truck took me with them. In Seoul I was put in a camp with other Japanese people. We went to Pusan and then to Japan.” Although he was hired as a ‘houseboy’ and returned to Korea, he was repatriated to Japan a second time and never found his sister.⁶⁷

The SCAP government also widely denied compensation to the families of Japanese citizens who were later reported missing or killed in Korea, claiming that they “had traveled to Korea illegally and without authorization, and had never been an official member of the UN/US forces in Korea.” Such was the fate of 29-year-old Hiratsuka Shigeharu, who had been a US base worker before traveling to Korea in June 1950, along with Yoshiwara Minefumi and two others from Oita Prefecture.⁶⁸ Those who did report being recompensed offered perplexing statements, including one man who insisted, “I always treated good by the Americans... I got no pay. I got food and clothes and cigarettes and candy. I want back to Tokyo to work for Americans again.”⁶⁹ While the reasons to do so remain vague in the context of ostensible coercion, desires to work for the US military again were popularly voiced among Japanese repatriates. Over 100 of the 120 documented civilians returned to Japan between February 1951 and mid-1952, and at least one of the two Japanese captured by North Koreans finally returned to Japan in 1953.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Morris-Suzuki, “Post-War Warriors,” 11.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1-2. Reports of their deaths and disappearances were published in the *Asahi Shimbun* after the Allied Occupation of Japan ended in 1952.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 6. T. Katoda was interviewed on March 14, 1951.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 2. The Records of GHQ, FEC, SCAP and UNC at the National Archives in College Park, MD are referenced for these figures.

MIS Nisei Experiences in Korea

To summarize the experiences of the MIS Nisei in Korea, it is important to qualify that they did were not the returnees. Rather, they conducted repatriation interrogations, as well as engaged with the Korean public through civic service tasks that included interpretation work and repatriate travel coordination. From the other side of the interrogation rooms of the Korean War, the Nisei engaged in culturally sensitive interrogation work that allowed them to forge important connections with their primarily Korean repatriate interviewees. By bringing in their experiences with Japanese prisoners during World War II and recognizing critical historical distinctions, the Nisei were able to challenge structures of linguistic colonialism. In addition, many felt that they were also able to challenge institutional racism through their work. They used their continued military service in Korea to reaffirm their American ‘belonging’ and expand their claims to racial citizenship, as well as merit recognition for ethnic minorities in the US military. Along these lines, the experiences of the MIS Nisei with repatriation in Korea can be viewed as materially and symbolically affirmative, and generally absent of personal trauma.

Japanese Laborer Experiences with Repatriation from Korea

Japanese laborers, on the other hand, faced a more tangled process of negotiating identity against the backdrop of a fractured postwar Japan and the conditions of US occupation that were conducive to labor recruitment. The experiences of these individuals can be sharply contrasted with those of the MIS Nisei, despite the fact of their shared Japanese ethnicity on Korean soil. The opportunities for Japanese civilians to enter into American spheres, through military bases as workers and American military family homes as domestic servants, shaped the course of Japanese migration to Korea along occupation(al) channels. Most worked precariously as menial

laborers, weapon and supply transport operators, kitchen helpers, and as inexperienced combat soldiers. Beyond exposure to battlefields and the streets of Korea, as was the case for some displaced youth, most Japanese civilians who came to Korea were confined to US bases. Finally, it is important to emphasize that many did not return to Japan, and the actual number of Japanese who were brought to Korea is unknown; the existences of dozens who went missing or were killed in action were denied by the US military. Yet, those who were repatriated to Japan have provided valuable testimonies that capture various degrees of confusion, reluctance, personal trauma, but also expectations of a return to the US military that dragged them across the region.

Korean War Repatriation: Winners and Losers?

What has been gained by looking at these separate groups together? On an elementary level, they are linked by a shared history as members of the same ‘global ancestral group.’⁷¹ Both groups are comprised of men who are ethnically Japanese, fluent in Japanese language, and worked for the US military on the Korean Peninsula during the Korean War. This research argues that, on a more substantial secondary level, repatriation links diverse Korean War experiences including those of the MIS Nisei and Japanese laborers. At this level, however, their experiences also sharply diverge along the planes of identity, labor, and purpose. It is clear from both groups’ first-hand testimonies that three distilled factors powerfully differentiated their experiences: (1) location of individuals on the hierarchy of racial, ethnic, military, and national identities in US-Occupied Northeast Asia; (2) US military endorsement, which granted occupational protections and safety of varying degrees to both parties; and (3) motivations to labor for the US military regime in Korea.

Along the first line of argument, identity politics created important distinctions between

⁷¹ Jane Yamashiro, *Redefining Japaneseness* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 8.

the MIS Nisei and the Japanese laborers. Most salient was the relative respect the Nisei received as both US military personnel and Americans which, despite their position as racially criminalized ethnic minorities in the US, allowed them greater mobility and opportunities for constructive interaction with diverse groups during the Korean War. Japanese laborers, in contrast, were widely viewed as victims of defeat and sources of cheap labor before and during the Korean War by the US Occupying Forces. On the Korean Peninsula, they were also framed as the former colonizer, which caused significant issues for some Japanese who either attempted to 'pass' as Korean or instigate conflicts with Koreans.

The endorsement of the US military provided a range of opportunities and protections, depending on the nature of the work and to whom it was tasked. Although both groups were involved in clandestine work as soldier-interpreters and soldier-laborers, respectively, that was not declassified until decades later, the MIS Nisei operated as official, skilled members of the US military in highly specialized roles. The Japanese laborers, on the other hand, were tasked with low-skilled, unofficial and often unpaid work. This tendency also affected the amount of compensation both groups were able to command; the Nisei accumulated pay, vacation leave, discharge points, and medals for their service, while Japanese repatriates rarely received wages, let alone recognition from the US military.

The final category of labor aspirations describes how the motivations to work under the US military in Korea differed for both groups. For the MIS Nisei, it was primarily a military order that brought them to Korea as interrogators, but with the order also came opportunities for recognition. More so during World War II, but still relevant during the Korean War, many Nisei soldiers chose to enlist as a symbolic move to prove their loyalty as American citizens while most of their families faced repression as ethnically-targeted prisoners in the US. Thus, military

service provided an outlet for the Nisei to affirm their claims to racial citizenship and a sense of American ‘belonging.’

In the case of Japanese laborers, however, the motivating factors are less clear. While it is likely that economic opportunity and personal connections provided the strongest reasons for Japanese civilians to travel to Korea with US military personnel, Morris-Suzuki’s account also suggests that opportunities for mobility played a great role. She explains that the “US military-controlled [base] ‘islands’ that dotted the terrain of Northeast Asia were not distinct but were linked to one another by invisible bridges.” These connections facilitated movement “at a time when it was virtually impossible for Japanese civilians to travel legally to Korea or for Korean civilians to travel legally to Japan,” and allowed US military base workers to drift between “military islands... sliding over the Japan-South Korea borderline as though it did not exist.”⁷² Thus, connecting this point to my findings on the relevance of identity and labor, mobility also becomes a central theme in conceptualizing the clandestine landscapes of the Korean War.

In a larger scope, these individual biographical and autobiographical narratives of actors caught in the Korean War are symbolic of unresolved conflicts over sovereignty and national identity in Japan and Korea(s), and the legacies of US military in identity formation during 1940s and 1950s that involved the labor of Japanese nationals and the MIS Nisei. The labor of both groups terminated with repatriations, at which point the MIS Nisei finished interrogating Korean and Chinese POWs and civilians, and surviving Japanese civilian laborers were sent back to Japan. As a course of future scholarly exploration, the patterns of mobility traced by this web of actors can offer greater insight for policy analysts who are grappling with the legal frameworks around repatriation. ‘Automatic repatriations’ of blackmailed North Korean escapees by Chinese

⁷² Morris-Suzuki, “Post-War Warriors,” 7.

human traffickers are just one case of the unresolved crisis of borders in the Asia Pacific.⁷³ The registry-based ‘erasure’ of displaced Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and minority ethnic groups in the first half of the twentieth century also merits more comprehensive and historically informed understanding. Most poignant yet is the protracted conflict between the invented nations of North Korea and South Korea, which grows more salient as the militarization of the peninsula continues.

⁷³ Jeanyoung Jeannie Cho, “Systematizing the Fate of the Stateless North Korean Migrant: A Legal Guide to Preventing the Automatic Repatriation of North Korean Migrants in China,” *Fordham International Law Journal* 37 (2013): 175.

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