

The Cold War Hits Kobe: The 1948 Korean Ethnic School “Riots”¹⁾

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At around 10:30 in the morning of April 24, 1948, four men, three Koreans and one Japanese, stormed into the Hyogo Prefecture Building (*kenchō*) and demanded an audience with Governor Kishida Yukio. Their purpose remained unchanged from previous attempts to see the governor—to discuss his April 10 order that the four Korean ethnic schools in his jurisdiction cease operations and that the students be transferred to Japanese schools. Kishida, who was at another meeting, informed their Japanese spokesman, Horikawa Kazutomo, that he would see them later. One half-hour later, the governor was told that about one hundred Koreans had forced their way into the building. He soon heard them yelling “Open up, open up. We will kill you,” as they destroyed one of his outer offices. Then fifty to sixty Koreans forced their way into Kishida’s office by breaking down the wall that separated his office from the outer office they had been destroying. They cut his telephone lines, trashed his furniture, and began roughing up the governor and the mayor of Kobe, who had been meeting with Kishida.

The intruders then sat the governor at his desk and the three negotiators, Kim Daisam [T’aesam], Kim Yongho, and Ryang Minseo [Minsō], presented their demands. Kishida was to rescind his order to close the Korean schools, release the sixty-five Koreans arrested during a previous incident at the assistant governor’s office, and see to it that no one involved in the present incident faced prosecution. At 12:30, three United States Military Police officers arrived and attempted to escort Kishida to safety. However, a crowd of Koreans who had gathered in the building prevented them from doing so. The crowd also roughed up the military policemen, lifting one “off his feet.” When one of the policemen drew his pistol a Korean woman bared her chest and baited him to “shoot here.” Negotiations finally ended around 17:00 when the governor agreed in writing to release those arrested during the previous incident.

Throughout the day a crowd had been assembling outside the prefecture building. Captain Roy M. Johnson reported that by 11:30 these people, who numbered over 3,000, “had ceased to be a crowd; [they had formed] a mob.” Their presence prevented help from entering the building until a team of 150 policemen succeeded in physically dragging “actively resisting” people away and roped off the area. When at 17:00 one of the intruders announced from a window that the governor had rescinded his order to close the schools, “the mob went crazy” and “marched down Illinois Avenue” waving the Korean flag.²⁾

Their jubilation was short-lived. That evening, the Supreme Commander Allied



Figure 1: Koreans on trial in Kobe

Powers (SCAP), which had ordered the schools closed in the first place, issued its first (and only) state of emergency during its seven-year tenure in Japan. From midnight the Kobe police, acting on orders from Eighth Army Commander General Robert Eichelberger, went on a “Korean hunt” (*Chōsenjin gari*) that aimed to arrest anyone who “looked Korean.” The hunt rounded up 1,732 people, including Okinawans, Taiwanese, and Japanese, of whom 39 were tried for “leading demonstrations.”³⁾ Later that day, Japanese police entered the Korean ethnic schools, physically removed the students, and nailed shut the doors.

Eichelberger also rescinded the promises that the governor had made to the Koreans on April 24. In total, seventy-five people (including one Japanese) were brought to trial and, save for four acquitted Koreans, all were found guilty of one or more of the following charges: unlawfully entering the governor’s office, destroying office furnishings, threatening the governor, detaining the governor, interfering with Occupation and Hyogo Prefecture communications, and assaulting Occupation force members. The four people who initiated the incident, along with three other Koreans, were tried by the United States Military Commission and received sentences ranging from ten to fifteen years of hard labor. Nine other Koreans, tried by the General Provost Court of Kobe, received sentences that ranged from three months to four years and nine months of hard labor. A total of fifty-two Koreans were fined 50 yen.⁴⁾

The court summary provided explicit details of the destructive and violent actions of the Korean participants, but failed to adequately consider the anger and frustration that fueled them. We learn of the intruders’ primary motivation—to make the governor rescind his order to close the schools—only through the demands that they issued to the governor. The court summary did not explain the reasons why SCAP ordered the schools’ closures. Nor did it offer explanation as to why the Korean people might react to this order as they did. It also neglected to note the attempts that Koreans had made to gain audiences with the governor prior to April 24, or the governor’s stonewalling—his office had told the Koreans that the governor was out of town—to avoid having to meet them.⁵⁾

The tone of the court summary reflected the negative attitudes that Americans and Japanese directed toward “uncooperative” elements in Japan at the time, among whom included Koreans residing in both Japan and Korea. As today, the approximately 650,000 Japan-based Koreans then represented the country’s largest alien population. The arrogant attitude that many Koreans had adopted at the war’s end toward their former colonial masters had gained them a reputation as troublemakers in



Figure 2: Elizabeth Ryan (far left) with friends in Kobe

the eyes of both American and Japanese authorities. Their insistence on educating their children in Korean ethnic schools irked particularly the U.S. administration in at least two ways. Americans first saw their recalcitrance as an insult to U.S. authority as it blatantly defied SCAP orders that they integrate their children into the Japanese school system. Secondly, it demonstrated again the generally uncooperative behavior that Koreans had displayed throughout the duration of the Occupation to date, be it through working in black markets or collaborating with the Japanese Communist Party. To many, the obvious solution to the Korean problem was that they all be sent “home.” Yet, this was not easy for a number of reasons, including the fact that many younger Japan-based Koreans knew of no other home than Japan.⁶⁾

Letters sent by Elizabeth Ryan, a court reporter stationed in Kobe in 1947–1948, to her family in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, expanded on the court summary’s descriptions of the Kobe “riots” by articulating general impressions that Americans and Japanese held toward the incident, the Korean participants, as well as the Korean people in general.⁷⁾ Her writing provides a view that enhances our understanding of the incident from a Japan-based American perspective. Ryan’s letters also suggest outside influence from her colleagues. Their content informs us of the general conceptions (and misconceptions) that Occupation and Japanese administrations held toward Koreans in Japan, but also in southern Korea. Furthermore, these perspectives contribute to our understanding of how the United States viewed long-held conflicts between Japanese and Koreans, and the growing political unrest in southern Korea that contributed to the outbreak of civil war in 1950.

The Korean “Rioters” Slapped Uncle Sam in the Face

The details that Elizabeth Ryan entered into her letters reflected positively those recorded in the court summary outlined above, though she admitted that her information came primarily from a shortwave broadcast out of Los Angeles.⁸⁾ She first addressed the “riots” in an April 27, 1948, letter that she sent to alert her family of her safety. Here Ryan described the incident and accused the Koreans of insulting the United States—they slapped Uncle Sam’s face—by refusing to send their children to Japanese schools as required by Japan’s recently promulgated constitution.

What it boils down to is this. The Japanese constitution, under which they are now to run their country, was set up by SCAP (Supreme Commander Allied Powers, the organization revolving around Mac [MacArthur]) and it called for a

certain schools system with a certain curriculum, etc. The Japanese have accepted it and are putting it into effect, which means closing the 4 Korean schools in Kobe. The Koreans don't want their children to go to Japanese schools and have protested. While that may be well and good, it is really not the Japanese idea in the school but the American, and so indirectly a slap in the face for Uncle Sam because the Koreans have rejected the school system. On Saturday morning 70 Koreans visited the Prefecture headquarters and really tore things apart. The Governor had them put in jail—and that set off the fire.

The incident spread concern that, as indicated by the display of power that SCAP demonstrated in its immediate aftermath, such Korean behavior would spread throughout Japan. Ryan wrote that General Menoher's declaration of a "minor state of emergency" brought the Occupation's top officials to Kobe. Soon after this declaration was issued, orders went out from SCAP to arrest "every last Korean." Her observations here reflect the seriousness with which SCAP viewed the incident, perhaps because of its generally negative impression of Japan's Korean population. She writes:

Headquarters Kobe Base (Shinko Bldg) looked for all the world like it might be the gold deposit for the world—all the cars lined up in front in "stand by," guards with helmets and guns patrolling every 10 feet—an air of excitement all over. The order went out from the "brains" that every last Korean was to be arrested and by 4 o'clock last evening they had 1500 of them in jail.

Ryan predicted that the Koreans would be tried fairly, but then suggested that they may be made scapegoats so as to discourage the outbreak of similar incidents in the future.

Special courts and staffs of lawyers are coming down from Tokyo and Yokohama to assist in the speedy trial of these people. They will be tried in our Provost Court instead of the Japanese court—and they probably will get it, but good. I have heard from some of the officers who were in the conference that it really wasn't too bad, but if we let it go by unnoticed, the way things have gone in the rest of the world, this could be only the beginning.

Ryan returned to Milwaukee just as the trials reached their conclusion and thus she does not comment further on the sentencing of those involved. Her short reports of the incident are as informative for what they contain as they are for what they omit. Her suggestion that the Kobe incident might serve as the first of a series of riots across Japan suggests that she was ignorant of the fact that the Kobe incident was just the most recent of a series of similar incidents that took place in Yamaguchi (March 31), Okayama (April 8), Hyogo (April 10), Osaka (April 12), and Tokyo (April 20).⁹ A second Osaka demonstration held on April 26 attracted 30,000 people.

Also striking is her contention that the Koreans violated United States, rather than Japanese, law—by rejecting the constitutionally authorized Japanese school system they slapped Uncle Sam's face. She elaborated on this point in a May 4 letter where

she wrote, “SCAP ... set up a constitution which was accepted by the Japanese and the allied powers as workable. In the constitution it stated that a certain school system would be set up—the whole curriculum has to be changed to weed out their former teachings against democracy, etc. The Koreans had their own schools, 4 of which were in Kobe, and would not move out of their school buildings.”

Her claim that Japan’s postwar constitution legitimized closing the Korean ethnic schools is problematic in a number of ways. First, this document had much to say about promoting a democratic education system but nothing to say about the curriculum that would guide this education. The constitution’s “education clause,” Article 26, reads as follows:

All people shall have the right to an equal education correspondent to their ability, as provided for by law. 2) All people shall be obligated to have all boys and girls under their protection receive ordinary education as provided for by law. Such compulsory education shall be free.¹⁰⁾

If anything, this document, in requiring “equal education correspondent to their ability” legitimized the continued existence of the Korean ethnic schools. Indeed, after receiving orders to close these schools Japanese lawmakers debated whether this action would constitute a violation of this very document.¹¹⁾

The Fundamental Law of Education (*Kyōiku kihonhō*) passed by the Japanese government in March 1947 reinforced the rights guaranteed by Japan’s postwar constitution. Sometimes described as a revision of the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education, this legislation’s preamble declared as Japan’s intention to build “a democratic and cultural state” dependent on the “power of education.” It stipulated in Article 5 that Japan’s education system would be compulsory (*gimu*), and that “nationals” (*kokumin*) would be guaranteed free access to this education. It further stipulated in Article 4 that this education would provide “nationals” with “equal opportunities without discrimination by race, creed, sex, social status, economic position, or family origin.”

It was not until later that year, when the Japanese government passed the School Education Act (*Gakkō kyōikuhō*) that we find any mention of the language or content that this education was to assume. Article 21, no. 5 of this legislation stipulated as a goal students being able to “correctly understand the national language (*kokugo*, or Japanese) as necessary for their daily lives,” and to understand the present conditions and history of their country and villages. It was the formation of the postwar Ministry of Education, rather than legislation, which established the curriculum to which, in SCAP’s eyes, the Korean schools should adhere. In January 1947 the Ministry, acting under SCAP orders, notified prefectural governors of the inclusion of the Korean schools. It had to repeat this order one year later after the prefectures refused to enforce it.¹²⁾

These documents specifying that Japanese education regulations applied to “nationals” (*kokumin*) further complicated Ryan’s argument that the Koreans violated the constitution by refusing to send their children to Japanese schools. Her lack of knowledge alerts us to the precarious position that Koreans in Japan faced, particularly regarding their legal status. Ryan might have been aware that in May 1947, just months prior to

SCAP's January 1948 announcement that Koreans would be treated as "Japanese nationals," SCAP reversed course by subjecting Japan-based Koreans and Taiwanese to its Alien Registration Ordinance. Mirrored after the U.S. Alien Registration Act of 1940, it required all non-Japanese over the age of 14 to register their alien status and carry with them at all times their alien registration passbook. It further stipulated that violators would face deportation. This legislation served as the forerunner for the more comprehensive Alien Registration Act of 1952 that introduced mandatory fingerprinting of foreign residents.¹³⁾ This Act, along with the U.S. occupation authorities rescinding the Korean residents' voting rights, did not constitute the Korean people losing their Japanese nationality. The Japanese government never legally recognized Koreans as Japanese, as is evident by its forcing Koreans to maintain their official residency (*honsekichi*) in their ancestral homeland (Korea) rather than have it transferred to their adopted homeland (Japan) either during the colonial period or after surrender on August 15, 1945.¹⁴⁾

The Koreans' options were limited. To avoid having their children enrolled in Japanese schools, the Kobe schools could have joined other Korean schools in applying for private school status. This would have permitted their children to study with their Korean, rather than Japanese, counterparts. They would have remained subjected to a Japanese-based curriculum as private schools, too, were required to follow Ministry of Education regulations. Their other option (relocating to Korea) perhaps met the general intentions of the two seemingly contradictory legislative actions by SCAP—to rid Japan of its Korean problem. American residents in Japan, like Ryan, justified this response by claiming that Koreans had no desire to assimilate into Japanese society—they were simply interested in causing trouble—and thus had no business remaining in Japan. This conclusion, that they should return from where they came, demonstrated the shallow understanding of Ryan (and no doubt other Americans) of why Japan housed such a large Korean population, as well as the colonial-era roots of the postwar animosity Koreans harbored toward the Japanese people.

Koreans Have Been “Pains in the Neck”

SCAP's generally negative attitude toward the Korean people partially fueled its harsh reaction to the riots. Since the beginning of the occupation Koreans had been rather uncooperative. Soon after the war's end they, along with Japan-based Taiwanese and Japanese, participated in black market activities. Many Koreans joined the left-wing *Chaeil Chosŏnin yŏnmaeng* (League of Koreans in Japan), which maintained ties with the Japanese Communist Party. Reports on the Kobe incident emphasized that its leaders belonged to this group, and that their followers, being people of limited intelligence, were easily swayed by this wayward influence. Ryan echoed these views in her letters. On April 27 she remarked that these troublemakers, who were driven by leftist agitators, provided the Japanese police with a test to prove their capacity to maintain law and order.

The Koreans have been a pain in the neck all along. They have some strange notion that they are the Occupationaires, and really give these Japs a hard time. They go into shops and board street cars with no intention of paying. The poor

Jap was scared to do anything about it because he got beat up. So finally, we had to tell them to settle the thing with their own law enforcement agencies (have to let them stand on their feet) and we would back them up to quell rioting, etc. All this Korean business is Communist-instilled.¹⁵⁾

In an undated letter she repeated the claim that “much [Korean] activity is Communistic” adding that the recent “uprising ... among Japanese and Koreans” was hardly unusual. “It happened all the time.”

American images of Koreans had never been overly positive. Their negative views were evident in the U.S. being one of the first governments to recognize Japan’s paramount position on the peninsula in 1905, and among the first to bless its annexation of Korea five years later. Even after the U.S. went to war with Japan, calls could still be heard for Japan to be allowed to keep Korea.¹⁶⁾ A report titled “Aliens in Japan,” completed in June 1945, before the end of the war, incorporated many negative attitudes frequently seen in Japanese writing on Koreans.

The Koreans in Japan are, for the most part, a distinct minority group with a low social and economic position. Koreans generally live apart from Japanese, do not intermarry, and are not assimilated into Japanese life to any great extent. The traditional pattern of Korean migration was based on the seasonal need for labor in Japan and the migrants’ desire to return to Korea for the New Year holidays.

The report also borrowed images used by the Japanese (and other colonizers) to justify colonial annexation: The people lack the “Japanese fever for hard work [and] appear to be slow moving and lazy.”¹⁷⁾

American Consul Douglas Jenkins, who was stationed in Kobe, also viewed Koreans as left-wing troublemakers, and suggested that they marched to Moscow’s orders.

There are between 60,000 and 70,000 Koreans in Kobe. The great majority of them were imported by the Japanese during the war for manual labor. They are of the low type generally, poorly educated and include among their number a high number of thugs and roughnecks. ... This large, boisterous and dissatisfied, alien group in the population of the city is an easy prey to organizers and agitators. They are known to include among their leaders a number of communists and quasi-communists who probably receive instructions from Northern Korea or, if not that closely associated, certainly follow the party line.¹⁸⁾

Ryan’s and Jenkins’s appraisals of this minority suggest misconceptions of the people’s purpose for both coming to and remaining in Japan. The contention that the “great majority” of them came as forced laborers is probably inaccurate. Among the estimated 2.4 million Koreans in Japan at the end of the war, about one-third (or 700,000) had been forced to come to Japan to perform hard labor.¹⁹⁾ After the war, these people were given high repatriation priority. They thus lacked many of the reasons that kept Koreans from returning: their inability to bring their entire estate to Ko-

rea and their insufficient knowledge of the Korean language and culture. Those who characterized the participants in the incident as “thugs” or “roughnecks” emphasized their actions over their general purpose, to say nothing of their frustrations over having to endure forced assimilation as second-rate residents during the four decades of colonial rule. To many Koreans, SCAP’s education policies mirrored Japan’s colonial-era policy that forced their children to study in a Japanese-centered environment while facing discrimination and harassment.

The belief that the “rioters” were “communists and quasi-communists [who toed] the party line” also reflected an impression that SCAP officials had developed soon after the war’s end in southern Korea. In mid-September 1945, just weeks after the U.S. had established its Military Government in southern Korea, Political Adviser H. Merrell Benninghoff included the following in his “brief analysis of conditions in Korea.”

There is little doubt that Soviet agents are spreading their political thought throughout southern Korea, and several parades and demonstrations in Seoul have admittedly been communist-inspired. Communists advocate the seizure now of Japanese properties and may be a threat to law and order. It is probable that well-trained agitators are attempting to bring about chaos in our area so as to cause the Koreans to repudiate the United States in favor of Soviet “freedom” and control. Southern Korea is a fertile ground for such activities because USAFIK lacks sufficient troops to expand its area of control rapidly.²⁰⁾

This summary was partially accurate in its claim: many Koreans in postwar Japan did harbor communist or leftwing sympathies. However, it is a gross exaggeration to suggest that all Koreans, or even the vast majority of Koreans, held these views. Also, little evidence exists that demonstrates these groups were influenced by Moscow. Their roots, as Ken C. Kawashima has recently demonstrated, stemmed more from the colonial-era ties they formed with Japanese leftist groups to combat ill treatment by Japanese management.²¹⁾ The Korean Peninsula connection with Japan came with the smuggling operations that Koreans and Japanese carried out across the East Sea/Sea of Japan. Occasionally concerns were voiced in government documents as to whether these operations, in addition to the illegal transport of rice, weapons, money, and even people, were solidifying Soviet Union-North Korea-Japan leftist connections.²²⁾ Again, while this allegation may hold some truth, other plausible explanations exist, too. First, strict repatriation regulations forced people with larger estates to seek alternative routes home. Also, participation in this “illegal trade” may have materialized from the opportunities that the breakup of the organized “legal trade” networks provided.

These character slurs neglected to consider why Koreans objected so strongly to decisions that forced them to live under Japanese jurisdiction despite the hardships they had endured under colonial rule. The majority had not been brought to Japan against their will, as Ryan claimed. While, as the report “Aliens in Japan” explained, many of Japan’s Korean minority had resisted assimilation, the actions and attitudes of Japanese had also discouraged even those Koreans who wished to live as Japanese. Koreans faced discrimination on all fronts, from their admittance to schools to their efforts to secure employment and housing. Kawashima traces this discrimination from their

entry into the labor market, after being “severed from landed property in colonial Korea” by the cadastral survey the Japanese colonial government conducted from 1910–1918, to their struggles to gain work in Japan’s day labor markets, to their difficulties in finding suitable housing from Japanese landlords unwilling to rent to foreigners.²³⁾ The Japanese demonstrated their anti-Korean sentiments most blatantly following disasters. After the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake the Japanese police spread baseless rumors that Koreans were committing acts of terror (such as polluting water wells) that encouraged the senseless slaughter of over 7,000 Japan-based Koreans. Under both normal and abnormal circumstances the Japanese consistently offered little encouragement to Koreans who might otherwise have considered adopting Japanese culture.

Regardless of whether they planned to remain in Japan or return to Korea, for many the most attractive short-term option was to enroll their children in ethnic schools. Yet, this decision made little sense to American occupation administrators who saw the most efficient means of encouraging Korean assimilation (or repatriation) to be their studying alongside their Japanese counterparts. SCAP refused to see the Korean efforts for what they were—attempts to protect the aspiration that their children develop or maintain a sense of identity as Koreans. Rather, SCAP interpreted them as efforts to encourage a larger cause—international communist revolution. Ryan joined other American officials in tying the “riots” to left-wing efforts to disrupt the elections scheduled for May 10 in southern Korea. She wrote that SCAP had even drawn up evacuation plans should Korean actions threaten American residents.

The Korean elections certainly have been watched from here with much interest for a long time. The outbreak has been confined to the Communists and the Koreans, but for a time there was a great fear that the attack would be made on Americans and we were ready for it. Right after the first of the year hush-hush arrangements went on with preparations to evacuate all Americans from Korea if a riot broke out prior to the elections. Kobe naturally would be the first haven for them. Ships came over from the States loaded down with food and it was stored here. ... A month ago all petroleum products were cut off so that in case of evacuation there would be nothing left for the Reds to take over. Then Mrs. Keeney and her baby ... got out of there the last part of March as did many others. Many ships were out at sea ready to put in at Seoul and other ports in case evacuation became necessary even at the 11th hour.

She expressed relief that her suspicions this time came to naught: after “the elections have passed that fear is over for the time being at least.”

Ryan’s opinions again reflected those of her peers in Japan, as we see in Jenkins’s letter to William J. Sebald. Jenkins suggested that Koreans were not especially concerned over the future of their ethnic schools, but saw SCAP’s actions as an opportunity to protest a more important issue, the upcoming elections.

With the elections in Southern Korea imminent, any clash between Koreans in Japan and the Occupation forces, which could be played up as demonstrating the Occupation supporting the Japanese against the Koreans, would serve as useful

propaganda ammunition in Southern Korea, and could also be used throughout the world as a further example of “American imperialism.”

The Korean leaders were presented with a ready made cause for mass protest by the closing of Korean schools by the Japanese authorities for the failure of the schools to comply with recently enacted education legislation. No doubt, had this eminently satisfactory cause for protest not come to hand, the leaders would have invented another to obscure their underlying motive.²⁴⁾

SCAP officials might be excused for considering this possibility. The days leading up to the May 10 elections were filled with violence between left-wing and right-wing factions. The G-2 Periodic Reports of April 28, 1948, the day Ryan penned her first letter on the Kobe “riots,” listed the following acts of “civil unrest” in southern Korea. A “mob of unknown size threw a homemade hand grenade into the home of a local election candidate”; the “South Korean Labor Party [SKLP] has issued instructions that all *myŏn* [village] offices, police boxes and registration offices must be burned to destroy election records. SKLP has also promised that arms sent by the North Korean Labor Party will be available by 10 May”; and “three members of the local election committee were killed and one seriously injured when attacked by a mob of 20 terrorists armed with spears and shotguns.” This report also carried news of mob attacks on school principals, village heads, leaders of right-wing groups, and police officers.²⁵⁾ In addition, violent confrontations on a mass scale also broke out from April 1948 on the island of Cheju that left an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 of the islanders dead, and forced as many as 40,000 people to flee to Japan.²⁶⁾

While acts of violence committed by leftists against rightists received much more publicity in the U.S. reports, this bias probably better reflects the conservative tone of the reports than the actual situation. The Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC), for example, included in its reports similar acts of sabotage and violence that were instigated from both sides.²⁷⁾ The violence by left-wing groups no doubt also reflected general U.S. oppression of this element from as early as February 1946, when the Military Government passed the Political Party Registration Act (*Chŏngdang tŭngnokpŏp*), a law that Kim Kut’ae compares favorably to the colonial-era Peace Preservation Act (*Chian ijihŏ*) enacted in 1925.²⁸⁾ This oppression, and the fact that the election being limited to southern Korea strengthened the political divide between the two Koreas, led many left-wing groups to boycott the elections altogether. The violence, for the most part, appeared to be over local issues involving the election process rather than a broader effort to advance communism globally.

While occupation officials interpreted the Korean actions as inspired by communists, Koreans on the peninsula addressed the incident from a much different perspective. A CIC report noted that both left-wing and right-wing Koreans viewed this “oppression of Koreans in Japan” as U.S. backing for a renewal of Japanese expansion in East Asia. It paraphrased one left-wing newspaper article that reported “innocent Koreans [being] oppressed and murdered not only by the Japanese but also by the US Army Forces in Japan.” The report continued: “US leniency toward the Japanese is responsible for the renewal of brutality directed at the Korean people.” Syngman

Rhee, who later became the Republic of Korea's (ROK, or South Korea) first president, added that Koreans would have no difficulty choosing sides on this issue.²⁹⁾

“Send Them All Back to Korea”

Elizabeth Ryan's solution to the problem—send them all back to Korea, and if they do not want to return have them take Japanese citizenship—was a simplistic solution to a much more complex problem. Yet, it was one frequently offered by high-level officials in the Occupation and Japanese administrations. Upon arriving in Kobe, Eichelberger remarked that he wished he “had the *Queen Elizabeth* here to ship the whole lot of them [Koreans] to Korea.”³⁰⁾ Japanese Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru suggested in a letter to General Douglas MacArthur that the U.S. administration forcefully return all Koreans who were unable to “contribute to [Japan's] reconstruction.” MacArthur sympathized with Yoshida's general aim to rid Japan of this problem, but was unwilling to force Koreans to repatriate. He lamented that should he do so they “would have their heads cut off” by the South Korean government as they were all “North Koreans,” in other words, communists.³¹⁾

Such suggestions were impractical for a number of reasons. First, the idea that Koreans should “return” to Korea made little sense to this people, many of whom had been born and raised in Japan. The Japan-based Korean population consisted of a large number of first-generation Koreans, but also a growing number of second-generation and third-generation Koreans. For these latter people, Japan was the only “home” they knew. They had little or no knowledge of their ancestral language and culture. Indeed, some who had been raised as Japanese during the prewar and wartime periods did not learn that they were of Korean ancestry until after Korea's liberation. These deficiencies complicated the efforts of many repatriated Koreans to integrate into Korean society, leading them to once again cross over (now illegally) into Japan. As mentioned above, the 1947 Alien Registration Ordinance categorized all Japan-based Koreans as “foreigner” (or alien), even though SCAP expected the people to go to schools for “Japanese nationals.”³²⁾ Feeling unaccepted in both Korean and Japanese culture, Koreans looked to the ethnic schools for an opportunity to reorient their children to their ancestral culture. Even if Koreans could assume Japanese citizenship, which they could not, there still remained the problem of whether the Japanese would recognize them as such.³³⁾

Ryan and Eichelberger might have recognized that U.S. policy also complicated their return to Korea. Occupation policy severely limited the amount of belongings returnees (both Korean and Japanese) could bring. One provision restricted them to taking only up to 1,000 yen in currency and all the belongings they could carry, which were not enough to survive a few weeks much less to restart their lives in a new environment.³⁴⁾ Additional problems awaited them upon arrival in southern Korea. The war's end and Korea's division interrupted economic networks that Japan had nurtured throughout its East Asian empire. This caused acute shortages in food, energy, and natural resources in southern Korea, which further curtailed the ability of all Koreans to procure basic living essentials (housing and food), and critically limited their opportunities for employment. U.S. Military Government projections for improvement in these areas remained gloomy over the first years of its administration of south-

ern Korea. In addition, news of political unrest in southern Korea and increasing military confrontation with northern Korea also caused Koreans in Japan to think twice before returning to the Korean peninsula.³⁵⁾

The Kobe “Riots” and SCAP’s “Reverse Course”

Missing from Ryan’s commentaries were answers to two important questions: why was it the Japanese (rather than the Americans) who issued these orders, and why did they wait until this particular time to order the schools’ closing? The Korean situation in Japan represents one example where SCAP’s otherwise farsighted decision to funnel its orders through a Japanese administration worked to its disadvantage. To Japanese, being issued directives directly from a Japanese administrative body, even though they were aware of their U.S. occupation origins, was palatable. To Koreans, however, this same Japanese voice represented a continuation of four decades of colonial rule, and thus was far less acceptable.³⁶⁾ Having the Japanese government order the ethnic school to close only rekindled in Korean minds painful memories of Japan’s colonial rule, and the troubles that this regime had inflicted on this people over the past four decades. As Koreans frequently reminded United States officials, the above oversight represented a frequently seen pro-Japan bias in U.S. dealings with Japanese-Korean relations.³⁷⁾ Previously, U.S. officials in Korea had ordered Japanese officials to remain in their posts in the former colony. This decision was practical in that it kept experienced people at their posts. Predictably, however, it enraged Koreans who were in no mood to continue taking orders from Japanese or their Korean collaborators.

The context under which Korean ethnic schools were closed cannot be divorced from other actions then taking place in Japan. From 1947 SCAP initiated what has come to be known as the “reverse course,” in which the U.S. rolled back occupation policies that promoted democracy and demilitarization in Japan and came to concentrate efforts rather on Japan’s economic and political development. These changes were influenced by the Truman Doctrine of March 1947. Truman vowed to “help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes.”³⁸⁾ In Japan, the Truman Doctrine was manifested in SCAP’s purging of thousands of suspected leftists from positions of influence and in returning Japanese officials who had been purged immediately after the SCAP administration began to these positions, including a number of Class A war criminals. The “reverse course” also ended plans to dismantle Japanese conglomerates (*zaibatsu*) and initiated discussions urging Japanese rearmament. The fear driving these changes was expressed by the director of the United States State Department Policy Planning Staff, George Kennan, who during a March 1948 visit to Japan questioned whether “Japan’s powers of resistance to Communism could be taken for granted.”³⁹⁾ As China slipped into communism, the United States came to realize the paramount position that Japan would play in East Asian political affairs. SCAP’s order to the Japanese to close Korean ethnic schools, which it believed served as a breeding ground for communist indoctrination, reflected the spirit of this policy reversal.

The upcoming elections in southern Korea may also have factored in the timing of

the schools' closing. The formation of a democratically elected national assembly, and the anticipated establishment of a Korean government, would offer Japan-based Koreans the opportunity to register as South Korean nationals, which in turn might expedite their repatriation. This scenario was anticipated in the "Staff Study Concerning Koreans in Japan" dated August 16, 1948, and issued by the Office of the United States Political Advisor at Tokyo one day after the government of South Korea was officially established. This study began by outlining the problem: "There are about 600,000 Koreans in Japan; most of them were born in Korea or in Japan of Korean parents. It is estimated that on a monthly average 650 Koreans enter Japan illegally and that 400 are repatriated or deported to Korea." It then summarized the efforts that SCAP had made to repatriate Japan-based Koreans:

SCAP policy toward Koreans in Japan has been twofold: a) ... Koreans have been treated as liberated people and therefore strenuous efforts have been made to repatriate to Korea all Koreans in Japan who wished to return; b) Koreans who voluntarily continued to reside in Japan have been presumptively considered for purposes of treatment as retaining their Japanese nationality and are to be considered until such time as a duly established Korean Government accords them recognition as Korean nationals.

However, those Koreans who remained in Japan were reluctant to return to Korea due in part to the uncertain prospects in both halves of the peninsula. Yet, at the same time their continued presence in Japan caused a number of problems.

Politically, Koreans have attempted to establish a large degree of autonomy in Japan. Many of them have tended more and more to participate in communist activity, so that now the League of Koreans Residing in Japan, the principal Korean organization in Japan, is largely dominated by communists. Koreans move illegally between Japan and Korea serve as the link between Japanese communists and those on the continent of Asia—Korean, Chinese, and Russian. ... Socially the Koreans represent a group which does not readily assimilate to the Japanese both because of the long-standing prejudice of the latter and because of the uneducated and generally underprivileged character of most of the Koreans in Japan. ... The recent riots in Osaka and Kobe arising from refusal by the Koreans to comply with orders of the Japanese Government afforded a test of the extent of Korean autonomy in Japan. ... The riots have of course increased the bitterness between Japanese and Koreans, and it is undeniable that the Japanese would be only too happy to see all Koreans leave Japan.

The study then recommended changes to facilitate Korean repatriation that included increasing the amount of currency with which they could return to 100,000 yen, offering better protection for the part of their estate that exceeded this amount, and providing more convenient transportation and better terms for repatriation. At the same time the Staff Study report acknowledged that these measures alone would be insufficient to encourage complete repatriation. Those who remained in Japan, it ad-

vised, should be treated as Japanese nationals even if they registered as Koreans and held dual nationality, or if they reentered Japan after resettling in Korea. The study did little to resolve the problems of Korean residents. With the lone exception of the recommendation to increase the amount of their estate with which Koreans could return to Korea, SCAP made no changes in policy. It washed its hands of the problem, and suggested that the South Korean and Japanese governments could negotiate a solution after Japan regained sovereignty. Only in 1965 did Japan and the Republic of Korea sign both a treaty to normalize their diplomatic relations and an agreement that set conditions for Japan-based Koreans to meet should they seek permanent residence in Japan. Japan-North Korea relations have yet to be normalized.

The shock of the violent response by Koreans to SCAP's order to close the Korean ethnic schools initially led to the occupation administration's harsh reaction. Yet, the incident as a whole also awakened SCAP to the need to negotiate with Korean leaders. On May 5, 1948, the *Asahi Shinbun* declared the problem solved when the Osaka and Kobe schools agreed to apply for authorization (*ninka*) as private schools.⁴⁰⁾ The Korean population could only view this result as defeat, a compromise that benefited the Japanese as it created separate Korean and Japanese schools. Koreans, on the other hand, did gain the right to educate their children in a Korean environment and to offer them a limited Korean ethnic program. But this was also an education that remained subject to Japanese Ministry of Education directives.

Tension heightened after the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) in September 1948. SCAP soon banned display of the DPRK flag at rallies, subjugating violators to arrest and deportation to the ROK. Exactly one year later, SCAP enforced its April 1949 order for the League of Koreans to disband. On September 9, 500 Japanese police officers locked the doors of the organization's headquarters. The Japanese government again targeted ethnic schools by ordering 350 of them to close. Of those that applied for private school status, only three were approved. Other schools gained recognition as "miscellaneous schools" that were freed from Japanese influence, and thus able to develop a Korean-based curriculum.⁴¹⁾ A half-century later 90 percent of all Japan-based Korean children received their education as minorities in Japanese schools, many obscured by the use of Japanese names, fluent Japanese language abilities, and familiarity with Japanese culture and mannerisms.⁴²⁾

Notes

- 1) An earlier version of this article appeared in *The Asia-Pacific Journal* (<http://japanfocus.org>) in November 2008. The author would like to thank Mark Selden for suggesting this topic, Katalin Ferber for comments on an earlier version of this paper, Lim Chŏl for valuable insights to questions about the incident and Japan-based Koreans in general, and Ken Alley for permission to use the pictures of Elizabeth Ryan and the Kobe court scene.
- 2) Unless specified otherwise, information on the riots is taken from "United States of America vs. Kim Dai Sam et al.: Review of the Staff Judge Advocate," *Records of the U.S. Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Japan, 1945-1949*, reel 3, (Tokyo: Japanese Diet Library, microfilm).
- 3) Pak Kyŏnsik, *Kaihō-go zainichi Chōsenjin undōshi* [The History of Post-liberation Japan-based Korean Demonstrations], (Tokyo: San'ichi shoten, 1989), 195.
- 4) "Sentences Imposed as Results of Kobe-Osaka Riots in April 1948," *Records of the U.S. Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Japan, 1945-1949*, reel 3 (Tokyo: Japanese Diet Library,

- microfilm).
- 5) Changsoo Lee, "Koreans under SCAP: An Era of Unrest and Repression," in *Koreans in Japan: Ethnic Conflict and Accommodation*, edited by Changsoo Lee and George De Vos, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 81.
 - 6) Estimating just how many Koreans were first, second, or third generation is rather difficult. One war-time report, "Aliens in Japan," estimated that in 1930 eight percent of all Japan-based Koreans were born in Japan. Office of Strategic Services, "Aliens in Japan" (June 29, 1945), "Occupation of Japan" United States Planning Documents, 1942–1945, vol. III, (Tokyo: Japanese Diet Library, microfilm), 5–6. According to Richard H. Mitchell, by 1950 this figure had grown to just under half (49.9%) of Japan-based Koreans having been born in Japan. Richard H. Mitchell, *The Korean Minority in Japan*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 159.
 - 7) These letters, which totaled over 1,000 pages, were discovered in a used bookstore in Nebraska. *The Japan Times* staff writer Reiji Yoshida has written a series of articles based upon them. I am indebted to him for sharing with me the letters involving the Kobe riots along with other documents that he collected involving the incident. His articles can be found at <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20080905f1.html> (accessed October 26, 2008). Information on Elizabeth Ryan's career in Japan is from Reiji Yoshida, "Letters from Kobe: Letter trove details Occupation life," *The Japan Times* (September 5, 2008; <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20080905f1.html> (accessed September 23, 2009)).
 - 8) This was probably due to her and "the boys" being restricted to camp, as she reported in her April 27, 1948, letter.
 - 9) Yi Wölsun, "Zainichi Chōsenjin no minzoku kyōiku to zainichi Chōsenjin kyōiku" [Japan-based Korean Ethnic Education and Japan-based Korean Education], in *Zainichi Chōsenjin no rekishi to bunka* [History and Culture of Japan-based Koreans], edited by Pak Chongmyōng, (Tokyo: Akashi shoten, 2006), 221.
 - 10) "The Constitution of Japan," Japan Institute of Congressional Law, at http://www.jicll.jp/kenpou/all/kenpou_english.html (accessed October 26, 2008).
 - 11) Hiromitsu Inokuchi, "Korean Ethnic Schools in Occupied Japan, 1945–52," in *Koreans in Japan: Critical Voices From the Margin*, edited by Sonia Ryang, (London: Routledge/Curzon, 2000), 150.
 - 12) Both orders were originated by SCAP. Takemae Eiji, GHQ: The Allied Occupation of Japan and Its Legacy, trans. Robert Ricketts and Sebastian Swann, (New York: Continuum, 2001), 462.
 - 13) *Ibid.*, 450.
 - 14) Thus, anytime a change had to be made in family status (e.g. birth, marriage, or divorce) a member of the family would have to return to Korea to make the change in the family registry. Higuchi Yūichi claims this regulation limited the number of applicants when, from 1938, Japan began recruiting volunteers for its military as Japan-based Korean candidates were required to travel to Korea to complete the application process. Higuchi Yūichi, *Kōgun heishi ni sareta Chōsenjin* [Koreans Enlisted in the Imperial Army], (Tokyo: Hyōronsha, 1992), 27.
 - 15) In another undated letter Ryan writes that the massive "Korean hunt" was a demonstration to the Russians (who were suspected of being "behind all this unrest") to make them, as she put it, "stay out of our play pen here."
 - 16) For example, Hugh Byas, *Government by Assassination*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), 359–360.
 - 17) Office of Strategic Services, "Aliens in Japan," 2, 15.
 - 18) "Letter from Jenkins to U.S. Political Adviser William Sebald" (May 4, 1948). *Records of the U.S. Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Japan, 1945–1949*, reel 15, (Tokyo: Japanese Diet Library, microfilm).
 - 19) See William Underwood, "New Era for Japan-Korea History Issues: Forced Labor Redress Efforts Begin to Bear Fruit," *Japan Focus*, http://www.japanfocus.org/_William_Underwood_New_Era_for_Japan_Korea_History_Issues_Forced_Labor_Redress_Efforts_Begin_to_Bear_Fruit (accessed October 26, 2008).
 - 20) H. Merrell Benninghoff, "The Political Adviser in Korea (Benninghoff) to the Secretary of State," *Foreign Relations of the United States VI* (September 15, 1945), 1051. This attitude may have been influenced by communications sent by the Japanese colonial government in Korea to U.S. forces in

- Okinawa, where they prepared for their new assignment in Korea. See Kobayashi Tomoko, “GHQ no zainichi Chōsenjin ninshiki ni kan suru ikkōsatsu” (One consideration of GHQ’s perception of Koreans), *Chōsenshi kenkyūkai ronbunshū* vol. 32, (October 1994), 165–192, for a summary of suspicions by the U.S. occupation of communist influence in southern Korea. Bruce Cumings found little evidence to support the often-heard contention that Soviet or North Korean sources were supplying southern guerrillas. Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 245. He writes that although from around the time of Syngman Rhee’s election in May 1948 southern communists began receiving guidance from North Korean communists, it “cannot be said [they] were mere creatures of Kim Il Sung” (Ibid., 218).
- 21) Ken C. Kawashima, *The Proletarian Gamble: Korean Workers in Interwar Japan*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
 - 22) For discussion of the smuggling operations see Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “An Act Prejudicial to the Occupation Forces: Migration Controls and Korean Residents in Post-Surrender Japan,” *Japan Studies* vol. 24 no. 1, (May 2004), 5–28; Mark E. Caprio, “The Detritus of Empire: Images of “Japanese-ness” in Liberated Southern Korea, 1945–1950,” *Occasional Papers* no. 14, (Tokyo: Centre for Asian Studies, Rikkyo University Asia Centre, 2009).
 - 23) Kawashima, *The Proletarian Gamble*, 209.
 - 24) “Letter from Jenkins to Sebald.” For similar views see “General Dean’s Answer to Written Press Questions of May 6, 1948,” in *Records of the U.S. Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Japan, 1945–1949*, reel 15, (Tokyo: Japanese Diet Library, microfilm).
 - 25) G-2 Periodic Reports (April 28, 1948).
 - 26) Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, 220–221.
 - 27) CIC Reports carried statistics that suggested these acts to have been more balanced than the information included in G-2 reports, which did not list right-wing acts against left-wing groups. In its May 16, 1948 report it recorded 162 deaths of which forty-three people were members of left-wing groups and fifty-nine were members of right-wing groups. Counter Intelligence Corps Semi-Monthly Report (May 16, 1948), *CIC Pogoso* (1945.9–1949.1) 3, (Seoul: Hallim Taehakkyo Asia Munhwa Yōn’guso, 1995), 406–407, 424.
 - 28) Kim Kut’ae, *Migunjang ūi Hanguk t’ongch’i* (U.S. military administration rule in Korea), (Seoul: Pagyōngsa, 1992), 151–152. The Peace Preservation Act served as a model for South Korea’s National Security Law that has generally been applied to Koreans who demonstrated sympathy to communism or to North Korea.
 - 29) Counter Intelligence Corps Semi-Monthly Report (April 23–30, 1948), 15.
 - 30) Lee, “Koreans under SCAP,” 82.
 - 31) Changsoo Lee, “The Legal Status of Koreans in Japan,” in *Koreans in Japan: Ethnic Conflict and Accommodation*, edited by Changsoo Lee and George De Vos, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 138.
 - 32) Lee, “The Legal Status of Koreans in Japan,” 138. This was in part a decision based on practicalities. Had SCAP granted Koreans the special status they demanded, they would have been eligible for special food rations and other privileges afforded peoples of United Nations states. The sheer size of the Japan-based Korean population made this option rather impractical. See Mark E. Caprio, “Resident Aliens: Forging the Political Status of Koreans in Occupied Japan,” in *The U.S. Occupation and the Transformation of Japanese Politics and Society*, edited by Mark E. Caprio and Yoneyuki Sugita, (London: Routledge, 2007), 178–199.
 - 33) This was surely the case during the colonial period, when even Koreans who identified themselves as having “become Japanese” found that Japanese rejected this claim. See my *Japanese Assimilation Policy in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945*, (Seattle: University of Washington, 2009).
 - 34) As I describe in “Resident Aliens,” more entrepreneurial returnees were able to circumvent this restriction by exchanging money en route to Korea with Japanese returning to Japan. As we shall see below, even SCAP officials recognized this restriction as a formidable barrier to Korean repatriation.
 - 35) Bruce Cumings offers a more complete description of this violence. See his two-volume *Origins of the Korean War*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, 1990). See also Mark E. Caprio and Yu Jia, “Legislating Diaspora: The Contribution of Occupation-era Administrations to the Preservation of Ja-

- pan's Korean Community," in *Diaspora without Homeland: Being Korean in Japan*, edited by John Lie and Sonia Ryang, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 21–38.
- 36) SCAP might have anticipated this response from the negative (and often violent) reaction that Koreans demonstrated in Korea over the U.S. Military Government's initial decision to maintain Japanese officials in their colonial-era positions, and later to rely on Koreans trained by the Japanese in police and administrative positions.
 - 37) The Republic of Korea's first president, Syngman Rhee reminded U.S. Ambassador John Muccio in May 1949 that Franklin Delano Roosevelt's agreeing in Cairo to Korea's postwar occupation represented the second time a Roosevelt (the first being Theodore at the time of Japan's making Korea its protectorate in 1905) had betrayed Korea. "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador in Korea (Muccio)" (May 2, 1949), *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1003–1005.
 - 38) Truman delivered this speech before Congress to request \$100 million in aid for Greece and Turkey. Quoted in Warren I. Cohen, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*, vol. IV, *America in the Age of Soviet Power, 1945–1999*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 38–39.
 - 39) George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925–1950*, (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1967), Chapter 16. For a summary of this "reverse course" see Mark E. Caprio and Yoneyuki Sugita, "Introduction: The U.S. Occupation of Japan—Innovation, Continuity, and Compromise," in Caprio and Sugita, eds., *Democracy in Occupied Japan*, 12–17.
 - 40) "Shiritsu de ninka shinsei: Chōsen gakkō mondai wa kaiketsu" (Korean school problem is solved: They will apply for authorization as private schools), *Asahi Shinbun* (May 5, 1948). Korean schools in Tokyo remained open, but they were absorbed by the Japanese school system which supplied the schools with Japanese staff and teachers (Inokuchi, "Korean Ethnic Schools," 154).
 - 41) See Inokuchi, "Korean Ethnic Schools," 153–155.
 - 42) See Eriko Aoki, "Korean Children, Textbooks, and Educational Practices in Japanese Primary Schools," in *Koreans in Japan: Critical Voices from the Margin*, edited by Sonia Ryang, (London: Routledge/Curzon, 2000), 157.