

Categorising Victimhood: Manchukuo and the Gendered National History of the Japanese Empire’s Violent Collapse in Northeast Asia

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Abstract

National victimhood is rarely immutable or permanent; instead, it reflects the transformations in society and ideas about citizenship. In Cold War historiography, the Japanese empire—a behemoth that controlled more than 7.5 million square kilometres of land and sea and ruled over millions of imperial subjects—has mostly been analysed through the lens of national history. This national framework has often discounted the importance of empire and ignored its many legacies. One consequence of this limited vision was the categorisation of Japanese victimhood along the lines of gender and the civilian-military divide. These divisions and omissions were not limited to the non-Japanese—even former “defenders of empire” might find themselves left out of the mainstream accounts of history.

Keywords: Cold War, gender, Japanese Empire, Manchukuo, Red Army, victimhood

Introduction

The Soviet Red Army's attack on Japan's puppet-kingdom of Manchukuo in northeast China in August 1945 left indelible scars in the memory of its survivors. Crossing the Soviet-Manchukuo border in the small hours of August 9, the Soviet troops advanced at lightning speed towards the Manchukuo capital of Shinkyō (present day Changchun) and further south, wreaking havoc and causing uncontrollable panic in Japanese settlements along the way. The vaunted Kwantung Army, stationed in Manchukuo to protect the empire's frontiers, was overwhelmed by the speed of its Soviet counterpart and hastily withdrew south, leaving over 200,000 Japanese settlers defenceless in the face of the onrushing enemy. In the 1930s, these agricultural pioneers had left the overcrowded Japanese home islands for Manchuria in search of land and livelihood; now they had to leave their new land and new lives and flee south. Many lost family members during the escape, and some voluntarily left their children with the local Chinese or Manchus to ensure their safety.¹

The brief Soviet-Japanese War of August-September 1945 has been a source of Japanese national trauma ever since, both for its survivors and the larger society that learned about it from history books and memoirs. This history was influenced significantly by the memoir genre—the recollections of witnesses and survivors published during the post-war decades. Many of these memoirs, some of which became bestsellers, concentrated on the tortuous escape of Japanese residents from the Soviets and the losses suffered along the way. When the guns stopped firing in Manchuria, the Soviets laid down the law and disarmed the Japanese military; the civilian population that had been displaced by the invasion and that had not managed to return to Japan was placed in internment camps. Thus, following the storm of war there came the Soviet occupation, which imposed new difficulties on the Japanese residents. During the following year, civilians were slowly repatriated, except those who decided to remain in China of their own volition. Thousands of Japanese skilled workers chose to stay because their expertise in operating industrial facilities was highly sought after by the Chinese authorities who were keen to rebuild the economy; and many young Japanese women elected to marry local men and stay on.²

In short, the empire's downfall in northeast Asia, while violent during the days of battle, was not only about suffering and victimhood for the Japanese residents on the Chinese mainland. Nevertheless, it has entered postwar Japanese collective memory predominantly through stories of violence and frantic escape from the Soviet enemy, of looting, rape, and untimely deaths. These repatriation memoirs—*hikiagemono*, many of them authored by civilian, often female, writers—achieved considerable popularity in postwar Japan.³ In these recollections, the victimhood of Japanese civilians left at the mercy of the fearsome invading army and hostile locals was a recurring theme.

Despite the diversity of experiences depicted in them, these recollections paint only part of the picture. They convey faithfully the overwhelming pain and misery of the survivors; nevertheless, the suffering narrated as indiscriminate violence against civilians was actually victimhood categorised along specific lines. The first line of division was national: the majority of memoirs prioritised Japanese suffering, rarely mentioning the victimhood of other peoples in the region—particularly that of Japanese colonial subjects (Chinese, Manchus, and Koreans)—before or after the Soviet attack. It is true that the nationalisation of victimhood was hardly unique to Japan; in the century of two deadly world wars, victim narratives provided the perfect raw material for national identities across the world.⁴ Nevertheless, the post-war narratives of Japanese victimhood were peculiar—and important—because they captured the transition from the wartime imperial mindset to the postwar Japanese national mentality.

The second and less studied division—contained within the national framework—happened along gender lines. Even within the nationally-contained narratives of the empire's fall in northeast China, Japanese suffering was further divided into two categories. The first category, embodying the majority of Japanese experiences in Manchukuo and thus becoming the mainstream narrative, was about the sacrifices of Japanese civilians. Humiliation and pain came in all shapes, but civilian suffering was most poignantly captured in the abuse of Japanese women: the pain of a mother who had lost her children trying to escape the enemy, or the trampled honour of a young girl who had been raped by Soviet soldiers

and so on. This category dominated the people's history of Manchukuo—still preserved in the nostalgia for the lost dream of building a model colony, “an ideal state,” among some Japanese citizens.⁵

I first noticed the existence of a second category of Japanese Manchurian victimhood during my doctoral research into the so-called “Siberian Internment” of Japanese former servicemen in Soviet forced-labour camps. The internment was about the suffering of men, the many stories of soldiers, held in captivity that were pushed to the margins of postwar Japanese collective memory.⁶ Just like the *hikiagemono*, the internment memoirs start in Manchuria; a few days after disarming the surrendering Kwantung Army, the Soviets rounded up one half-million men and sent them to the USSR as forced labourers. The majority of these captives would stay in the USSR for the next three to four years; while a thousand or so “war criminals” convicted by Soviet courts would remain in Siberia until late 1956.⁷ Their captivity—a dark chapter in modern Japanese history—is still little known internationally. Even after they finally returned home, many of the Siberian internees continued to suffer from suspicion and discrimination in Japanese society, and their victimhood was not acknowledged nationwide until the end of the Cold War.

Thus, the gendered division on which I base this essay was perpetrated in Manchuria by the Soviets. The USSR required young men who could give their labour to the rebuilding of its war-torn economy; it thus selected those who could do the hard work. As a result, in the months following Japan's defeat a total of 600,000 military—women, children, and the elderly—were sent back to Japan as the “remnants of empire.” In this paper, based on multilingual source material, I demonstrate how even within the exclusively Japanese national history of defeat at Soviet hands, the humiliating history of imperial downfall prioritised civilian—and female—suffering, whereas the Japanese male and almost all non-Japanese suffering was largely overlooked. I emphasise how the collapse of the multinational empire was categorised in narrowly national and—within this national history—gendered terms. I start with an overview of the nation-centred narratives of victimhood, before moving on to an analysis of Siberian narratives of hardship and

humiliation marginalised in Cold War Japan—just like the suffering of the victims of Japan's empire.

From Imperial Consciousness to National Narratives

Towards the end of the half-century of its existence, Japan's Asian empire (1895-1945) had managed to instill in its subjects—or at least the Japanese population of the home islands—an ambitiously pan-Asian imperial consciousness that went well beyond the borders of the Japanese archipelago. This mindset, based on the idea of liberating Asia from the yoke of western imperialism, promised to unite the “eight corners of the world under one roof.”⁸ The Japanese empire's collapse, however, was followed by an almost instantaneous reversal of this imperial mindset. According to historian Barak Kushner, “Japan's inhabitants were used to empire; the idea and actuality of it were ideologically satisfying and formed part of their self-image and existence”—and now they had to leave the empire behind.⁹ The imperial consciousness was soon—perhaps too soon—replaced by a narrowly national Japanese narrative, absent from which was not only the expansionist rhetoric, but also any mention of the millions of non-Japanese former imperial subjects.

To be sure, the empire's Korean, Taiwanese and other subjects had never been equal with the Japanese even when Korea and Taiwan were formally part of Japan.¹⁰ But as the empire disappeared into oblivion during the Allied Occupation, Japan commenced its abrupt transition back to being simply a nation-state. Just as the ethnic Japanese nationals abroad were being returned to their home islands, the non-Japanese former imperial subjects moved to Japan by the empire were now called “third country nationals.”¹¹ There was no place for the latter in the new national identity, which was narrowly defined along ethnic lines. During the transition from the wartime expansionist empire to the postwar exclusivist nation-state, history and memory would also have to fit within these strict national boundaries.

Both during the Allied Occupation and subsequently as Japan acquired the role of a Cold War US ally, the new national narrative favoured a separation between the pre-war and the post-war.¹² Japanese

victimhood became an important component of the new national discourse, helping to establish a break with the war and diverting attention away from Japan's responsibility as a perpetrator.¹³ The moral high ground afforded by the position of a victim was almost universally persuasive; it took only a few years even for some Japanese leftists—members of the pacifist movement who were perhaps most likely to acknowledge Japan's role as a victimiser of Asian peoples—to become preoccupied by Japanese victimhood.¹⁴ During the period described by Sebastian Conrad as a “clinical separation of Japan from its empire,” Japanese victimisation of Asian peoples and of the Allied servicemen who had perished in the battlefields of Asia was excluded from the new national consciousness.¹⁵ In the mainstream narratives of both the war and the post-war period, the violent sacrifice of the *Japanese* people became paramount, while other victimhoods were regularly passed over in silence. A comparative reading of memoirs and archives shows that even writing about experiences where suffering was widespread and indiscriminate—for example, in the Soviet labour camps for foreign POWs—Japanese memoirists prioritised Japanese victimhood.

More importantly, when writing about Japanese victimhood that readily invites comparison with episodes of Japanese victimisation—for example, the victimhood of Japanese POWs in Siberia as opposed to the victimisation of Allied POWs by the Japanese on the Burma-Thai Railway—it was often the former that received mention. While accounts of sexual abuse of Japanese women by Soviet soldiers are rife in the Manchurian *hikiagemono*, these memoirists hardly ever mention the long-term, systematic sexual abuse of Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and other Asian “comfort women” by the Imperial Japanese Army. The Cold War necessities of being America's ally reinforced this national container of history, reducing Japan's war in Asia to the Pacific War (1941-1945) against the US, and ossifying in Japanese eyes their country's unique victimhood of being “the only nation to have suffered nuclear bombing.”¹⁶

Even when isolated from non-Japanese suffering, the account of Japanese national victimhood was neither monolithic nor immutable. Rather, it was further divided; to put it in straightforward terms, some

Japanese victims received more attention than others. The memoirs of defeat in Manchukuo are important because they highlight this selective construction of national narratives, whereby the hardships and humiliation suffered by one group of Japanese citizens was prioritised over that of other groups.

Victims par excellence

It is not an exaggeration to say that the Soviet Union was the most despised enemy in postwar Japan; it “consistently headed the list of ‘most hated countries.’”¹⁷ There were two major reasons behind this indignation, both related to the USSR’s Manchurian invasion. First, at the time of the Soviet invasion, the USSR and Japan were still bound by the 1941 Neutrality Pact; the Soviet Union announced its renunciation of the pact only hours before Red Army troops crossed into Manchukuo. This was described by Japanese historians as a backstabbing of Japan in a time of crisis—the Soviets had entered the war between the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.¹⁸ Second, even as Joseph Stalin was planning to invade Manchukuo, the Japanese harboured the hope that the USSR would help mediate a better peace deal with the Allies.¹⁹ The invasion was a betrayal for the Japanese; one can even say that the latter saw themselves as victims *par excellence* vis-à-vis the Soviets.

This righteous fury with the Soviet attacker became more acute once victors and vanquished came into actual contact. When Red Army soldiers started looting the possessions of Japanese residents, this added insult to injury. Japanese memoirists recounted with indignation the propensity of the invaders to confiscate whatever they liked—wristwatches and cameras were especially prized among the Soviet officers. Furumi Tadayuki, a high-ranking officer in the Manchukuo government, remembered the search carried out in his house by the Soviet officers who came to arrest him; the arrest soon turned into a looting, with the Soviets eventually marching off with his “camera, sewing machine, and gramophone.”²⁰ The plunder was carried out at the state level, too—on August 30, 1945, the USSR’s State Defence Committee issued an order “to transport trophy equipment from Manchuria”—many Japanese-owned factories and plants were dismantled and simply

hauled away on Soviet freight trains.²¹

Yet of all the offences committed by the Soviets, the rape of Japanese women was perhaps the most infuriating. Almost every memoir of the fall of Manchuria mentions it; as argued by anthropologist Mariko A. Tamanoi, “none of the victims of rape committed by Russians has ever written a memoir, but the authors of memoirs often write *about* such victims.”²² Furumi Tadayuki remembered young Japanese women shaving their heads and dressing in Buddhist robes to avoid the attention of potential rapists.²³ Although it is impossible to place subjective human suffering on any scale, it should be remembered that rape was one among many atrocities endured by Japanese women, and it was perhaps not the most horrible experience. For many narrators, the most devastating experience, recounted in memoir after memoir, was observing the deaths of their children.²⁴ Despite this, rape became a central component of civilian memoirs of the fall of Manchukuo, the one that resonated most with their readership. Traditional gender stereotypes played a part in the perception of Soviet crimes; it was as if in the rape by the Soviet enemy all of Japan’s national humiliation was contained. Sataka Makoto, an author and critic, summarised it well when he said, “the story of the Soviet army violating Japanese women became the archetypal image of the Soviet Union during the post-war.”²⁵

Due to the limitations of space, I can only briefly analyse one memoir—undoubtedly the most important account of Manchuria’s fall—Fujiwara Tei’s *Nagareru hoshi wa ikite iru* (The Shooting Stars Are Alive), which was published in 1949.²⁶ Fujiwara wrote this memoir of her flight from Manchuria as a kind of last will and testament to her children who did not remember the war’s end—the youngest of the three had been only a month old when the Soviets invaded Manchukuo. She wanted her children to learn about her suffering and that of other Japanese civilians. Her readership, however, far exceeded the members of her family: the book became a publishing phenomenon in Japan and remains in print even today; in the post-war decades, it has been made into a film and several TV dramas. And its popularity was not confined to Japan; according to historian Michael Kim, upon its publication in Korea, the book became a “phenomenal success and sold out its entire

first edition in just three days.”²⁷ Japanese historian Narita Ryūichi has described Fujiwara’s account as telling the story of “divisions and rifts in the ‘family’ and the Japanese community” that opened in the wake of the Soviet-Japanese war.²⁸ The rifts within the family—seen in the fury of the Japanese women at the men who left them and their children helpless before the enemy—reinforce the gendered division I propose here. The memoir thus brought civilian suffering to the forefront and contributed to the gendered narratives of the empire’s fall; writing about experiences similar to the ones depicted in Fujiwara’s work, historian Lori Watt has claimed that “Manchuria was feminized.”²⁹ Moreover, according to Narita, Fujiwara’s memoir did not pay enough attention to the “other”—“the figure of the Korean is not sufficiently mentioned in the book.”³⁰ In other words, Fujiwara’s recollections remain confined within the limits of the Japanese nation; they popularised the idea of national victimhood and served to reinforce the rhetorical national boundaries in post-war Japan.

More importantly, Fujiwara’s book etched in the readers’ minds the image of a woman who heroically crossed the steppe and swam across rivers with her children in tow, refusing to give up. This heroism of the civilian mother that challenged the gender stereotype overshadowed the shame and misery of the defeated Japanese man unable to protect these defenceless mothers and children.

Stories of Siberian Internment in Cold War Japan

Within the Japanese narratives of victimhood at Soviet hands, one chapter has only in the past few decades gained a place in the canon of national suffering. This chapter started on August 23, 1945, a mere three days after the Kwantung Army officers agreed terms of surrender with the Soviet military leadership. On this day, the Chairman of the USSR’s State Defence Committee, Joseph Stalin, signed a top secret order that issued instructions to “select up to 500,000 Japanese [...] physically fit to work in the conditions of the Far East and Siberia” and to transport them to the Soviet Union.³¹ The order gave a start to the “Siberian Internment” of former Japanese servicemen in the USSR—one of the greatest forced

migrations in modern history, an odyssey of epic proportions that saw an army of Japanese captives transported, exploited for their labour and indoctrinated by the victorious Soviet Union.

The real reasons behind Stalin's decision to intern Japanese prisoners-of-war remain hidden in Soviet archives that are still inaccessible to historians, over seven decades later. One could point to an obvious reason—the desperate need for labour in rebuilding the Soviet economy ravaged in the life-and-death conflict against Nazi Germany. This easy answer overlooks two important points. Firstly, transporting, accommodating, guarding, and feeding a half-million-strong army of foreign citizens came at an enormous economic and logistical cost for the USSR. Second, the costs of accommodating the foreign POWs—there were close to 2 million of them in Soviet camps even before the arrival of the Japanese—almost always exceeded the returns from their labour; thus, the Soviet leadership valued these captives not only as an able workforce but also as a potential instrument in the coming Cold War. The propaganda chiefs in Moscow were aware of the potential contribution foreign POWs could make to extending Soviet influence in their respective countries, and sanctioned a meticulous re-education and propaganda program aimed at persuading the detainees of the advantages of Soviet-style communism. In the four years that it took for the majority of the Japanese internees to return home, all of them contributed their labour to various Soviet industries, and over 20,000 of them attended communist schooling—a fact that partly explains the suspicion with which the Japanese society greeted their return in the late 1940s.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the complex set of ideas conjured up by the word “Siberia” haunted the Japanese captives even after they finally returned home in the late 1940s and early 1950s. A rich combination of feelings and memories—indignation at the hardships they endured, fascination at having lived in a completely different political system, as well as the relief of finally making it back alive to Japan and to their loved ones—meant that many Siberian returnees put pen to paper following their return. Yet there was another, perhaps more important, reason for their decision to document the Siberian Internment as they

had experienced it—the need to explain themselves to the society that did not seem to trust them, the urge to reclaim their place in post-war society as rightful Japanese citizens.

The more than 2,000 memoirs and recollections published by the Japanese survivors of Stalin's POW camps are as diverse as their authors' backgrounds and experiences, but they all document a certain kind of victimhood—that of former servicemen illegally detained, exploited, and indoctrinated by the enemy. Ubiquitous in these memoirs of victimhood are three themes specific to the Soviet labour camps. The first theme is the cold: even those internees who were accustomed to the frigid winters of northeast China found the harsh climate of Soviet Siberia and the Far East extremely demanding; their ordeals were aggravated by accommodation often more suitable for cattle than human beings, as well as the lack of appropriate clothing. Many of the at least 20,000 Japanese who died during the first winter of the internment, one of the coldest on record, succumbed to cold and diseases compounded by frigid temperatures. The second theme is hunger—at least during the first two years of the internment, food was scarce in the USSR—with conservative estimates putting the number of Soviet victims of famine in 1946-1947 at around 2 million people³². In such conditions, it was not surprising that foreign POWs were constantly underfed. They often went to great lengths to fill their bellies: many ate wild berries and forest mushrooms, and some boiled tree bark and hunted for small forest animals; after poisoning spread, the camp authorities prohibited gathering wild food.³³ The situation improved from 1947 on as the Soviet economy started its recovery, but the misery of the initial months in hungry camps remained etched in the memory of survivors. The third theme is that of backbreaking work which, in combination with cold and hunger, took its toll on the health and morale of the Japanese POWs. As a workforce under the general management of the Soviet Ministry of the Interior, the mighty NKVD, the internees worked all over the Soviet Union in numerous industries and construction projects, often assigned to demanding tasks and having to meet daily work quotas too hard to finish in a week. This experience was not universal—there were regions and camps in which the internees could finish the quota before

lunchtime—but the prevailing memory was of extremely demanding labour.

These three themes formed what one writer called the “Siberian trinity of suffering,” canonised in the many memoirs and recollections that appeared during the post-war period.³⁴ Writing from memory of what they had experienced—and of course, exaggerating at times for effect—these returnees from the Soviet Union felt the need to document their own suffering to Japanese society in order to reclaim their recognised status as Japanese citizens. Nevertheless, their suffering became confined to the margins of national memory for decades. There were two major reasons for this neglect. The first reason lies in the gender stereotypes associated with military men. To put it simply, male soldiers were seen as less deserving than the defenceless civilians of a place in the pantheon of victims. Besides the traditional and widespread stereotypes of masculinity that prescribe certain behaviour for male soldiers (“protectors of the motherland,” “defenders of the frontiers”), there were specifically Japanese stereotypes associated with POWs. The soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army were advised to “commit suicide and not endure the shame of being taken alive”; becoming a POW was a shame that could not be washed away.³⁵ Of course, the issue of whether or not the Siberian internees were POWs remains contentious to this day—they were clearly taken prisoner *after* laying down arms, but *before* Japan had signed the Instrument of Surrender on 2 September, 1945. Moreover, the memoirs are replete with accounts demonstrating that the Japanese were tricked by the Soviets into captivity; before putting them on trains bound for Siberia, Soviet officers ensured the Japanese they were being sent home, to Japan. Nevertheless, for many in post-war Japanese society, the returnees from the Soviet Union were shameful POWs—the ignominious remnants of the failed empire. Almost every group in society found something in the Siberian returnees that they did not like; for women, they were the men who had failed to protect the Japanese civilians in Manchuria, for pacifists, they were the once-vaunted soldiers of the militarist empire, and for nationalists they were the returnees from the hated ideological enemy, the Soviet Union.

This latter point brings us to the second and, in my view, more

important reason why accounts of victimhood in Siberia were overlooked in post-war Japan in favour of civilian suffering. Both the Cold War and Japan's role as an anti-communist ally of the United States in Asia created the necessary prerequisites for the marginalisation of the Siberian returnees. Their association with the USSR led to apprehension in Japanese society. To begin with, the majority of returnees from the USSR returned to Japan in 1948-1949—the two years in which the “reverse course” of the US Occupation administration was being implemented. The year 1949 saw the Cold War arrive in Japan; it was also the year of important setbacks for the American influence in East Asia.³⁶ As a result, the Japanese government, press, and society were suspicious of leftists, represented in the political sphere by the increasingly belligerent Japan Communist Party. Also, the behaviour of some of the returnees did not help their cause. Many repatriates arriving in Japan during 1949 had been converted by their camp instructors; they believed in the advantages of the communist system of government and the need to overturn the emperor system. Upon their return to Japan, they demonstrated recalcitrant behaviour, refusing to cooperate with the authorities and terrifying the gathered crowds at the ports and railway stations. All of this contributed to the image of a “red repatriate” in an increasingly anti-communist Japan. The press played its part in sensationalising this image, which was foisted on a majority of the repatriates, even though only a fraction of them had displayed allegiance to the communist cause. Thus, within a few months after the arrival of the “red repatriates” on Japanese shores, the society that had so eagerly campaigned for the return of their “brethren” (*dōhō*) from the unlawful Soviet captivity suddenly turned against them. As the mental borders of Japanese nationhood were redrawn in the Cold War, even the once proud members of the Japanese nation—the defenders of the imperial frontiers—came to be seen as insufficiently Japanese. And as victimhood narratives took their place in the book of national suffering, the returnees' association with the Soviet Union meant that their suffering—arguably harder and more prolonged than that of some other groups—was for decades treated with near indifference by the Japanese government, which refused to pay them the compensation they demanded for their

losses.

In post-war Japan, the defeat by the Soviets hurt especially because “ever since the victory in the Russo-Japanese War, the Japanese had made a fool of Russia” as a backward and wild land.³⁷ It is perhaps for this reason that the suffering of soldiers yielded pride of place in the popular imagination to the humiliation of innocent and unprotected women and children. In writing about the role of the barbaric Soviet Union in ending Japan’s empire, it was uncomfortable to talk much about the resounding strategic and tactical superiority of the Red Army over the once-famed Kwantung Army. Yet the uncivilised features and the detestable transgressions of the Soviet soldiers and officers—the looting of food and valuables, the rape of the Japanese women, the disregard for humanity, law and order—were ubiquitous in *hikiagemono*. In this way, the simplistic victim narratives replaced the unpleasant discussions of defeat and failure.

Conclusion

In today’s Japan, hardly anyone questions the hardships endured by the over 600,000 former servicemen who forcefully migrated to the Soviet labour camps at the war’s end. These days, it is an issue that unites, unexpectedly, people who otherwise have very little in common or who are even bitterly opposed to each other: during the annual commemorative ceremony in Tokyo’s Chidorigafuchi Cemetery on August 23—the anniversary of Stalin’s infamous secret order—it is not uncommon to witness a speech by the member of the ruling conservative Liberal Democratic Party followed by a speech by a representative of the Japanese Communist Party. A representative of activist groups who had struggled for compensation for the returnees might speak immediately after an official from the Japanese government, against which that struggle for compensation was once waged. The victimhood of the Siberian internees has finally triumphed, even though it had been virtually ignored during the period from the 1950s until the 1990s.

In this paper I have briefly analysed the categorisation of Japanese national victimhood at the hands of the Soviet Union at the end of the

Second World War. I also traced the evolution of social attitudes towards the survivors and victims of the war. As seen in the lives of the Siberian internees in postwar Japan, national victimhood is hardly immutable or permanent—just like national identity, it reflects the transformations in society and ideas about citizenship. The divisions in Japanese national victimhood I have analysed were legacies of the Cold War—the global ideological confrontation that divided not only countries and continents, but also transformed the ways in which histories were written and the past remembered. Despite the growing importance of transnational approaches to the study of the past, national histories continue to hold sway across the world, but especially in East Asia. One of the largest contradictions of Cold War historiography was that the Japanese empire—a behemoth that controlled more than 7.5 million square kilometres of land and sea and ruled over millions of imperial subjects—has mostly been analysed through the lens of national history. This national framework has often discounted the importance of empire and ignored its many legacies. The gendered division of Japanese national victimhood was a product of this limited vision. These categorisations of victimhood disregard the imprint that the empire left on the lives of the millions of its non-Japanese subjects—the forced labourers transported across the empire, the “comfort women” forced to serve the “empire’s defenders” and so on. Yet, as I showed here, these divisions were not limited to the non-Japanese—even former “defenders of empire” might find themselves left out of the mainstream accounts of history.

Notes

¹ For a history of these orphans and their return to Japan in the 1980s, see Mayumi Itoh, *Japanese War Orphans in Manchuria: Forgotten Victims of World War II* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

² Araragi Shinzō, “The Collapse of the Japanese Empire and the Great Migrations: Repatriation, Assimilation, and Remaining Behind,” trans. Sherzod Muminov, in *The Dismantling of Japan’s Empire in East Asia: Deimperialization, Postwar Legitimation and Imperial Afterlife*, eds. Barak Kushner and Sherzod Muminov (London: Routledge, 2017), 66–83.

³ Narita Ryūichi, “‘Hikiage’ to ‘yokuryū,’” in *Ajia taiheiyo sensō*, Vol. 4: *Teikoku no sensō taiken*, eds. Kurasawa Aiko, Sugihara Tōru, Narita Ryūichi, Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Yui Daizaburō, and Yoshida Yutaka (Iwanami Shoten, 2006), 179-208.

⁴ See, for example, Ran Zwigenberg, *Hiroshima: The Origins of Global Memory Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); on the uses of victimhood, Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (London: Vintage, 2010).

⁵ The founding fathers of the puppet-kingdom Manchukuo had dreamed of building an ideal country (*risōkoku*). See Katakura Tadashi and Furumi Tadayuki, *Zasetsu shita risōkoku: Manshūkoku kōbō no shinsō* (Tokyo: Gendai bukku sha, 1967).

⁶ There were women Japanese internees in Siberia, the majority of them nurses taken prisoner along with the former Kwantung Army soldiers. 155 of these women were taken to the USSR and interned in the camps. On August 12, 2014, the NHK aired a special documentary titled *The Women’s Siberian Internment (Onnatachi no shiberia yokuryū)*, which contained testimonies of the surviving female returnees from Siberia. Visit the NHK Website at <https://bh.pid.nhk.or.jp/pidh07/ProgramIntro/Show.do?pkey=001-20140812-11-34786>.

⁷ Sherzod Muminov, “Prejudice, Punishment, and Propaganda: Post-Imperial Japan and the Soviet Versions of History in East Asia, 1945-1956,” in Kushner and Muminov, eds., *The Dismantling of Japan’s Empire*, 146-64. Also, Sherzod Muminov, “The ‘Siberian Internment’ and the Transnational History of the Cold War Japan, 1945-56,” in *Transnational Japan as History: Empire, Migration, and Social Movements*, ed. Pedro Jacobelli, Danton Leary, and Shinnosuke Takahashi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 71-95.

⁸ Walter Edwards, “Forging Tradition for a Holy War: The ‘Hakkō Ichū’ Tower in Miyazaki and Japanese Wartime Ideology,” *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 29, no. 2 (2003): 289-324.

⁹ Barak Kushner, “Introduction: The Unevenness of the End of Empire,” in Kushner and Muminov, eds., *The Dismantling of Japan’s Empire*, 5.

¹⁰ Katō Kiyofumi, “*Dainihon teikoku*” *hōkai: higashi ajia no 1945 nen* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron, 2009).

¹¹ Lori Watt, *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009), 94.

¹² John W. Dower, “Imperial Democracy: Driving the Wedge,” in *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Aftermath of World War II* (London: Penguin, 2000), 277-301.

¹³ James J. Orr, *The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001); Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

¹⁴ Orr, *Victim as Hero*, 3.

¹⁵ Sebastian Conrad, “The Dialectics of Remembrance: Memories of Empire in Cold

War Japan," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56, no. 1 (2014): 22.

¹⁶ Inoguchi Takashi and Purnendra Jain, eds., *Japanese Foreign Policy Today: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 267.

¹⁷ Hiroshi Kimura, "Japanese Perceptions of Russia," in *Northern Territories" and Beyond: Russian, Japanese, and American Perspectives*, ed. James E. Goodby, Vladimir I. Ivanov, and Nobuo Shimotomai (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995), 55.

¹⁸ Abe Gunji, *Shiberia kyōsei yokuryū no jittai:Nnisso ryōkoku shiryō kara no kenshō* (Tokyo: Sairyūsha, 2005).

¹⁹ Among other works, Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

²⁰ Furumi Tadayuki, "Manshū teikoku no saigo o mite," in *"Bungei Shunjū" ni miru shōwaushi*, vol. 2, ed. Handō Kazutoshi (Tokyo: Bunshun Bunko, 1995), 144.

²¹ Postanovlenie GKO-9940ss ot 30 avgusta 1945 g., "O sozdanii komissii po vyvozu trofeynogo oborudovaniia iz Man'chzhurii," *Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI)*, f. 644, op. 1, edinitsa khraneniia 459.

²² Mariko Tamanoi, *Memory Maps: The State and Manchuria in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 73.

²³ Furumi, "Manshū teikoku," 144.

²⁴ See, for example, the memoir by Chiharu Kōno, who lost all five of her children during the flight from Manchuria. Chiharu Kōno, "Five Victims," in *Women Against the War*, ed. Women's Division of Sōka Gakkai (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1986), 26-31.

²⁵ Sawachi Hisae and Sataka Makoto, "Sedai o koete kataritsugitai sensō bungaku," *Sekai* 6 (2007): 207.

²⁶ Fujiwara Tei, *Nagareru hoshi wa ikite iru* (Tokyo: Hibiya Shuppansha, 1949).

²⁷ Michael Kim, "The Lost Memories of Empire and the Korean Return from Manchuria, 1945-1950: Conceptualizing Manchuria in Modern Korean History," *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 23, no. 2 (December 2010): 196.

²⁸ Narita, "Hikiage," 184.

²⁹ Watt, *When Empire Comes Home*, 123.

³⁰ Narita, "Hikiage," 185.

³¹ Central Archive of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (TsAMO RF), f. 66, op. 178499, d. 1, l. 593-98.

³² V.F. Zima, "Golod v Rossii 1946-1947 gg.," *Otechestvennaia istoriia* 1, (1993)

³³ Iitsuka Toshio, "Watashi no shiberia yokuryūki," in *Heiwa no ishizue: Shiberia kyōsei yokuryūsha ga kataritsugu rōku (yokuryū hen)* (Heiwa kinen jigyō tokubetsu kikin, 1991-2012), vol. 9, 291.

³⁴ Kurihara Toshio, *Shiberia yokuryū: Mikan no higeki* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2009).

³⁵ Ōba Sadao, *The "Japanese War": London University's WWII Secret Teaching Programme and the Experts Sent to Help Beat Japan* (London: Routledge, 1995), 69.

³⁶ In January, the Japan Communist Party won its biggest victory in the National

Diet elections, in August, the Soviet Union successfully tested its own nuclear bomb, ending the US monopoly on weapons of mass destruction, and, on October 1, Mao Zedong proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China.

³⁷ Sawachi and Sataka, "Sedai o koete," 207.