

The Siberian Internment in History

THE PRINCE'S TALE

On August 16, 1945, the day following the imperial broadcast announcing Japan's surrender, Prince Takeda (Takeda-no-miya) Tsuneyoshi was called to the emperor's temporary residence on the palace grounds—temporary since the main residence had been bombed.¹ Along with him, and by his testimony equally in the dark about the reasons for this summons, were three other imperial princes: Asaka, Kan'in, and Higashikuni. The purpose was soon made clear. Higashikuni was to become prime minister, though only for a matter of weeks, as it turned out. Asaka, Kan'in, and Takeda were each to be sent to different theaters of the just ended war. There they were to convey to the theater commanders the emperor's "sacred will" that all those who had fought in his name now put down their arms and surrender peacefully to the representatives of the Allied forces. For Kan'in, the mission was to the South Pacific, and Asaka's to China. Takeda was to be sent to Manchuria, that is, to the Kwantung Army.

Like the others, Takeda, at the time a lieutenant colonel, combined imperial rank with full military credentials. Both rank and credentials, it is fair to speculate, must have been thought necessary to ensure the mission's success. The entire situation was without precedent. On the one hand, Japanese forces had never before been defeated—had never surrendered to an enemy—on such a scale. On the other hand, over the

years of the Asia-Pacific War, they had been thoroughly and effectively indoctrinated in the belief that surrender was an intolerable humiliation. There was no small measure of fear in official circles that, by itself, the imperial broadcast of August 15 might not be sufficient to overcome the stigma placed on the act of surrender. Even if it was certain that the rescript had reached scattered and remote forward units, it still had to be interpreted and backed with the further sanction that only a personal—and professionally credible—imperial emissary could provide. And just to make sure, a second rescript, addressed to “Our Soldiers and Sailors,” was issued on August 17. With greater brevity and in somewhat plainer language, it called on Japan’s soldiers to “comply with Our intention” to surrender.

The decision to send Takeda to Manchuria was more than sensible. Born in 1909, he had succeeded to the headship of his house at the age of ten, and at twenty briefly entered the House of Peers. The following year he had graduated in the forty-second class of the Army Academy, was commissioned a lieutenant in the cavalry, and by 1936 had risen to the rank of captain. After graduating from the Army War College in 1938, he was briefly commander of a cavalry unit in Hailar, in far northwest Manchuria. But what he really wanted was to serve in a frontline unit in China, and after repeated refusals from his superiors he was finally permitted to do so, finding it “not at all pleasant to have bullets flying toward me.” At length, Takeda was recalled to Tokyo. Promoted to major in 1940, he served on the Army General Staff and at Imperial Headquarters, and was involved in strategic planning for the campaigns in the Philippines and Guadalcanal. At great personal risk, he was sent as an observer to the frontlines, notably to Rabaul. Promoted finally to lieutenant colonel in 1943, Takeda was transferred to the Kwantung Army staff. There he worked under the assumed name of “Miyata”—hardly a subtle disguise for one of his lineage—and settled along with his growing family in Xinjing (now Changchun), the capital city of Manchukuo.² As a staff officer and strategist, Takeda gained considerable familiarity with (and some authority over) many of the Kwantung Army’s operations and high-ranking personnel.

At the beginning of July 1945, Takeda was brought back to Tokyo, again joining the Army General Staff. By that time, Japan’s cities had almost all been laid waste in Allied bombing raids, and Takeda left his family in Xinjing. This seemed prudent: Takeda shared the perception of virtually all its Japanese residents that Manchukuo, which had largely been spared combat and aerial bombing, was a safer place than the home

islands. During July and August, Takeda himself, acting as liaison between Imperial Headquarters and the Kwantung Army, continued to shuttle back and forth by air between Tokyo and Manchukuo. The sense that Manchukuo was safe dissolved, of course, with the Soviet declaration of war at 12:00 A.M. (local time) on August 9. Despite the general panic following the Soviet onslaught, however, Takeda successfully recalled his family from Xinjing; they returned with nothing but the clothes on their backs five days before the emperor's surrender broadcast on August 15. From that point he might have remained with them in Tokyo, but fortuitously the summons from the emperor placed Takeda back on the scene. Prior to departing for Xinjing on the 17th, thinking that in his absence American occupation forces were likely to arrive, and not knowing whether he would even return alive from Manchuria, Takeda spent the night burning all the military-related documents in his possession and setting his affairs in order.

A military aircraft, escorted by four fighter planes, brought Takeda to Xinjing by the evening of the 17th. Met at the airfield, he was taken directly to Kwantung Army headquarters. Yamada Otozō, army commander-in-chief, and his assembled senior officers "reverently pledged to comply" with the imperial will: with this, Takeda's primary mission had been accomplished. The next morning, following a send-off by his former Kwantung Army colleagues, Takeda's plane left for Keijō (Seoul), where he was to relay the emperor's will to the commander of Japanese forces in Korea. An engine malfunction forced the aircraft back to Xinjing for emergency repairs; an hour later, this time from an empty tarmac, Takeda again departed. As he would soon learn, Soviet forces occupied the city the next day.

Along with his mission to ensure a peaceful surrender in Manchuria, Takeda had one other task. Prior to leaving Tokyo, he had been asked by Higashikuni and Foreign Minister Shigemitsu Mamoru to meet, if possible, with Pu Yi, the "last emperor" of Manchukuo and, if Pu Yi desired, return with him to Japan. The two men had been close since Takeda's earlier stationing in Xinjing and he was determined to carry out this second mission if it was within his power to do so. It almost happened: Takeda had proposed to Pu Yi, who was in Tonghua, that they meet in Keijō. But lacking an aircraft capable of making the tough flight over mountainous terrain, Pu Yi demurred, and proceeded instead to Fengtian (now Shenyang), where he was captured by Soviet forces.³ Takeda had been willing to go to Fengtian himself, but was dissuaded by the chief of staff of Japan's forces in Korea and the colony's governor-general. For

the second time in as many days, he avoided the fate that met so many hundreds of thousands. For Takeda, there was no Siberian internment, but just barely. There can be little doubt that capture by the Soviets would have led to investigation and imprisonment of indefinite length.⁴

Running through the prince's tale are strands that tie together a number of key issues in understanding the Siberian internment. That he was able to carry out his mission was due, as we have seen, to his combined imperial status and military credentials: in a sense he did not just convey the emperor's "sacred will" but embodied it. He had willingly exposed himself to risk, as did others of the extended imperial household. Of far greater import was that, as the vehicle and embodiment of the emperor's will for his soldiers, Takeda legitimated the act of surrender for the officers and men of the Kwantung Army, helping to remove from that act the stigma of shame that army training had done so much to deepen. As a result—not of Takeda's mission alone, of course—the Kwantung Army surrendered, very nearly in its entirety.

This was in no sense to be taken for granted. Throughout the empire, Japan's defeated soldiers bristled when the term "prisoner of war" was used to describe them. As they saw it, a prisoner of war (*boryo* or *furyo*) was a soldier who had been captured while fighting was still going on. Those who surrendered on imperial orders after the cessation of hostilities were not to be so classed, and they were supported in this stance by their government. In deference to these sensibilities—and to minimize the chance of individual and group suicides by captured Japanese—the Americans and British also steered clear of this usage in their public statements. Instead, they adopted the designation "Surrendered Enemy Personnel" (SEP) or "Japanese Surrendered Personnel" (JSP) while retaining the term "POW" in their own official documents. But while the Americans in general adhered to the stipulations of the Potsdam Declaration and the 1929 Geneva Convention in treating their postwar prisoners in the Philippines and the mid-Pacific, the British made explicit use of the distinction between POWs and JSPs to justify a considerably harsher and less costly regime, one that used JSP labor for reconstruction in Burma, Malaya, and elsewhere.⁵

Japan's Kwantung Army, of course, came under Soviet control, and the USSR never wavered in speaking of the members of that captured force as POWs. But the Japanese government, military, and many of the soldiers themselves (particularly officers) preferred the term "internees" (*yokuryūsha*), which was less stigmatized and emotionally freighted. Internees remained soldiers, they insisted, still following the orders of

their commander-in-chief. In terms of international law, however, the status of internee was problematic: the Hague (1907) and Geneva Conventions had accorded to POWs certain recognized rights, such as speedy repatriation, the payment of wages for their labor, and separate housing for officers and exemption from manual labor. Internees, which usually referred to civilians in enemy custody, had far fewer rights. The term was clearly inapplicable, but it continues to be used in almost all writing (including this book) about Japan's gulag veterans.

In any case, Takeda had achieved his purpose. By whichever name they were subsequently referred to, the men had surrendered peacefully. It was surely no part of the prince's intention that, for more than six hundred thousand soldiers of the Kwantung Army, his mission served as a baton touch, transferring them from the domain of the vanquished imperial forces to that of the Red Army and the gulag. But that is precisely what it meant.

THE SOVIET-JAPANESE WAR

The Siberian internment was a result not of the Second World War in general, but of the Soviet-Japanese War. Stated simply, Japan lost and its armies were taken prisoner, transported en masse to the Soviet Union, and put to forced labor. But why had the two powers fought when they did, as they did, and for what stakes? Why were there so many prisoners, why were they interned, and why for so long? How, in other words, did the story of Japan's military collapse come to be intertwined with that of the gulag?

In the wake of Japan's capitulation, the vast majority of soon-to-be internees were necessarily ignorant of what was to come. And what they did know of their unfolding personal fates, they were powerless to change. Yet there were others who held just such power. At the level of decision making, whether it was the making of the war or of the internment, there was no "innocent" side. The war was not causeless; and the internment, though clearly a self-interested act of the Soviet state, had highly placed Japanese enablers before the fact. This is to say nothing—yet—of the very complex relationships that developed between Japanese and Soviets, and among Japanese prisoners themselves, as the months of internment stretched into years. Nor is it—yet—to address the later, and equally complex, interpretations of the internment experience that have appeared in various forms over the six decades since the event. The point for now is just to start. I open this chapter with a brief account of

the Soviet-Japanese War in its immediate setting of the race between the Soviet Union and the United States to bring the Pacific War to a close. I then place it and its aftermath in the strategic context of the incipient Cold War. Next, I loop back through the prehistory of the conflict in the difficult, and at times violent, relationship of Japan with Russia since the early years of the twentieth century. Arriving once more at the scene of surrender in Manchuria, I close with an account of the internment decision and the roles played in making it by both Soviet authorities and those Japanese I have termed their “enablers.” The argument, or suggestion, underlying this approach is that a full understanding of the Siberian internment, its consequences, and the modes by which it has been interpreted cannot emerge from any one or two of these histories alone. The internment was a consequence of Soviet victory and Japanese defeat, but it was more than that. It was a perfect theater for Cold War power politics, but more than that, too. And it was an episode in the history of Russo-Japanese political and cultural relations—an extraordinary one in the sheer numbers of those affected and the density of personal documentation, nearly all of it retrospective, now at hand. It was all of these, and nothing less. It was undoubtedly more as well, but such considerations belong at the end, not the beginning, of the story. And that story begins with war.

The Soviet-Japanese War was the culminating military engagement of World War II.⁶ Across three extended fronts ranging along the five-thousand-kilometer Soviet border with Manchuria, beginning in the early hours of August 9, 1945, the ground, armored, and air forces of Joseph Stalin’s Red Army were sent in wave after wave against the Kwantung Army, the Japanese garrison in the then “empire” of Manchukuo. Within a week, Manchuria lay in Soviet hands, Japan’s armies were vanquished, and the political entity called Manchukuo evaporated. By Soviet calculations, some fifty thousand Kwantung Army soldiers had been killed, a number that would rise to eighty-four thousand by the first days of September, when hostilities finally ceased on Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. Most strikingly, in the demise of what had once been Japan’s most renowned and feared—and most aggressive—fighting force, at least six hundred thousand Kwantung Army soldiers were captured. As will be seen, the matter of numbers, both of internees who were repatriated and of those who died in captivity, is highly vexed and needs untangling.⁷ We will also have occasion to explore who the internees were, to examine the makeup of the Kwantung Army in the process of its disintegration; this had no small impact on how both the war and the internment itself

played out. For the moment, the rough figure of six hundred thousand captured should suffice to suggest that this was surrender on a scale without even a remote precedent in Japan's military history. The same could be said, of course, about the other theaters of World War II in Asia. But our concern is with what came next.

To put it plainly, even crudely, there should not have been so many prisoners in Manchuria. That was not part of the plan; quite the contrary. The Soviet-Japanese War was a conflict expected on both sides. It was simultaneously the result of a long prehistory and the last act in the *Götterdämmerung* of Japan's empire. By Soviet estimates, Japan had a million men in arms in Manchuria and 2.3 million on the Japanese mainland. High-level planners and theater commanders alike expected a difficult, prolonged, and costly campaign to seize hold of the innermost core of Japan's empire. As with their Western allies, they envisioned a struggle that might soon envelop Japan's home islands themselves and lead to untold numbers of new casualties. Those were the numbers they worried about.⁸

Instead, the Soviet-Japanese conflict was short and cataclysmic. Significant external elements, both political and military, were at play that clearly affected the timing and, to some degree, the final outcome of the Red Army's offensive. Its purpose was to destroy the Kwantung Army, seize vital territory in Manchuria and Korea, and move on to defeat Japanese forces in south Sakhalin, the Kurils, and if possible northern Hokkaidō. The hoped-for result would be Japan's surrender as well as the establishment of a favorable Soviet position as pieces of Japan's empire fell under Allied occupation. But first things first: Would Japan in fact surrender? And when? On the one hand, at the time of the Soviet attack, Japan was a badly weakened enemy, its government reeling under the impact of the atomic bomb dropped on August 6 and politically fragmented over whether to accept the surrender terms announced at Potsdam. Moves to end the war quickly were in the ascendant, including the ultimately futile attempts by Japan to seek Soviet mediation. Some at least of Japan's highest political figures had no desire for national suicide, and sought to end what appears now a sick game of "chicken" played with the lives of a desperate and exhausted people. All this the Soviets knew, so there were reasons for thinking that an overwhelming blow directed primarily at Japanese forces in Manchuria would achieve its strategic and political purpose.

On the other hand there were those, not exclusively in Japan's military, who were determined to continue the "game."⁹ As July gave way to

August it was by no means clear that they would fail in that aim, at least not yet. And even if the Allied demand for “unconditional surrender” were to be accepted, how was that act to be justified and then communicated palatably to Japan’s military forces and the general population? Japanese field commanders could not help but be swayed this way and that by swirling rumors of a cease-fire and their government’s imminent surrender. Concerning their troops in the field, responsibly minded officers were worried, not that they would give up fighting on their own and seek to surrender wholesale, but precisely the opposite: that they would refuse to surrender and instead persist in needless resistance or carry out mass suicides. That, after all, had been the ghastly pattern up to that point. The *Senjinkun*, Japan’s Field Service Code of 1941, had enjoined soldiers “never to suffer the humiliation of remaining alive as a prisoner” (*ikite hoshū no hazukashime wo ukezu*). This teaching had its due effects on the conduct of troops in the field. But it also produced a tragic spinoff of coerced collective suicide among vulnerable civilian populations in Saipan, Okinawa—and Manchuria.¹⁰

Soviet commanders, then, were not facing an enemy just waiting to give up. The Japanese in Manchuria were not already beaten when the Soviet government declared war. It mattered a great deal, therefore, how Stalin’s frontline officers deployed their armies. Anything less than overwhelming force and speed might not bring sufficient pressure for Japan’s military leaders to seek, or cease opposition to seeking, imperial sanction for surrender. They knew better than anyone else that nothing but an imperial command would make surrender morally tolerable. The issue was to make an effective link between the “objective” military situation on the ground and the “subjective” political conditions that would make such sanction a face-saving act for all parties to the decision. The gruesome toll of the Allied strategic bombing campaign in the home islands—an estimated half million deaths—had only gone part of the way to the making of that link. The atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima closed the gap appreciably (Nagasaki, it has been argued, was irrelevant, “a useless massacre” with little discernible impact on the ultimate decision).¹¹ But defeat had not yet become surrender. This, Stalin and his commanders judged, was the opportune moment to strike.

The Soviet declaration of war and initiation of hostilities were separated by a single hour. At 5:00 P.M. Moscow time on August 8, 1945, People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav M. Molotov read out the text to Japanese ambassador Satō Naotake. Japan’s government, it proclaimed, had rejected the Potsdam demands, thus depriving its

request for Soviet mediation of “any basis” and leaving the Soviet Union no alternative but to accede to the Allied proposal to join in the war against Japan. This was the only means of preventing “further sacrifice and suffering” and sparing Japan’s people the destruction visited upon Germany.¹² Many time zones to the east, Marshal Aleksandr M. Vasilevskii, at the head of the Far East Command, ordered the commencement of the “Manchurian Strategic Offensive Operation” (Man’chzhurskaia strategicheskaiia nastupatel’naia operatsiia). Soviet historians later called this campaign a strategic “Cannae,” referring to Hannibal’s destruction in 216 BC of Roman armies in a classic double envelopment. Similarly, Soviet battle plans called for “offensives along three strategic axes to chop up, encircle, and successively destroy the Kwantung Army piecemeal in northern and central Manchuria, and capture Manchuria’s vital central valley, the Liaodong peninsula, and northern Korea.” In total the ground forces ranged against Japan numbered over 1.55 million. Combined with 5,000 tanks and 5,000 aircraft, this was a force roughly comparable to the Wehrmacht that Hitler had sent to invade Russia in June 1941. The Soviet attacks came from the east, as the 404,000-man armies of the 1st Far Eastern Front drove across the Ussuri River into eastern Manchuria and northern Korea; from the northeast, with combat troops of the 2nd Far Eastern Front, 238,000 strong, invading across the Amur; and most devastatingly from the west, where the 416,000 combat troops of Rodion Malinovskii’s Trans-Baikal Front, behind phalanx after phalanx of high-speed tanks, crossed over the Greater Khingan Range and overran the Manchurian heartland.¹³

Opposing them were the forces of the Kwantung Army, committed since June to a “total war of attrition” (*zenmen jikyūsen*). Stalin’s Far Eastern commanders were aware that many of their opponent’s best units had been deployed elsewhere, but also that these had been replaced and were being reinforced as their own battle plans proceeded. Soviet strategists also included in their assessments more than 100,000 paramilitaries. In total they projected Japanese troop strength in Manchuria at a million in 31 infantry divisions, to which planners added the armies of Manchukuo, Inner Mongolia, as well as Japanese forces on south Sakhalin and the Kurils, for an imposing 1.4 million overall. The more accurate Japanese count was markedly lower: 714,000 troops, 24 divisions (in Manchuria and northern Korea), and an additional 190,000 in southern Korea for a total effective force of roughly a million. The effect of the Soviet overestimate was significant. On the crucial Trans-Baikal Front, for example, Soviet commanders assessed the correlation

of forces at 1.7:1 for infantry and 5:1 in tanks; the actual figures were 2.7:1 and 15:1. These made the odds for the Japanese garrison truly dismal. Even so, in places, Japanese resistance was ferocious and the planned delaying tactics had some effect in slowing the Soviet assault. Partly as a function of disrupted communications, however, many Kwantung Army units never entered combat at all or did not do so until it was too late. But there were deeper problems. At the command level overconfidence and complacency were rife, and the derogation of military intelligence very costly. To be sure, Soviet strategic deception in various forms might have been effective even against a better-prepared enemy. But the Kwantung Army leaders also misinterpreted what solid intelligence they had at hand. As a result, they badly underestimated the size of the force they faced, and mistook both the timing of the offensive and the direction from which it would come. An attack they expected for September at the earliest and possibly as late as spring 1946 came instead early in August. And they had dismissed the idea that the Red Army would invade over the Greater Khingans—which was precisely the route it took.¹⁴

On the whole, therefore, Kwantung Army commanders waged a confused and mediocre campaign, even considering the political uncertainties and the materiel and manpower deficiencies they had to contend with. They had lived in their “fool’s paradise” too long. By August 16, barely a week after the Soviet invasion had begun, Manchuria was occupied. The rest of the offensive—further advance toward the 38th parallel in Korea and the assault on south Sakhalin and the Kurils—has been described as a “pro forma” affair (and the planned occupation of northern Hokkaidō was aborted). The phrasing is unfortunate, in view of the casualty rates and the number of prisoners taken. But it was indeed a “war after the war,” no longer about forcing surrender but instead jockeying for geopolitical advantage and settling scores. The final landing by Soviet assault parties on the islands of the Habomai group came on September 4, fully three weeks after the emperor’s broadcast and two days after the signing of the surrender instrument on board the *Missouri*. The Soviets claimed over eighty-four thousand Japanese dead and 590,000 captured; on their own side they reported deaths at just over twelve thousand, with some twenty-four thousand wounded.¹⁵

In the shadow of the atomic bomb—of the claim that “the bomb,” and it alone, finally induced the Japanese leadership to surrender—the Soviet-Japanese War has taken on the character of a walkover or afterthought, little more than a “postgraduate exercise” drawn from the brutal school

of war in Europe. But it was far from being that. In terms of scale, “August Storm” (as David Glantz has dubbed it) was “the most ambitious strategic offensive” launched by the Red Army during the entire war, and represents still “the highest stage of military art” it reached.¹⁶ It was brilliantly executed, daring and innovative, and spectacularly successful. Not surprisingly, Soviet interpretations stress that it was this, and not the bomb, that brought the war to a close. All argue that the bomb had no impact on the outcome of the war, but was dropped, as one writer quaintly put it, “in the first instance in pursuit of goals in the moral-political order.” But there are variations on this theme, too. In a 1951 public lecture, V. N. Evstigneev, a Red Army major-general, posited a virtual conspiracy between Chiang Kai-shek on one side and on the other the Western allies, who, having already fought a slow and feckless campaign in the Pacific, in fact sought to prolong the war further, into 1946 or even 1947. War profits and capitalist fears of socialism—of the Soviet Union, and of national liberation movements throughout Asia—were the ostensible reason. By contrast, only the USSR, which had already faced the full onslaught of Hitler’s fascist armies alone while being forced to maintain a high level of defense against the concentrated forces of Japan in Manchuria, acted resolutely to bring Japan to surrender as soon as possible. The notion that the atomic bomb ended the war, Evstigneev argued, is nothing but the propaganda of history’s falsifiers and the “stooges” of capitalism. It is just one of many “slanders” against the Soviet Union now given full rein in Western countries. A later account, in the memoirs of Marshal Vasilevskii, takes a notably more measured tone. While agreeing that “the mass annihilation of Japanese cities was not dictated by any military necessity whatsoever,” he makes no mention of imperialist conspiracies to prolong the conflict. His concern is to portray the Soviet Union as a vital ally doing its part, at enormous sacrifice, and Stalin as a responsive, flexible leader who paid attention to his commanders when it counted. On the eve of the Potsdam Conference, Vasilevskii recounts, Stalin sought unsuccessfully to hasten the Soviet attack on Japan by ten days. Rebuffed by his theater commander, Stalin did not argue, but deferred to him. At the time, Vasilevskii notes, Stalin gave no reason for his request, but Vasilevskii insists that at that juncture Stalin had no knowledge of the just-completed A-bomb test, and must have been thinking ahead to being pressed by Truman to fulfill his commitment to join the war.¹⁷

Vasilevskii’s view seems to me plausible, and the either/or character of the larger debate misconceived. Once dropped, the Hiroshima bomb

was a factor in the thinking on all three sides, Japanese, American, and Soviet. It had indeed added special urgency to the timely launching of the Manchurian operation, and to the speed and relentlessness of its execution. In the absence of either the bomb or the Soviet invasion, Japan's military leadership might have played for more time, using the lives of its troops and the civilian population as pawns, just as it had long done. But the devastating effectiveness of the Soviet offensive and the speed with which Stalin's forces were gobbling up not just Manchuria but the "Imperial Land of Korea" (*Kōdo Chōsen*) seems at long last to have forced the issue and "tilted the Japanese over to put an end to the war." As Calvocoressi, Wint, and Pritchard put it in their magisterial history of the Second World War, "all Japan knew the significance of the dreaded invasion of Manchuria." It meant the culmination of a decades-long threat that, as will be discussed presently, essentially governed the making of Japan's foreign policy. Unable to stomach war with another great power, Japan's leaders yielded.¹⁸

It remained, however, to turn defeat into surrender. This was accomplished by means of a series of imperial rescripts and related orders, the first being the epochal broadcast of August 15. Its contents are well known and perhaps require no elaboration here, except for one point: that as his reason for accepting the Allied surrender terms, the emperor cites only the appalling, civilization-threatening damage caused by the atomic bomb. Positioning Japan as the first country to be sacrificed in a new age of barbarity, the emperor declared that "having been able to safeguard and maintain the structure of the imperial state [*kokutai wo goji shiete*]," he could ask no more of his people. The enemy's weapon was too strong and too terrible to resist. In fact, however, the matter was not closed. It was unclear whether the "extraordinary measure" now taken would induce the 3.5 million men in arms still at their posts—more than 2.1 million having died—to lay down their arms without a further, more direct order. That order was soon forthcoming, on August 17. It shared with the earlier rescript its refusal to lay any blame for Japan's defeat either on the military services or the cause for which they had been used. The reason given for surrender—the order was forthrightly entitled "Rescript Addressed to Our Soldiers and Sailors Concerning Surrender"—was simply "that the Soviet Union has entered the war against Us." Not a word is said about the atomic bomb. The emperor's forces are then enjoined to "comply with Our intention" to make peace with the empire's enemies, to "maintain a solid unity and strict discipline" and bear the unbearable difficulties that lay ahead. This was also

the burden of the message brought to theater commanders by Prince Takeda and his fellow imperial emissaries.

But one further step was necessary. For soldiers in the field, laying down of arms in surrender necessarily meant some period of captivity, that is, becoming a “prisoner of war”: the very status to which the imperial state and its organs of military education attached the greatest contempt. It was clear, however, that throughout the now vanquished empire, hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of Japanese soldiers were on the cusp of having to live with this deepest possible humiliation. This was a situation fraught with complications and possible dangers. On the day following the emperor’s rescript to his forces, therefore, a terse imperial order (*chokumei*) was promulgated, stating simply that “we do not regard soldiers who at present have surrendered unconditionally to be prisoners of war.” In turn, Imperial Headquarters, in the name of Umezu Yoshijirō, chief of the Army General Staff, issued Army Order 1385, which stipulated that “with respect to soldiers and attached civilian employees of the imperial forces who, subsequent to the issuance of the Rescript, have fallen under the control of enemy forces, we do not consider them to be prisoners of war.” The statement notably offers no other term to describe the status of its captured soldiers. But with this “spiritual tranquilizer,” as Shirai Hisaya aptly describes it, Japan’s war leadership managed, not to remove the underlying causes of the stigma attached to captivity, but to conjure it away with a rhetorical sleight of hand.¹⁹

For the moment that was enough. Throughout the empire, including Manchuria and the islands north of Hokkaidō, the surrenders began. Even so, word of the imperial order was slow to reach distant and scattered units, and resistance continued for some time. At length, however, Japan’s military capacity was destroyed and its empire dismembered: such were the Potsdam demands. For both victor and vanquished, the costs were stupefyingly high.

HOT WAR TO COLD

But what was to follow? Such a vast conflagration could not help but leave an extended half-life, a long period with neither war nor normality, of massive population displacement, political turbulence, and local violence as a new order struggled into being. Without wading too deeply into the always-roiled waters of the “atomic diplomacy” debate, we must at least hazard a sketch of the grand strategic context that opened

up at war's end, and its bearing on the consequences of the Soviet-Japanese War, including the Siberian internment. At the Tehran Conference in late 1943 Stalin agreed to enter the war once Germany had been defeated, thus eclipsing Chiang Kai-shek's position as the cynosure of Western hopes for a regional ally to join in the denouement of the war against Japan. Stalin's commitment, under Western pressure, was renewed at Yalta in early 1945, when the agreements and secret deals were made that, in effect, redefined empire in a world of superpower blocs and decolonized peoples. Yet much as Chiang had found himself pushed to the strategic margins by the Soviet promise, the successful development of the atomic bomb seemed on the verge of leaving Stalin with a far weaker hand than he had held, just when the time had come to play it. He knew that he was in a race with the United States to establish as favorable a position as possible for the USSR in the aftermath of Japan's imminent surrender.²⁰

In the event, that surrender did not come too soon for Stalin to keep his promise. Indeed, it would seem that if the bomb was "necessary" to bring that surrender about, so was the invasion of Manchuria. The consequences, needless to say, remain with us even though, ironically enough, the Soviet Union itself has passed from the scene. The People's Republic of China certainly owed its emergence in part to the enhanced stature of the Soviet Union as a dominant regional power after 1945. The ongoing division of Korea too is a direct legacy of the Soviet-Japanese conflict. Yet in one major respect, the playing out of the "race to the finish" and its articulation with the regional Cold War did not lead to what also seemed a likely consequence. On August 15, President Harry Truman sent to Stalin his General Order No. 1, which set out procedures for receiving the Japanese surrender at designated points in the former empire. In his response the following day, Stalin pressed for an amendment that would have empowered Soviet representatives to accept the Japanese surrender on northern Hokkaidō. That would of course have meant the creation of a Soviet zone of occupation, for which Stalin proposed the territory north of a line between Rumoi and Kushiro. What would have changed in the postwar history of Japan and East Asia had a "People's Republic of Hokkaidō" come into existence makes for fascinating speculation. But it did not happen. On August 18, much to Stalin's professed shock ("I must say that I and my colleagues had not anticipated that such would be your reply"), Truman categorically rejected the idea. Stalin himself seems to have hesitated to drive a wedge among the Allies just as Japan's formal surrender was approaching. Fighting on Sakhalin

was still ongoing, moreover, and at that juncture not particularly smoothly. Still, it was not until August 22 that invasion plans for Hokkaidō were aborted.²¹

Thus did Stalin's "gamble" for Hokkaidō fail. In the end the Soviet Union was excluded "from the administration of any territory not overrun by Red Army troops." As a consequence, the "refrigeration of politics" set in far more thoroughly in Japan than in Korea or Germany, and Stalin was compelled to make use of other, less direct channels to exercise influence over occupation policy, and occupied Japan itself.²² The Siberian internment, it may be suggested, was the deepest running of those channels. In recent decades, it has itself fallen under the shadow of the so-called Northern Territories issue—the dispute concerning sovereignty over four offshore islands north of Hokkaidō (Habomai, Shikotan, Kunashiri, and Etorofu) and the related issue of the composition of the Kuril chain. This is generally regarded as the prime cause of the failure of Japan and Russia to sign a treaty formally ending their hostilities of now six-plus decades past. But as far as its social and cultural impact is concerned, the internment was, in my view, of considerably greater importance in the making of postwar Japan. This is true not just in terms of the massive numbers both of those who went through it and the testimony they have left to us. It had a major impact, though short in duration, on left-wing politics, and far-reaching effects in shaping Japanese images not just of the war, of the USSR and socialism, or of Russian society and culture, but of themselves. It has also left a living legacy of grievement. Two major groups have been particularly important. These were the bitterly anti-Soviet and irredentist Northern Association (Sakuhoku Kai) and the National Council for the Compensation of Siberian Internees (Zenkoku Yokuryūsha Hoshō Kyōgikai, or Zenyokkyō). The Northern Association, formed in 1953, was composed mainly of internees subsequently convicted of "war crimes" under Soviet law—meaning principally former officers. The Association made no demands for compensation of former internees but instead focused on obtaining an apology from the Soviet, and then the Russian, government, and on the return of the Northern Territories. With Boris Yeltsin's 1993 apology long on the books but territorial issues as intractable as ever, the Northern Association disbanded as a national organization in 2005. Zenyokkyō, for its part, pursued a different course and agenda. Founded in 1979 by Saitō Rokurō, it agreed that the prime mover in the internment was the USSR, but argued that Japan too bore substantial responsibility, and that the postwar government was obligated to bear the

historical burdens incurred by its imperial predecessor. For decades, Zenyokkyō sought redress through the courts, only to encounter various forms of the legal argument that all Japanese who had suffered in the war were equal, so no group deserved special treatment. But with the successful passage of redress legislation in 2010, Zenyokkyō too has now disbanded. One common concern of both organizations—and indeed of all returnees—was the repatriation of remains, care for gravesites, and the fullest possible accounting of the number of dead. With the average age of survivors now approaching eighty-five, it is obvious that others must take up these tasks. But one also senses that distance in time magnifies distance in space. It is not clear for how long the next generation's physical connection to the internment can be preserved.²³

As may be surmised from this bare summary, Siberian internees developed disparate understandings of their—broadly speaking—shared experience, and adopted disparate political means of seeking historical recognition and redress. It is also important to recall that a great many internees played no role at all in either organization, or any other. Still, Zenyokkyō had a wider base of support within Japan and was also willing and able to make productive connections in post-Soviet Russia, which has led to the emergence from the Russian archives of highly pertinent documentation concerning the internment. This last point reminds us that ultimately the Siberian internment was a sustained encounter with an extraordinarily significant other, an encounter whose effects are still being assimilated.²⁴

THE SOVIET-JAPANESE CONFLICT: PREHISTORY INTO HISTORY

When Stalin made his failed case to Truman for the creation of a Soviet zone of occupation in Japan, he naturally spoke of fair compensation for his country's sacrifices in bringing down a common enemy. But significantly for our considerations here, he appealed also to historical justice. "In 1919–21, the Japanese occupied the whole of the Soviet Far East," he reminded the president, delicately omitting reference to the United States or the other powers involved. He was not just being politic. Japan had been the first in and last out—its troops remained on the mainland until 1922, in fact, and in northern Sakhalin until 1925. And at seventy-three thousand, their numbers dwarfed those dispatched by any of the other powers. "Russian public opinion," Stalin therefore argued, "would be gravely offended if Soviet troops had no occupation area in

any part of the territory of Japan proper.” Nor was Stalin’s “modest suggestion” for the righting of historical wrongs an isolated instance. Marshal Malinovskii, commander of the Trans-Baikal Front, had viewed the destruction of the Kwantung Army in precisely the same terms: beyond signifying the final collapse of the fascist powers, it was “payback” for the Siberian Expedition.²⁵

But the problems with Japan lay one historical layer deeper. In his victory speech to the nation on September 2, Stalin evoked the Russo-Japanese War and the memory of defeat. “We of the old generation,” he declared, had never forgotten the fall of Port Arthur, or the naval debacle in the Tsushima Straits. Now they could assuage their bitterness. Yet as Isaac Deutscher remarked, the “old generation” of Bolsheviks—Vladimir Ilyich Lenin included—had actually rejoiced over the tsar’s defeat. Here Stalin was the revisionist. But that is actually the crucial point, and the pivot for a turn in our own considerations toward the longer prehistory of the Soviet-Japanese war. The Stalin who congratulated the Allies on the defeat of fascism—which was nothing but capitalism in its most counterrevolutionary aspect—was also the author of “socialism in one country.” If he was not a “Great Russian chauvinist,” he was without question a Soviet-Russian nationalist. And from that perspective, Japan, since at least the 1890s, had posed a singular and persistent threat. The Trans-Siberian Railroad, built to meet that threat, instead took it to its next level: the clash, in which Japan emerged victorious, over hegemony in Korea and Manchuria. For its part, Japanese foreign policy, Calvocoressi, Wint, and Pritchard argue, was based on fear of the outside world and the spread of a “counter-fear” of Japan.²⁶ “Counter-fear” does indeed seem an apt description for the Siberian Expedition. And by the onset of the 1930s, the Kwantung Army, formed initially in 1919 to protect Japanese assets (and seize new ones) in Manchuria, had become the highest embodiment of that policy, even to the point of creating a new form of state—the so-called empire of Manchukuo—to do its bidding.²⁷

In part, this concentration of aggressive energies occurred because the Russian threat to Japan had also changed: hence the creation of new means of “counter-fear” employed to meet it. Russia had thrown off its “rotting tsarist” regime in 1917 and become a union of soviet republics. It had embraced a new mission, “to set the east ablaze” in proletarian revolution. It was this mission in its nationalized form that Stalin had synthesized and made the basis for the conjoined operations of the Comintern and its member parties, on the one hand, and the Soviet state,

on the other. From this perspective, Soviet-Japanese relations were no longer purely matters of diplomacy in the national interest. Instead they took on a historical—but future-oriented—character that is of concern to us here for the light it sheds on Soviet interpretations of Japan's continental policy.

In 1935, the historian N. A. Levitskii published a widely read study of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05. “The essence of Japan's victory,” Levitskii concluded, “consisted not in the positive qualities of the Japanese army, but in the fact that the rotting autocratic regime, not reflecting the interests of the broad popular masses of Russia, was unable to advance into aggressive war such an army as it could lead to victory.”

“To defeat such an army,” Levitskii added, “was easy.” But just as tsarism, backward and stagnant, had earlier enabled a historically “progressive” Japan, tsarism's defeat had also ushered in Russia's proletarian revolution. So that now the historical positions of Japan and the Soviet Union had become reversed; social conditions in Japan today, Levitskii observed, “have much in common with those of Russia prior to the Russo-Japanese conflict.” In the wake of the economic crises of the late 1920s, a strong and revolutionary Soviet Union would if necessary challenge a weakened—therefore desperate, therefore more aggressive—Japan. But the Japanese should know, he warned, that if it did come, the next conflict would bring “the Tsushima of the feudal-capitalist regime of their country.”²⁸

That “Tsushima” did come again, not once, but twice, each time involving the Kwantung Army. Although Japan had recognized the Soviet Union in 1925, relations remained difficult. The Manchurian Incident of 1931 sharpened tensions; the creation of Manchukuo in 1932 and its “transformation into an industrial and colonial powerhouse” was seen as a permanent provocation, and cross-border violations were common. Virtually as Levitskii wrote, the region was being fortified and prepared for war. In 1938, Soviet and Japanese armies fought to a draw at Lake Khasan. A fateful engagement came in the summer of 1939, at Nomonhan (Khalkhin-Gol) in the disputed border zone between Manchuria, Mongolia, and Soviet Union, and was the first of the latter-day debacles. At the end of August, under Georgi Zhukov, a Red Army force annihilated the 23rd Division of the Kwantung Army after months of on-and-off sparring, mounting casualties, and stalemate. On the day following Zhukov's victory, the Second World War began in Poland.²⁹

Zhukov's strike was a palpable rehearsal, featuring highly mobile tank units and enveloping strategies, both for the Soviet war of defense (especially its component of offense-within-defense) against the Wehrmacht, and the August 1945 strike in Manchuria. For Japan too, it was of major significance. In the wake of the Nomonhan defeat, the army's "northern" strategy of confronting the USSR and seizing hold of Siberia's vast natural resources, was revealed to be a chimera. Military strategists in the navy, in turn, lost no time in arguing—convincingly—that Japan's aims would be better served by a "Southern Strike" policy, which ultimately opened the sea road to Pearl Harbor. In April 1941, two months before Hitler broke his nonaggression pact with Stalin, Japan's foreign minister, Matsuoka Yōsuke, fairly glowed with delight at the signing of Japan's own five-year neutrality pact with the Soviet Union. But as Japan's official history of the Soviet-Japanese conflict puts it: "In essence, the alliance among the three Axis powers clearly took precedence over the Japan-USSR Neutrality Pact."³⁰

The debacle at Nomonhan meant more than strategic shifts. It stood also for lessons unlearned. No change in Japanese military doctrine or force modernization emerged in its wake. The studied derogation of intelligence, disregard of armored warfare, persistence in an "offense-first" approach: all these were unaffected by defeat. Kwantung Army commanders much preferred to think only of the near-successful resistance of Finnish armies to Stalin's forces, and of the initial success of Hitler's Operation Barbarossa, as they continued to hold out hope that their own offensive move against the Red Army might still be a possibility. In terms of doctrine and practice, David Glantz observes, the individual soldier, his courage, relentless drive to attack, and refusal to surrender, continued to be regarded as the military's ultimate resource, and its most expendable. Of this, Soviet commanders were also well aware.³¹

Nomonhan reinforced this point—the nexus of "interiorized" expendability at the level of the individual soldier with systemic contempt for the status of prisoner of war—in dramatic fashion. POWs were as a matter of course taken at Nomonhan, on both sides; but on both sides the actual numbers were closely guarded. In seeking to arrange prisoner exchanges following the cease-fire, the parties were at loggerheads over whether to exchange all prisoners held or settle on an equivalent number. Ultimately, on the basis of a "rough estimate," two exchanges were carried out. The first saw the return of close to nine hundred prisoners by each side, the second of a mere handful. Kwantung

Army authorities suspected that many more Japanese remained in Soviet hands, and they were correct. This was not because the Soviets were detaining them, but the reverse: they had refused to be exchanged, and the reason was clear. They feared, no, they knew that they would be met with court-martial, imprisonment, and possibly execution for the crime of being captured. At best it was moral failure, at worst treachery. In the end, it is estimated, at least five hundred Japanese former Nomonhan POWs, and possibly a thousand, elected to remain in the Soviet Union. Initially they were tried in military courts for violating the Soviet border, but after serving sentences of seven years they had their records cleared and were accorded full citizenship rights. Scattered throughout Siberia and Central Asia, they lived as Soviet citizens, one reportedly serving as an officer in the border police at Blagoveshchensk—the city on the Amur River that hundreds of thousands of captive Japanese passed through on their way into internment.³²

To this story we may juxtapose another, of two captured Kwantung Army fighter pilots. One, Major Harada Fumio, was reported mistakenly to have been killed in action and was given a hero's funeral in his home district of Saga. In the second POW exchange Harada was repatriated along with the other pilot, Lieutenant Daitoku Naoyuki. Since he had shamed himself, his unit, and his family by having been taken captive, Harada was advised by his commanding officer to cut off all contact with his family, change his name, and move to Manchuria as an agricultural pioneer. This, his pride would not allow. Daitoku, the second pilot, refused to admit any shame and energetically sought reinstatement for further combat duty. But he was refused, again on grounds that he had made himself unworthy. Given no way out, the two men chose to commit double suicide by simultaneously shooting each other—with pistols thoughtfully provided for them on order of their superiors. Shortly thereafter, reports of their deaths and a portion of their remains were delivered by the army to their families.³³ My point is not to glorify the humanism of Soviet POW policy, since the gulag was full of prisoners whose crime was that they had returned alive from captivity in Germany or elsewhere. Indeed, for both Japanese and Soviets, for different reasons, being taken prisoner was the ultimate dishonor and required different means of expiation. But speaking only about the Japanese cases, the difference in fates is striking. What they share is that they had all lost the right to claim either a moral or physical home in the country of their birth. It seems very doubtful, however, that their families were consulted in the matter.

The years that followed the signing of the Japan-USSR Neutrality Pact were years not of peace but of “no war yet.” The Red Army had had to begin the diversion of its far eastern forces to the west, leaving the defense of Siberia and the maritime zone to the fourteen “Fortified Regions” created for that purpose. On the Japanese side, the initial phases of Hitler’s Operation Barbarossa in Russia raised Kwantung Army hopes for its own campaign to “settle the Northern Problem,” and as early as July 1941 the Liaison Conference, with the emperor presiding, sanctioned the idea so long as German success continued. So much for the neutrality pact. Although offensive plans were shelved the following month, this was not so much out of moral scruples as from a sense that they were not yet feasible. For his part, a somewhat more cautious Kono Fumimaro, as prime minister, had already seen the need to build up the capacity of the Kwantung Army in order to stop an anticipated Soviet invading force and defend Manchuria’s industrial regions. The so-called Kwantung Army Special Exercises (Kantōgun Tokushu Enshū, or Kantokuen) saw the transfer to Manchuria of some fourteen homeland infantry divisions, ammunition, and thousands of combat vehicles and horses; Japan’s Manchurian force reached its peak strength of some 740,000 in mid-1942. By any name it was a massive buildup.³⁴

In the end, Kantokuen amounted to quantity rather than quality, and the contradiction between its aggressive essence and defensive function went unaddressed. On the one hand, an authoritative Russian source counts 779 violations of the Soviet border by Kwantung Army forces, 443 violations of airspace, 49 incidences of Soviets being fired upon, and the arrest of 362 Japanese spies. Soviet shipping as well was frequently the object of harassment and seizure by Japan in the early war years. Leery perhaps of antagonizing Japan while they were under German attack in the West, the Soviets kept silent about these events, and Japan’s official policy of “quiet in the north” was maintained. On the other hand, the grand élan of the war took its fateful turn. No sooner had the Kwantung Army been readied for a possible offensive in Siberia than Japan’s naval forces were dealt irreparable blows at the battle of Midway, and the vast Pacific expanse they controlled began to contract. Manchuria’s divisions, one after the other, were soon redeployed—to the Philippines, the south Pacific, and eventually to the Japanese mainland as the ultimate line of defense. Hitler’s forces too were turned back in titanic engagements across the Russian steppes, at Stalingrad and Kursk. By late 1944, Stalin was speaking publicly of Japan as an aggressor, and Soviet units had begun to make forays across the border into

Manchukuo. The context for the Soviet denunciation of the neutrality pact in April 1945—a declaration of war before the fact—had been set. At this juncture the Soviet government made its argument that the Japanese military buildup and early border incursions in effect aided the Wehrmacht offensive and thus constituted a violation of the pact. In short, neither party to this agreement hesitated to contemplate violating it or to prepare concrete plans to do so, virtually from the moment it came into being.³⁵

By this point also, as Glantz notes, the Red Army had recovered from the purges of the late 1930s that had killed imaginative military theorists such as M. N. Tukhachevskii and “anesthetized the brain” of the army. The operational and tactical education that commanders had received earlier in the war was beginning “to pay real dividends.” In line with Tukhachevskii’s hopes and aspirations, “Red Army operations were grander in intent, scope, complexity, and duration . . . and operational results were more impressive.” Against this background, Red Army strategists could now begin the promised and reconfirmed buildup for their Manchurian assault, and presently the “Fortified Regions” were turned to offensive purposes. Guided by the final wartime edition of the Field Regulations (*Polevoi ustav*, the so-called PU-44), operational planning took five months. The logistical problems alone—not least how to overcome the load limits of the Trans-Siberian Railroad—were enormous. Along with their emphasis on the aggressive frontline use of armored units and careful attention to suiting resources to terrain, the Regulations placed a premium on command initiative and creativity.³⁶ The contrast to the spirit of the *Senjinkun* could not be starker. It is no wonder that from a professional point of view, “August Storm” may have been nothing less than a perfect storm as well.

TOWARD INTERNMENT

Near the end of the preface to his definitive study of the Manchurian offensive, Glantz notes in passing that “Soviet sources simply gloss over unpleasant events.”³⁷ Beyond noting death and casualty figures on both sides and the number of Japanese captured, he too declines to pursue the question of what those events were. Military history, after all, is also in part institutional history, and is prone to reproduce the buffering or distancing effect that institutional decision makers depend on in order to exercise power over, to move, even to kill the human subjects who are the objects of their acts. Still, as far as Glantz is concerned, one might

have expected a mention of the internment (since in a technical sense it was a military operation), and of the abysmal conduct of Soviet forces as they initially moved to occupy Manchuria. Sometimes numbers tell a story, sometimes they do not, sometimes they are not allowed to.

In fairness, the disintegration of Japanese dominion in Manchuria—and of the Kwantung Army as it articulated with Manchukuo as a political entity—and of settler society along with it, lay beyond Glantz's concerns. By conception his story is one of war, not of the postwar that ensued. For us, however, the Soviet-Japanese War was significant precisely because of the events of its aftertime. Let us resume the story once more, just before Glantz's leaving-off point, and carry it into that aftertime, or half-life, that was the Siberian internment.

In its last months of existence, the Kwantung Army was once more fortified, this time in de facto preparation for its demise. Defense (at least of anything other than itself) was not a notion congenial to this organization or its preferred mode of action. But that had become the order of the day. The facts on the ground were by this point not appetizing. The army's best units—organized at the time of the Kantokuen “special exercises”—had long since been sent elsewhere, leaving only a shell of its former self to garrison the territory. Reinforcement had begun in January 1945. But with the Soviet abrogation of the Japan-USSR Neutrality Pact in April 1945, war with the USSR became a virtual certainty, and the pace grew frantic. Between May and July, the Kwantung Army carried out a series of massive mobilization levies—250,000 draftees were called up in July alone—that sent its nominal strength to 780,000 men.³⁸

But despite the formidable number, this was a “bottom-scraping mobilization” (*nekosogi dōin*), its target met by drafting “the physically infirm, the overage, civil servants, colonists, and students.” The number also concealed a missing middle: on the eve of its demise, the Kwantung Army was made up of teenagers and men in their thirties, or even forties. A great many of these “old soldiers” (*rōhei*), moreover, were no more veterans than the young men alongside whom they were sent to fight—or more accurately, to man units in the Manchurian borderlands whose mission was to stop, or slow, the Soviet ground assault. In performing this function they were often joined by new agricultural “pioneers” who had been mixed with paramilitary forces and hastily organized into settlements in the war's final weeks. Overall, as Kurihara Toshio puts it, the training and weapons these late conscripts received were essentially medieval, with troops being issued carving knives that

could be fashioned into bayonets, along with two beer bottles to be used as crude explosives. The standard-issue Meiji-era rifles (which were the top of the line in their day) were in short supply, with whole regiments having virtually none; some units had less than half of their mandated number of machine guns. The material deficiency was to be made up less with spirit than with the bodies of the soldiers themselves. Since antitank training, for instance, consisted of a soldier slipping underneath an oncoming tank with explosives strapped to his chest, it was also suicide training as well. A mordant phrase used to describe the imperial army's Special Attack Forces applied here as well: ten lives lost, none saved (*jusshi reishō*). Despite locally fierce resistance, three quarters of Manchuria were essentially conceded in this fashion. As noted, some fifty thousand defenders died during the first week of the Soviet attack, and eighty-four thousand by its end.³⁹

The Kwantung Army was now defunct, or becoming so. Throughout Manchuria, northern Korea, Sakhalin and the Kurils, hundreds of thousands of soldiers were now falling under Soviet control as they lay down their arms. As Kwantung Army staff and frontline officers struggled to communicate the emperor's surrender order to the last scattered units, they and those who received that order had to face a simple fact. They could choose to obey—as virtually all of them did—but beyond that they did not control their fate. More to the point, they did not even know what that fate was to be. But we do. From the time they took custody of them at points of surrender, Russian guards and soldiers made sure that captive Japanese understood two key phrases. One was “*Davai!*”—“Move it! Get going!” The other was a concoction of pidgin Russian, repeated endlessly and soon inscribed in the memories of everyone who heard it: “*Skoro Tokyo Domo!*”—“You'll be home in Tokyo soon.” On both sides, “going home” (*domoi*) was the currency. We speak of the Siberian internment as the most important among the “half-lives” of the Manchurian war for this reason: “*Skoro Tokyo Domo!*” did not happen. The words and the assurances were false. In Moscow, at some point before the war ended, the decision was made that, after Japan surrendered, most of the hundreds of thousands of Japanese soldiers under Soviet control, except for the sick, would be sent, not *domoi*, but to labor camps in Siberia, Mongolia, Central Asia, and even European Russia.

No one really knows when discussions began among the Soviet leadership about interning the defeated Japanese forces in and around Manchuria. The basic policy may have been set as early as Yalta, in February 1945, when Stalin (unbeknownst to the Japanese) confirmed his

intention to join in the war against Japan. Stalin could not have known, of course, how many prisoners of war would emerge from an offensive still at least seven months distant. He may have guessed that the numbers would be considerable. Although it is hard to see how concrete plans could have been made quite that early (at any rate there are no traces of them), preparations for the internment had to have begun at least some months prior to the launching of the August offensive.⁴⁰

One reason for the puzzlement about the timing of the internment decision itself comes from a coded telegram sent on August 16 by Lavrentiy Beria, Stalin's interior minister and newly minted Marshal of the Soviet Union, and co-signed by Nikolai Bulganin and Aleksei Antonov, to A. M. Vasilevskii of the Soviet Far East Command. In it, Beria specifies that members of the Japanese military are not to be transported to Soviet territory, but held in camps close to where they had surrendered. What did this order mean? How was it related to the fact, which is beyond dispute, that the USSR soon began just such transports of Japanese prisoners onto its territory?

The contradiction may be more apparent than real. If Shirai and others are correct, Beria's telegram was no more than a sort of "hold your fire" order, a temporary stay of a decision already taken. And that decision was to intern the Kwantung Army en masse in the USSR. We can only speculate about the reasons for delay. It may have been because sufficient food supplies were not yet available, that the principal figures in charge of supervising the transports and internment were not yet on the scene, or some other practical circumstance. On the other hand, the relations between Stalin and Truman at that juncture were highly volatile, and there is no doubt that Stalin was incensed over his "loss" of Hokkaidō. That he would have ordered the internment out of the blue as a way of exacting revenge is a logistical and temporal impossibility. But that he might have been waiting until then to move ahead with what was already settled policy is entirely conceivable.⁴¹

In any case, the first steps toward internment came with the creation of assembly camps—some twenty-seven in Manchuria, eight in Korea, nine in south Sakhalin and the Kurils.⁴² The memoir literature contains hundreds of accounts of miserable and debilitating marches ending at packed frontline camps that were short of food and rife with disease. The Soviets—specifically the Red Army and Interior Ministry—had inherited a logistical nightmare. What happened to the immense mass of Japanese humanity now thronging these camps was their responsibility. The weather was growing unfriendly. Very quickly, as with the civilian

population, disease (dysentery, typhus) and hunger began to take their toll. The deaths began. Somehow this had to be turned around, the wounded, sick, and infirm sequestered and sent to hospital camps or repatriated, the masses of others fed enough to keep them alive while the big decisions were made.

At the camps, prisoners were reorganized into Soviet-style “work battalions” (*sagyō daitai*) of roughly one thousand men, each commanded by a minimum contingent of Japanese officers, both high-ranking and lower echelon. These were the prototypes of the Siberian labor camps that were their ultimate destination. Once reorganized, the prisoners worked. At Soviet command they assisted in the wholesale expropriation of Japanese industrial assets, loading machinery, building supplies, fuel, and foodstuffs onto trains and ships for transport to the USSR. But mainly they waited in mixed fear, anxiety, hope, and ceaseless speculation. They all knew that the Potsdam Declaration had mandated the speedy return of prisoners of war to their home countries, now that hostilities had ceased. And they had heard the promises of *domoi* countless times. From the instant of surrender to the end of the internment, “return” was the one constant concern of every prisoner. This was categorically the case. Would it come in weeks, months? But what was “return”? On this score there were complications, right from the beginning. Though they had all been imperial subjects, not every soldier who served had come from Japan. Thousands had been living in Manchuria at the time of their conscription, others in Korea, others elsewhere. Many were not Japanese at all. Where were they to go? It occurred to some that it might even be possible to escape—the chances were marginally better now than they would be later.⁴³

On August 23, a top-secret, detailed directive from Stalin, for execution by Beria, ordered the transport of up to five hundred thousand Japanese soldiers “fit for labor” to the Soviet Union and their disposition in camps of varying sizes, types, and locations, all spelled out in the order along with provisions for distribution of food supplies, barbed wire, fuel, and construction materials.⁴⁴ This was the infrastructure of the internment, much of which was built and maintained by those whom it held captive, where possible using confiscated Japanese assets (*trofeinoe imushchestvo*). The order directs authorities to provide transports with two months’ worth of food and other supplies. But the actual process of moving these five hundred thousand—in fact many more than that were needed, both military and civilian, in order to replace the dead, infirm, and so on—took closer to eight months to complete. Most, however, had

been carried onto Soviet territory by late fall of 1945.⁴⁵ In virtually all accounts this phase of the internment stands out as among the most harrowing and traumatic. Initially believing the promises they heard of speedy return, prisoners obediently boarded the freight cars that were to carry them into prolonged captivity. Kurihara Toshio quotes one internee to the effect that had they been told the truth, many would have tried to escape or resist. The lies were a “clever, and cruel, act.”⁴⁶ The journeys could take weeks. Lacking toilet facilities (some had a hole in one corner), the cars, packed with fifty or so men, were soon mired in filth. Never learning their destination, by the time they arrived at their assigned camps, prisoners were desperately hungry and weak, and many were in complete despair for the future.

It is not surprising that those who experienced such journeys should have wondered about the reasons and motives that drove their Soviet captors. These quests for understanding have produced accounts of considerable pathos and sophistication. But we should also wonder, for our own sake. As “otherly” as the events may seem, they are in fact intelligible, and we could easily have been there, as captor or captive. Soviet reasoning and motives do appear to have been both very simple and politically calculated at a number of levels. In the broad background loom two convergent facts: first, that the Soviets had inherited from the tsarist regime the penal system of Siberian exile, which they then enhanced and expanded; and second, that during World War II some thirty-five million POWs, including forced laborers, were taken by all sides in the conflict. While the USSR was a “Pharaonic” exception in holding large populations captive for labor (long-term) following the end of hostilities, it was hardly exceptional in abusing prisoners while they were held or dissimulating about their condition. Also salient, as part of the deeper background, was Stalin’s nationalities policy, which took the wholesale uprooting and transport of entire populations (Chechens, Tatars, Koreans, Ingush, Volga Germans, and so forth) as a necessary element in the repertoire of handling supposed class enemies and collaborator peoples. For its part, let us also note, beginning in the late 1930s Japan had undertaken the forced transport of hundreds of thousands of Koreans, Taiwanese, and others to work in its mines and factories. In any event, after the cessation of hostilities, the USSR held nearly four million POWs in all: over two million Germans, more than six hundred thousand Japanese, almost as many Hungarians, smaller numbers of Romanians, Czechs, Poles, and Italians, plus returned Soviet POWs.⁴⁷

Against the broader background of massive (and punitive) population transfer in conjunction with forced labor, the direct motive for the internment of the Japanese becomes readily apparent. There is no question that it arose first and foremost from the desperate Soviet need to replace, even fractionally, the catastrophic losses to the country's labor supply caused by the war. Victory over the Wehrmacht had come at the most immense of costs: an estimated twenty-three million deaths, about one in seven Soviet citizens. A hundred and fifty thousand Japanese were assigned to work on the Baikal-Amur Railroad. Japanese helped to construct public buildings and apartments in Irkutsk. Thousands worked in coal mines in Magadan, felled timber, and operated heavy machinery. They also worked as skilled technicians and doctors, performed concerts, painted posters and portraits, propagandized, and even baby-sat. Although their labor was of doubtful efficiency, its value (in 1987 dollars) has been estimated at \$64 billion, based on five billion man-hours.⁴⁸

But even the imperative need for labor had to be translated into proper ideological and social terms. Along with their naturalistic descriptions of hunger, cold, and forced labor, later memoirs recalling the core years of 1948 and 1949 universally point to the reeducation campaign—the so-called democratic movement—as an inescapable feature of camp life. It was set around the dissemination of the *Nihon shinbun*, a Japanese-language newspaper distributed to internees from mid-September 1945 through the end of December 1949. Published in Khabarovsk, the paper's operations were directed by a Soviet editor-in-chief (Ivan Kovalenko) and employed a staff of fifty Japanese and fifteen Soviets—reporters, writers, Communist Party activists. Along with overweening doses of late Stalinist propaganda, its 662 issues provided readers with news of Japan, the camps, the USSR, and the wider world, as well as literary and cultural features.⁴⁹ To be sure, some internees saw no use for it except as rolling paper for tobacco. But for masses of internees starved for print, it was at least a dependable presence. The broader role of the *Nihon shinbun*, as indicated, was organizational. Almost as soon as the internment began, it became the nucleus for groups of Japanese activists or *aktivs* who, with Soviet direction and training, sought to bring about a revolution in consciousness among the former soldiers of the Kwantung Army: to rid them of the feudalistic mind-set that had induced them to follow their leaders into aggressive war, mold them into model workers, and prepare them to struggle for a Soviet-style democracy upon their return to Japan. Movement activists came into



FIGURE 1. Satō Chūryō, *Camp Gate* (pencil and watercolor on paper, 1980). Courtesy Satō Tatsuo and Miyagi Museum of Art, Sendai.

their own in 1948, when Soviet camp authorities granted them substantial control over the organization and disciplining of labor. The resulting power struggles with former officers led to a panoply of abuses—informing, revenge-seeking—that have shadowed the movement ever since.⁵⁰

Beyond labor and reeducation, other motives for the internment are often cited. These are more tactical, and in my view secondary. As is often the case with highly politicized and emotional issues, these motives also tend to be seen in power-political, even conspiratorial, terms that can seem more “real” than something like labor supply. As noted, for example, some have argued that Stalin conceived of the internment only after, and as a compensation for, Truman’s refusal to give up Hokkaidō. Again, this is a temporal impossibility. But it does not change the fact that Stalin subsequently used the internee issue—how many were being held, when they would be released, who would provide and pay for the ships to repatriate them, and so on—as a pawn in negotiations, a means of influencing other areas of American occupation policy in Japan. American officials responded in kind, particularly by inflating the numbers of captives and dead.⁵¹ The emotional toll on families of these tactics was huge.

On the Japanese side, a more substantive, though circumstantial charge has held that the internment was a form of reparation offered by Japan to the USSR in secret presurrender negotiations, in exchange for Soviet offices that would lead to a quick surrender and the “preservation of the national polity.” There is something to this: in July 1945, Konoe Fumimaro, at the suggestion of Privy Seal Kido Kōichi, lobbied for a mission to Moscow in which he would offer Stalin both territory and labor; territory alone, Konoe thought, might not be enough. The terms were vague, and certainly there was no explicit mention of an internment, in Siberia or anywhere else. In any case, Moscow rebuffed the proposal. In the last weeks of August, also, the Kwantung Army offered the Soviets both military and civilian labor as a temporary arrangement until repatriations could get under way.⁵² At that juncture, the army—and the Japanese government as a whole—still expected a majority of Japanese to give up their nationality and remain in Manchuria, a notion to which none of these authorities had any objection.⁵³ But soon, conditions on the ground grew so chaotic and violent that official policy made an about-face to one of complete repatriation.⁵⁴ Still, even if they were unaware of the Siberian internment that was poised to begin, Japanese authorities did not hesitate to offer their soldiers’ labor (or that of civilians) to their Soviet conquerors. The “cold logic” of their thinking was on full display. Stalin, it is true, had already made his decision. But thanks to this further bait, he may have been able to discern that the highest officials of the Japanese military would likely do little to protest or obstruct his plans. It would not have occurred to them that war prisoners might have rights to be defended. In this sense, therefore, it is not wrong to say that the internment had Japanese enablers in the moment of its making, and to that extent was a “joint work” of Japan and the Soviet Union.⁵⁵

The phrase is apt. For if the Japanese military placed scant value on the rights of its own captured soldiers, their captors followed suit. But for Japan, this “enabling” role was part of its last gasp of dishonor as an imperial power. The USSR, in the victor’s seat, had far greater power of decision and choice. The USSR joined in the Potsdam Declaration on August 8, 1945; Japan’s formal acceptance was announced six days later. Under its terms, prisoners of war were to be speedily returned to their countries of origin. This was now a legal obligation. As early as December 1946, the USSR and the United States (acting as Japan’s provisionally sovereign occupier) agreed on a schedule for repatriations that quickly became a dead letter and occasion for protracted Cold War theatrics on

both sides.⁵⁶ The actual pace of returns of Japanese from Siberia—not including those convicted of “war crimes” under Soviet law—was slow and fitful: 5,000 in 1946; 200,774 in 1947; 169,619 in 1948; 87,416 in 1949; and 7,547 in 1950. In the face of this reality, Soviet officials and legal scholars later claimed that the internment was in fact permissible under international law, since the “state of war” between Japan and the USSR had not ended until 1956, when the two countries signed the Joint Communiqué that restored their diplomatic relations. Like the internees themselves, the pledges of the Potsdam Declaration—and the underlying premise of international legal accountability—became hostage to the twinned imperatives of Soviet national reconstruction and the drive for hemispheric dominance.⁵⁷

Ultimately, then, the internment was Stalin’s show. It is sobering in this context to recall that in his victory speech on September 2, Stalin emphasized that “our country would exact a special price” from Japan for its history of aggression. We need no longer guess what price he had in mind.

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THE INTERNMENT REMEMBERED

As discussed in the prologue, my concern in this book is with the Siberian internment as “experienced, remembered, and interpreted by those who lived through it.” Who wrote about it, and why? What meaning did they seek to draw from their captivity, and how? To whom, and for whom, did they speak? I have tried in the foregoing pages to provide a historical context sufficient to address such questions and so gain an understanding of the struggles and conflicts that have shaped Japan’s gulag returnees as a community of memory. As has been observed with respect to the USSR itself, however, even the richest memoir literature can only go so far in capturing the administrative, political, and especially the social history of an institution such as the gulag.⁵⁸ Perhaps before long, we will be in a position to say something similar about Japan’s gulag interlude. But we are not yet at that stage: the memoir literature, the testimony of the (fractious) community of Japan’s gulag returnees, still has to be explored for itself. That work is now under way, and I offer this book as a contribution.

All told, Japanese were held in some two thousand labor camps across the Soviet Union. Seen on a map, one writer has charmingly said,

the camps resemble “black-roasted sesame seeds sprinkled atop a bowl of white rice porridge.”⁵⁹ In size they varied widely, from the massive railway complex of Taishet that held forty thousand or more prisoners, to remote satellite camps of a few hundred or not even that. By coincidence, over the decades since 1950 some two thousand memoirs by Japanese internees have appeared. The majority consists of short catalogue-like reminiscences or exemplary, even stereotyped episodes, but no fewer than five hundred book-length treatments had been published by the mid-1990s, and these include a number of major and searching reconstructions of the gulag experience.⁶⁰ It is as if, by this crude arithmetic, fate had decreed that for each camp, someone would be moved to write about how it was to be held there, be it for a year, eighteen months, two years, or—most commonly—for three or four.

Needless to say, neither the individual experiences of captivity nor the later recording of them even remotely approached uniformity. I note the coincidence of “one memoir per camp” merely to give an indication of scale. In fact, internees virtually never remained in any single camp, but were transferred, as if at a whim, with no prior notice, or any idea of their destination or length of stay. The single point in common to the body of Japanese camp memoirs is precisely that they are memoirs; there is no other way for us to reconstruct the experience of the Siberian internment at the individual level. By the nature of the gulag’s carceral regime, it was well-nigh impossible for prisoners to keep notes or diaries. Correspondence too was highly infrequent and tightly controlled. To start with, paper was in exceedingly short supply, as were writing instruments. Prisoners and their quarters were routinely and rigorously searched for hidden papers and notes, or books beyond what was officially distributed. Discovery could bring punishment, interrogation, or worse. Illumination in the barracks was scant and unreliable, and there was essentially no such thing as privacy. Even so, after hours and hours at hard labor and on chronically empty stomachs, some prisoners did try to jot down a thought, poem, or sketch, or a simple record of the day’s events. But even when they managed to do that, a final, nearly insuperable hurdle remained. This was to conceal what they had written through the repeated searches that accompanied the “processing” of prisoners for their return voyages from Nakhodka. It was made unambiguously clear to prospective returnees that nothing handwritten or printed was permitted among their belongings. The stakes were incredibly high: if found out, the prisoner was sure to be removed from the returnee list and sent

back to the interior for an extended term as punishment. Few indeed were willing to take such a risk.

One who did, and successfully, was Niki Yoshio, a young officer mobilized in an emergency call-up in March 1945 and attached to the 291st Infantry Regiment in Nanam, northern Korea. His “Log of a Prisoner in the Soviet Union” (*Soren ni okeru horyo nisshi*) is one of only two day-to-day accounts of the internment known to have survived.⁶¹ Written in pencil in cramped and tiny letters on tobacco wrappers, it was hidden in a false bottom that he sewed into his officer’s document case (*zunō*), and smuggled back with him when he returned to Japan.

Niki had begun making entries as soon as he was called up. He may have been used to it—in fact the compilation of a logbook or *nisshi* was not uncommon, being used in training for surveillance and discipline by superiors.⁶² The portion of Niki’s record available to us begins in the final week of the war, and continues until his repatriation in November 1947. It is thus of obvious value for the picture it provides of the frantic confusion of the war’s end, which he met at Kyōngwŏn, on the Korean border with Manchuria. We learn of his having supervised, eyes awash in tears, the burning of several years’ accumulation of goods from the regimental canteen. Although his unit had learned of the “cease-fire” by August 17, we are told that it did not surrender until August 20, at Tumen, and that the formal reading of the August 15 rescript did not occur until the 25th. Most entries for the month or two that follow are, understandably, short and telegraphic, and in any case corroborate almost everything one encounters in later descriptions of the exhausting journeys into internment. So too they record the dawning awareness that return home would not be coming anytime soon, and that even though the Soviets had retained their privileges, he and his fellow officers would have to share the sufferings of the regular soldier.

To some extent they did. Niki spent most of his internment at Lada, some four hundred kilometers southwest of Moscow, in a camp that primarily housed Japanese officers. It is clear that he and those around him were hungry all the time, once the high-quality foodstuffs they had carried with them from Korea had been exhausted. As was very common, Niki and his fellow prisoners foraged for edible grasses and roots, killed and cooked snakes, mice, and so on in an attempt to fill their stomachs. Some among them grew ill, and a small number, in the early days, died. Niki himself had to be hospitalized later on. He seems never to have slept well, only partly because of the bedbugs that were the bane of exis-

tence in every camp. Rumors and talk of return were constant. He also notes at least one summary execution.

On the other hand, it is striking how quickly work and off-duty routines were established once Niki's group arrived in camp. For some time, the daily round consisted of gathering firewood to heat the camp; later Niki was assigned to die-casting duties. Evening lectures (on some of which Niki kept detailed notes), poetry writing, concerts, theater, and other cultural activities began immediately. Mahjongg, go, and dice were also key forms of entertainment. There are a few mentions of his wife at home, worries about conditions in Japan—but also fond recollections of skiing. With the disdain perhaps to be expected of an officer, Niki mentions reading the *Nihon shinbun*, but refuses to have anything to do with a signature campaign to promote the “democratic construction of the New Japan.” How is it, he wonders, that the Japanese work leaders have become so self-protective, so sycophantic to the Soviets? Could this be the same lot who were my superiors? In any case, by June of 1946, Niki could write—on his birthday—of a Sunday evening spent watching a “Japan vs. Hungary” soccer match between prisoners, hearing announcements from the “Japanese Club,” then enjoying an outdoor movie. “Somehow, it’s more like being at summer school” than a prisoner of war camp. So much had conditions improved.

We should hardly begrudge Niki his taste of normality. That we can read of it in a diary written as a captive—something he never forgot—is extraordinary. But his normality is precisely what was denied to the vast majority of internees: their experience was different. The labor norms and conditions that ruled their lives were incomparably harsher, and their food much worse. For their own reasons, the Soviet authorities had respected the Geneva Convention requirements for separate officer housing and lighter work requirements. This was all the more important in the early phase of the internment, when food supply throughout the Soviet Union—not just the gulag—was at its worst. It is thanks to this “consideration” that Niki survived, that he remained healthy and active enough to write, and that we can read his diary now. But it is probably also why we have fewer than a handful of diaries. For the rest—the mass of rank-and-file soldiers—the time and chance to record what they had been through would come only later. If it came at all.

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Let me turn now to the internment memoirs themselves and the other modes of remembrance, and in particular to the contents, organization,

and sequencing of the chapters that follow. Simply put, I have elected to arrange the chapters as a series of studies set around major works by individual authors; to opt, or so I hope, for interpretive depth over sociological breadth. Rather than mining the many hundreds, indeed thousands, of memoirs in order to create a kind of ideal-typical image of internee experience in its different dimensions or phases, I focus on a quantitatively smaller body of sustained testimony. In doing so, I seek to illuminate the internment experience via an intensive dialogue with (and to set up a dialogue among) my subjects as they faced the task of remembrance. Individually and taken together, the studies I offer here operate in three timescapes: the original life course of each of my figures, with the internment experience as its crucial episode (T^1), the multiple revisiting by each of them of that experience over the postwar decades, via different media (T^2), and my own conjunctural position as one engaged in dialogue together with them (T^3). The last is the starting point: from it we move through the second toward the first, and it is only then that we can claim to know the internee experience.

Beyond the option for depth, the number and ordering of chapters also bears a word of explanation. In the absence of any established historiography of the internment, there was no analytical framework for me to support or contest. It had to be created—created, in fact, through the same immersion in the memoir literature that led me to choose to focus on individual works. As I read, I became aware that, more than the date of writing or the location and type of camp where an individual was held—again, no one stayed in just one—the crucial element in interpreting internment memoirs was how long the writer was held. This was not a matter of the raw accumulation of days in captivity. Rather, at the collective level there was a distinct *phasing* to the internment experience; it mattered profoundly when *domoi* finally came. My approach was to choose for in-depth exploration individual memoirs and other forms of remembrance that would bring out the specificity of those phases.

To sketch both, the individuals and the phases, in brief: the early returners (mid-1947 to mid-1948) had the bitterest but least “ideologized” experiences, since, as mentioned, general conditions in the gulag and surrounding society were at their postwar nadir. Food and labor shortages were particularly severe problems and had deadly consequences: malnutrition leading to disease, even starvation; the enforcement of dra-

conian production norms leading to crippling or fatal accidents of all kinds; and some suicides. The painter Kazuki Yasuo, who is the focus of the chapter to follow, was among the first mass of returnees in mid-1947. In his work on the gulag—the fifty-seven-canvas Siberia Series that retraces his path to and through captivity, and in later memoirs—Kazuki acts, I argue, as an iconographer of the profane. The world he portrays is rendered in naturalistic terms that are most suited, I believe, to the anomic and dangerous first phase of the internment.

The next group, those who returned from late 1948 through 1950, was better fed and treated—all things being relative—as conditions improved for Soviet society at large. The labor regime and climate remained harsh, to be sure. But the experience of the gulag at this second stage was marked, even dominated, by mass participation in the reeducation campaign that took off in mid-1948 and reached its peak a year later. As indicated, this so-called democratic movement involved both significant self-organization and political conflict among Japanese internees. There is a clear difference between the memoirs of early and second-stage returnees in terms of their perceptions of the USSR and the concerns that preoccupied them, differences that can only be explained by the impact of the “movement.” As a focal point for this second, and central, phase, I have chosen Takasugi Ichirō’s *In the Shadow of the Northern Lights* (Kyokkō no kage ni, 1950), among the earliest and most famous gulag memoirs by a Japanese author. If Kazuki Yasuo’s concern was to justify or redeem his own physical survival in a harsh social and natural environment, Takasugi’s was the issue of political and moral choice after the fear of death had receded. And this, I think, makes his work illuminative of the internment’s core years.

Finally, there is a third group, those designated as “war criminals,” convicted of “counterrevolutionary” offenses against Soviet law and sentenced usually to prison terms of twenty-five years. It included senior Kwantung Army officers, military police, intelligence operatives, high officials of the Manchukuo government, and diplomats; but also others who had been close to the Soviets only to fall afoul of them, Russian language experts suspected (this was almost automatic) of spying, and so on. The challenge of treating this group is its disparate character. A number were indeed in positions of power and responsibility, but many were small fry. From among the latter emerged some of the most powerful writing by internees. I offer here a study of Ishihara Yoshirō, a

poet and analyst of the gulag whose experience both recapitulates that of the first two groups but extends far beyond it. For as his time in captivity wore on and he was fed into the general gulag population, Ishihara found himself in an abyss, convinced that he had been abandoned by his country and in danger, he feared, of losing touch with language itself. As a “twenty-five year man,” I argue, Ishihara wrote amid a psychological tension and with concerns that decisively marked him off from those who had returned earlier, whether in the first or second phases of the internment.

None of the figures I have chosen for this study would have claimed to be the representative of anyone—any group, any movement. They were not movers and shakers, politicians or generals, men of particular social importance, or even scholars by profession. Before capture they were in many ways ordinary and unremarkable, and in any case still young: Kazuki was a promising painter and art teacher, Takasugi a journal editor, and Ishihara a corporate employee still in search of his life’s vocation. But they made themselves into remarkable witnesses and interpreters of the singular set of events that constituted the Siberian internment, and beyond anything else they did after their return, it was as witnesses and interpreters that they subsequently came to be known. For each of them, the internment experience was first and foremost his own, and his life’s work was now to come to terms with it. Clearly, each applied to the act of remembrance every bit of talent he possessed. At the same time, none of them stands alone: in this sense, they are both exemplary and representative. I have associated each of the three with a larger group of internees, because by historical accident, the length of their respective internments placed them in one of those groups rather than another, and in so doing played a major role in shaping the distinct contours of their individual experiences.⁶³

But for all their differences, and for all the differences among the three groups in which they happened to fall, Kazuki, Takasugi, and Ishihara shared an underlying attitude and conviction. It was that the internment, which had so irrevocably marked their lives, could not be separated from the issue of the role each had played as a member of Japan’s military forces. Although all three had been victimized by decisions they had no part in making and had suffered in the gulag, none of them could accept the stance or identity of victim. They were all driven to think through the prism of the internment about their own and their

country's war responsibility, and through the prism of war responsibility about their internment and the question of its larger meaning, both personal and historical. This process, at once one of meditation, analysis, and self-expression, was demanding, even exhausting. In the end, they did not arrive at the same answers. But they had the courage to ask the question.