



Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories: Decolonization and U.S. Occupations of Korea and Japan

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Abstract:

At the end of World War II, the Japanese empire had a population of over two million Koreans in its metropole (naichi), the majority of whom were both migrant and wartime conscripted workers. When the U.S.-led Allied forces occupied Japan after the war, General Douglas MacArthur and the Japanese government tried to send as many Koreans back to Korea as possible in order to reduce the surplus population of the war-torn, demobilized country. As the U.S. project of repatriating (re-placing) “displaced persons” of the two million Koreans in Japan led to more than half a million Koreans choosing to remain in postwar Japan, their presence emerged as a “problem” in the U.S. agenda of decolonization and the military occupation of Japan and Korea. How did U.S. policy makers and Japanese and Korean leaders respond to this “Korean minority question” in dismantling the empire?

This talk illuminates the transnational linkages of the Korean minority question between U.S.-occupied Japan and Korea. By examining interactions between U.S. occupiers in both Japan and Korea, between the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) and the U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), the talk shows how the Korean minority question became a critical locus of collaborations and discordances between them. It also discusses how the question of the legal status of Koreans in Japan emerged as a primary site of political struggles between Korean leaders, Japanese officials, and U.S. occupiers over the meaning and scope of Korean liberation.

Deokhyo Choi is a lecturer in Korean Studies at the University of Sheffield and specializes in the history of modern Korea-Japan relations. Before joining Sheffield in July 2018, he worked as a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Cambridge and the Research Institute of Korean Studies, Korea University. He received his Ph.D. in History from Cornell University, and his dissertation, titled “Crucible of the Post-Empire: Decolonization, Race, and Cold War Politics in U.S.-Japan-Korea Relations, 1945-1952,” won the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) Best Dissertation Prize in the Humanities. He has published numerous articles in three languages (English, Japanese, and Korean), and his recent article about the Korean War was published in *Critical Asian Studies*.