HOKKAIDO UNIVERSITY

Title	Lori Watt, When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan, Harvard University Asia Center: Cambridge, Mass: 2009, ISBN: 978-0-674-03342-9
Author(s)	Bull, Jonathan
Citation	Eurasia Border Review, 3(1), 133-135
Issue Date	2012
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/50911
Type	other
File Information	EBR3-1_009.pdf

Hokkaido University Collection of Scholarly and Academic Papers : HUSCAP

Lori Watt, *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan*, Harvard University Asia Center: Cambridge, Mass: 2009, ISBN: 978-0-674-03342-9

Jonathan Bull*

When studying the formation of Japan's modern borders and the large-scale movement of people across them it would be difficult to find a more important period than the years between 1945 and 1949. With the acceptance of the Allies' terms of surrender Japan lost an empire and nearly 6.9 million of the country's citizens who had been living in the colonies suddenly found themselves outside of the protection of the Japanese state. In *When Empire Comes Home*, Lori Watt examines what happened to these civilians and soldiers and the 1.5 million mostly Koreans, Taiwanese and Chinese who were residing on the main islands of Japan when the fighting ended. In just over 200 pages the author persuasively argues that the Japanese who left the former colonies were labelled as "repatriates" (*hikiagesha*) and experienced widespread discrimination because people in post-war Japan wanted to distance and isolate themselves from the failure of empire.

The first three chapters of this impressive book provide an overview of how Japan acquired colonial possessions and what happened when the empire collapsed. Chapter 1 explains how almost 7 million Japanese came to be living "overseas" at the time when the war ended. When Japan surrendered American, British, Chinese, and Soviet forces took control of the colonies. The Allies then started to repatriate colonial Japanese from September 1945 although the speed at which people arrived in Japan depended on what part of Asia they found themselves in at the end of the war. In the second chapter, the author focuses on what happened to the colonial Japanese on their arrival in Japan. The Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) ordered the Japanese government to establish "Regional Repatriation Centres" around the country to handle the repatriation (p.70). The Japanese authorities disinfected every person who passed through one of these centres for any disease they might be carrying and searched for any items they were not supposed to be bringing in to the country. Officials then sent them on their way with a free train ticket and identification papers as a "repatriate" to their "home" where they were expected to re-build their lives.

However, as Watt shows in her third chapter, what awaited many people was hostility and discrimination. She identifies important distinctions of how "returnees" were treated depending on where and by which allied force they had been repatriated. For example, she provides a case study of Japanese repatriated from Manchuria, arguing that incidents of sexual violence committed by Soviet troops against women led to the perception that those returning from northeast China were physically "contaminated" (p. 113). Then, from 1949, Japanese men returning from Siberian prisoner-of-war camps were feared to have been brainwashed into supporting communism, especially after there were

* Jonathan Bull is a doctoral candidate at the School of Law, Hokkaido University in Japan.

cases of demobilised soldiers who had arrived in Japan singing the *Internationale* whilst ignoring their families who had come to meet them. The first half of the book makes good use of many primary sources to give a persuasive account of what happened during the repatriation process.

In the second half of the book, Watt moves the analysis away from the early post-war period to consider how Japanese society portrayed people repatriated from the colonies over the years up to and including the 1980s. In Chapter 4, the author examines popular culture to show that "repatriates" provided a rich source of material in literature, song and film. Furthermore, some of the most prominent writers and artists in post-war society had grown-up in the colonies and been repatriated. She provides examples that the individuals themselves attributed this background as an important reason for their sometimes critical take on Japanese society. The fifth chapter explains how a movement for compensation in the 1950s and 1960s led to accounts of repatriate suffering being included in the "national" narrative of Japanese victimhood in World War II. Museums and other sites of commemoration shortly followed. By the 1980s, when Japanese women and war orphans who had stayed or been left behind in China at the end of the war came to Japan to look for relatives, they were no longer referred to as "*hikiagesha*" but rather as "foreign migrants." This, she argues, is because people in Japan no longer felt the same need to try to put distance between "Post-war Japan" and "Imperial Japan." The final chapter concludes by placing the Japanese experience of decolonization and repatriation in the context of other countries like France and Germany.

Watt's important book is the first in-depth examination in the English language of post-war repatriation in Japan and, therefore, she has immediately filled a considerable gap in the literature. Through her intelligent use of the idea of "labelling" (a process by which bureaucratic interests and procedures create definitions that become attached to people), she has come-up with a convincing explanation for why many colonial Japanese experienced such a cold reception in post-war Japan. As the author mentions in her conclusion, "stigmatization of former colonial participants is one of the ways that metropolitan societies move away from their histories of decolonization" (p.200). Furthermore, by making unique use of repatriate newspapers (collected by SCAP as part of the censorship process and later preserved in the Prange Collection at the University of Maryland), she vividly shows how many repatriated Japanese did not just passively accept what was happening but sought to challenge and resist the images being attached to them by post-war society.

Yet, if "the goal of this study is to present this story [of post-war population transfer] as it was understood by actors in East Asia" (p.15), there is something missing from the author's analysis. Although Watt acknowledges that the way in which American military and civil authorities viewed their role in repatriation is a subject for further research, it seems difficult to represent accurately how *Japanese* people made sense of their own actions without reference to the process of SCAP policy-making. The clearest example of this is in the section on the return of Japanese POWs from Siberia and SCAP fears over communist sympathisers. According to Watt's analysis the "summers of 1946, 1947 and 1948 ... [were] without incident" and it was from 1949 that "the effects of the indoctrination campaign [of Japanese POWs by Soviet propaganda] had begun to take hold" (p.127). If that is the case then why did SCAP set-up interrogation sections at regional repatriation centres as early as November 1946? Fear about "Red Repatriates" did not emerge suddenly from Japanese society by

itself. Rather, sections of SCAP from the earliest days of the occupation of Japan became increasingly fearful about repatriates arriving from areas under Soviet control and forming links with the Japanese Communist Party.

As living conditions for repatriates became some of the most miserable out of all the widespread poverty and hardship in the early years of the Occupation, the American authorities sensed they had, at best, the makings of a propaganda disaster on their hands and, at worse, the rise of anti-capitalist and anti-American sentiments that could lead to organised resistance. This led to suspicions and close surveillance of repatriates for communist activity and SCAP-sponsored negative press coverage about “unruly” incidents by communist supporters. By not utilising the thousands of pages of documents in the SCAP/GHQ and Japanese Foreign Ministry archives, Watt perhaps misses some important nuances.

Nevertheless, her book is without doubt an empirically rich and highly readable account of an issue that affected post-war Japanese society and the nation’s borders in important ways. Refreshingly free of jargon and light on post-colonial theory it provides an excellent foundation for future research.