

How to Understand USSR-Japan Bilateral Relations in the Cold War: Based on the Issue of Japanese Prisoners of War

Yichen Hao

Abstract—One of the most significant bilateral relations for Japan was with the Soviet Union in the Cold War, but unsolved problems created barriers for USSR-Japan relations, especially for internment of Japanese prisoners of war and civilians in Siberia, which refers to the Siberia issue. As an obstacle in USSR-Japan relations, the interpretation of its impacts is limited due to the lack of various perspectives. To address this limitation, this paper will use the case study method to discuss both Japan and Soviet Union's stances in the Siberia issue, explore the Soviet Union's strategies in Japan and Asia Pacific, and reveal the nature of USSR-Japan relations. In this process, I find that both compromise and conflicts involve in their relations, and the ambitions of the Soviet Union becomes stronger and stronger in the big picture of the Cold War.

Index Terms—Cold war, Japan bilateral relations, Japanese prisoners of war, Siberia issue.

I. INTRODUCTION

As one of the main bilateral issues between the USSR and Japan in the post-World War II period, the Siberia issue was a marginal topic in academia, since there was limited scholarship on this aspect. In terms of its impacts on post-World War II Japanese history, those Japanese prisoners of war were victims of World War II, who had minimal impacts on post-World War II Japan. However, it did not represent that the USSR and Japan would ignore this issue and normalize their relations without doubt. To reveal the impacts of Japanese prisoners of war in Siberia on USSR-Japan relations, it was necessary to provide a clear timeline about Japanese prisoners of war in Siberia to recall that part of history and understand the perspectives of the Soviet Union and Japan in USSR-Japan bilateral relations.

Following the Soviet-Japanese War of August 1945 and Japan's announcement of unconditional surrender on 15 August 1945, as Muminov stated that, Stalin ordered 500,000 Japanese transferred to Siberia on 23 August 1945 [1]. Although Japan had repeatedly demanded the return of Japanese prisoners of war from the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union was unwilling to return them back to Japan. On 29 December 1945, the United States and the Soviet Union signed an official treaty regarding the repatriation of those Japanese prisoners. The Soviet Union agreed to return 50,000 detainees to Japan monthly. Between 8 December 1946 and 6 January 1947, four vessels returned to the port of Maizuru in Japan. After that, repatriation was unstable to return from the Soviet Union to Japan. In this process, most prisoners could

not return home and died in Siberia due to the extreme cold weather and forced labor. On 25 May 1946, 80 percent of 60,000 Japanese were reported death based on the extreme situation in Siberia. In addition, on 15 February 1948, Siberian internment camps were established for the rest of the Japanese prisoners. Panov summarized how the rest of the Japanese prisoners were sent back to Japan based on the Soviet-Japanese negotiations of 1955-1956 regarding the normalization of USSR-Japan bilateral relations [2]. In the beginning, the Soviet Union disagreed with returning Japanese prisoners of war, because it did not sign the San Francisco Peace Treaty, then announced that this would resolve after the conclusion of the peace treaty [2]. When the Soviet Union and Japan discussed territorial issues, the Soviet Union made a compromise that returned Japanese detainees, in order to preserve its benefits in the Northern Territories. Until 26 December 1956, the last repatriation vessel *Koanmaru* arrived in Japan, which marked the end of Japanese prisoners' internment in Siberia [3]. In the same year, the Soviet Union and Japan officially normalized their relations and discussed postcolonial settlement to show the big picture of East Asia. From 1945 to 1956, Siberian internment symbolized the Japanese transition from the empire to Manchukuo, from Manchukuo to the Soviet camp system, and finally to a much-changed "New Japan" [1], which was an imperial legacy. Those Japanese prisoners of war were imperial reincarnations of post-World War II Japan. Their experiences implied an ideology in the Cold War, that the United States was Japan's ally, and the Soviet Union was Japan's enemy. In fact, this notion existed prejudices toward the Soviet Union. In the post-World War II period, most Japanese politicians were willing to work with the Soviet Union, in order to weaken the United States' power in Japan. The Soviet Union had the same stance with these Japanese politicians, and its main diplomatic pattern focused on influencing the US-Japan relations, which reflected other bilateral relations in the Cold War. Nevertheless, to achieve this bilateral framework, the USSR and Japan had to solve their legacies from World War II, and Siberian internment was one of the blockades in the development of their bilateral relations. The issue of Japanese prisoners of war was a more general issue in World War II, with Japanese prisoners existing in Prisoners of war camps or labor camps in the Soviet Union, China and the USA. The Japanese in Siberia were taken out of their context because of the specificity of this region of Siberia. It was difficult to establish contact with the surrounding areas, so the Japanese Prisoners were passively educated by the Soviet Reds in this isolated place, which made their status even more special when these prisoners were released back to Japan. On the one hand, they

Manuscript received April 2, 2022; revised May 25, 2022.

Yichen Hao is with University of Glasgow, G12 8QQ UK (e-mail: 2431178h@student.gla.ac.uk).

doi: 10.18178/ijssh.2022.12.3.1080

were imperial soldiers from the old Japanese era, and on the other hand, with the added context of the Cold War, some Japanese saw them as the face of communism. Either way, the perception was secondary victimization of these prisoners of war who had returned to their homeland. Therefore, even in Japanese history textbooks, this section of Japanese prisoners was rarely mentioned [1], but in this case, it was worth reflecting collective memory in Japan, the cause and consequence of World War II, and post-World War II impacts in the global context [4]. Under the context of the global Cold War, the Siberia issue did not seem to be a turning point, whereas it had a profound impact on USSR-Japan relations.

This paper will explain my narratives on the Siberia issue and evaluate its impacts on the development of USSR-Japan bilateral relations. To illustrate the impacts of the Siberia issue involved in USSR-Japan relations, it will discuss the context of the Soviet Union's strategies in Japan and the Asia-Pacific, explore why the USSR used Japanese prisoners of war to impede Japan, and reveal the nature of their bilateral relations by demonstrating typical diplomatic techniques in the Cold War. These considerations will be shown through the interpretation of USSR-Japan legacies after World War II, their foreign policies in the Cold War, and the implication of the global Cold War trend based on USSR-Japan relations. First, I will provide a literature review about this topic's previous research and some unanswered questions that those scholars left in their research, and demonstrate how my study would address those questions and bridge the gap to contribute to my understanding of this topic. After outlining my methods in the section of methodology to describe my evidence and what I will achieve in my findings and discussions, I will present verbal results of the study from reviewing Siberian internment, the Soviet Union's ambitions in Japan and the Asia-Pacific, and strategies behind the Siberia issue. In this process, I will also analyze USSR-Japan legacies following World War II, their Cold War foreign policies, and the global Cold War trend based on USSR-Japan bilateral relations by reflecting the results and contributing to the knowledge on this topic. Finally, the conclusion will summarize all sections, emphasize the significance of this research, discuss potential limitations, and provide some recommendations for future research on this topic.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Ardath Burks' article "Japan's Relations with the Communist World", his career contributed to his understanding of the trilateral relations among the United States, Japan, and the Soviet Union. He was an Air Force intelligence analyst from 1941 to 1946, and he was also a research associate for Japanese studies from 1952 to 1953 [5]. He paid more attention to Japanese negotiations with the USSR about the problem of repatriation of prisoners of war. Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama Ichiro pursued a peace treaty with the Soviet Union, because he was one of the Japanese politicians' representatives who sought to work closely with the USSR. In 1956, when the Soviet Union and Japan had a conversation to normalize their relations, the USSR decided to use the German formula to solve the Siberia

issue and returned the rest of the detainees to Japan after the normalization of USSR-Japan bilateral relations [5]. Based on the solution, it could summarize Soviet strategies on psychology pressure and cultural exchange in the relations with Japan, which caused negative effects and weakened Japan's voices in those bilateral issues. However, Burks did not give other perspectives except for the psychological and cultural approaches. My study will interpret more details in the Soviet Union's strategies and how it links to USSR-Japan bilateral relations.

Hiroshi Kimura revealed Japan's contradictory attitudes toward the Soviet Union in his article "The Love-Hate Relationship with the Polar Bear". Although his article focused on territorial settlement in the Northern Territories more than Siberian internment, he mentioned how Japanese dealt with the treatment of Japanese prisoners of war in Siberia and what impacts the Siberia issue had in Japan, which provided an in-depth view for the reflection of World War II. Japanese realized that they were defeated by war and the Siberia issue was their punishment, but it was filled with violence, that harmed most Japanese people for a long time [6]. He also held the view that if the Soviet Union could not face up to Japanese attitudes, their relations might not preserve the normalization since 1956 [6], which was a potential unanswered question. Kimura published this article in 1981, which was different from recent scholarship about this topic. On the other hand, he only described Japanese feelings toward the Soviet Union without comparing with the Soviet attitude toward Japan. Thus, my research will discuss both Japanese and Soviet perspectives in the issue of Siberian internment and their bilateral relations.

Michael Thompson's report "The Northern Territories: Case Study in Japanese-Soviet Relations" had a similar stance with Kimura's article "The Love-Hate Relationship with the Polar Bear". They started from introducing the territorial dispute in the Northern Territories, but Thompson was different from Kimura, since he connected the issue of Northern Territories with the Siberia issue and how they revealed USSR-Japan bilateral relations in his report. From his perspective, he listed the fact that the Soviet Union sent Japanese prisoners of war to Siberia and intensified the conflicts between the Soviet Union and Japan, so they did not sign a peace treaty after World War II. They officially signed it and established their diplomatic relations in 1956, and their peace treaty was delayed due to the complexity of the Northern Territories [7]. He failed to discuss the case study of the Siberia issue and how it affected USSR-Japan relations in detail, since his focus was the impacts of Northern Territories on their bilateral relations. In this case, I will provide more information about the analysis of the Siberia issue and its impacts on USSR-Japan bilateral relations.

Curtis Kemp's report "Japan and the Soviet Union Threat: Perceptions and Reactions" was also similar to Kimura's article, especially on Japan's perceptions of the Soviet Union. Unlike Kimura, Kemp almost covered all bilateral issues between the USSR and Japan, such as the Northern Territories, fishery disputes, and Siberian internment, and evaluated the Soviet threat based on Japanese perspectives. However, he existed the same question with both Kimura and Thompson, which was the lack of the Soviet perspectives, and failed to analyze the Siberia issue and its impacts on

USSR-Japan relations. He mentioned that due to Japanese prisoners of war in Siberia, Japan hated the Soviet Union and their relations deteriorated [8]. He also stated that approximately 234,151 Japanese prisoners died, 18,797 were missing, and 17,637 were imprisoned. Japanese prisoners were regarded as slave labor in Siberia [8]. His purpose was also limited because he aimed to help Americans understand Japanese perspectives on these issues and consolidated the US-Japan partnership [8]. How did others understand these issues involved between the Soviet Union and Japan? Overall, his report could not clarify the Siberia issue and its impacts on USSR-Japan relations. I will go into further detail on the study of the Siberia issue and its implications for USSR-Japan bilateral relations.

Kimura's article "Soviet Policy Toward Japan" filled the gap in his previous article "The Love-Hate Relationship with the Polar Bear". At this time, he provided more information about the Soviet foreign policy toward Japan based on the Soviet strategies and perspectives. Through the Soviet military advantages, he illustrated that it was an empirical approach when the Soviet Union treated those Japanese prisoners of war, so the Soviet Union believed that their military measures played a vital role in coping with anti-Soviet forces and intimidating the Japanese [9]. Similarly, the Soviet Union did Communist education of Japanese prisoners, because the Soviets thought that this was also an effective way to intimidate Japan [9]. He lacked an in-depth analysis of Japanese prisoners of war and their impacts on USSR-Japan relations. He also ignored that the Soviet foreign policy changed over time, which could be understood at that time. His article was published in 1984, so he only provided relevant materials until 1984. In my study, I will use his perspectives on the Soviet foreign policy toward Japan as a reference, and add more knowledge of the Siberia issue on this aspect.

As per Peter Berton, he evaluated both Japanese and Soviet perspectives on their bilateral relations based on their perceptions, goals, and interactions in his article "Soviet-Japanese Relations: Perceptions, Goals, Interactions". In his assessment of their relations, he had clear stances about how much Japan and the Soviet Union would benefit from their bilateral relations, and stated that Japan had little to gain from the Soviet Union [10]. Unfortunately, he only used the case study of the Northern Territories to show the Soviet and Japanese policies. About Japanese prisoners of war, he gave the number of prisoners, which was different from the historical record. He noted that approximately 600,000 Japanese prisoners were sent to Siberia [10], but historical record was 500,000 prisoners. I will identify which one is correct in my findings, and provide more information regarding Japanese prisoners of war in USSR-Japan relations.

In John Stephan's article "Behind a Curtain of Silence: Japanese in Soviet Custody, 1945-1956 by William F. Nimmo (Review)", his review of Nimmo's book contributed to more knowledge on the Siberia issue and its impacts on USSR-Japan relations. From Nimmo's chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, Stephan pointed out the fact that Nimmo depicted the timeline from Siberian internment to the return of Japanese prisoners of war in 1956 [11]. This part of history could express the relations between the Soviet Union and Japan,

since there was an enormous shift from enemies at the beginning of the Cold War to friends after the normalization of their bilateral relations. Besides this, Stephan's review revealed that most Japanese prisoners of war had to accept the Soviet indoctrination and join the Communist Party, but most of them changed their faith after they returned home [11]. However, Nimmo's work was similar to the aim of Kemp's report, which focused on American awareness of Siberian internment. I think that the Siberia issue should not be limited by the recognition of the United States, the USSR, and Japan. Other countries need to know what happened to those Japanese prisoners of war. I will use the more recent scholarship to support my argument of showing a wide range of perspectives on the Siberia issue in USSR-Japan bilateral relations.

Overall, these scholars' work has discussed the Siberia issue with more details and summarized a series of its impacts in Japan and the USSR, but their viewpoints are limited by their understanding of the Siberia issue. Thus, I will use various perspectives to analyze the Siberia issue and interpret how this issue has affected the relations between the Soviet Union and Japan, in order to fill the gap of limited interpretations of the Siberia issue.

III. METHODOLOGY

This paper will be qualitative research based on the case study of Japanese prisoners of wars in Siberia and its impacts on USSR-Japan bilateral relations. All my evidence is derived from scholars' written words, such as review papers, periodical articles, and dissertation papers. Some data focused on the number of Japanese prisoners of war and other information in Siberia.

Through analyzing these texts, I find that the documents before 2000 have huge differences by comparing with recent scholarship. Muminov published his article in 2017, and his article provided a complete timeline and reflections for the Siberia issue and USSR-Japan relations by interpreting more narratives in this event which clearly explain multi-dimensions of Japanese prisoners of war in USSR-Japan relations from the Soviet diplomatic strategies in the post-World War II period and connections with the global framework of the Cold War. By contrast, according to my literature review, some articles have revealed that their authors were limited by a single aspect or perspective. For instance, Burks gave sufficient background information regarding Siberian internment, but failed to analyze both Japan and the Soviet Union besides psychological and cultural perspectives, and only paid more attention to Japanese viewpoints toward the Soviet Union. The big picture of the Soviet diplomatic strategies was not mentioned clearly by summarizing the relations between the USSR and Japan. Similarly, Kimura only discussed Japanese attitude toward the Soviet Union and missed the USSR's feelings in the Siberia issue. Since Siberian internment was a bilateral issue, it needed to identify both Japanese and Soviet perspectives in the article. Both Kemp and Stephan were limited by clarifying the Siberia issue to Americans in their cases. Although the Soviet Union utilized Japanese prisoners of war in Siberia to see how the United States responded to this issue as Japan's alliance and influence the US-Japan

relations, the objectives of Kemp and Stephan were likely to cause misunderstanding for audiences. It should not only explain Siberian internment to the United States clearly, but other countries need to have a clear perception about the cause and consequence of this event. Besides these, Thompson, Kimura, and Berton emphasized the case study of the Northern Territories, and only briefly mentioned Japanese prisoners of war with few sentences without adding more knowledge on this topic, which failed to solve my research question and support my arguments with sufficient details.

To address these gaps, I will use methods such as summarizing the main contents from the texts, comparing different arguments and perspectives, and producing descriptive analysis based on summary and comparison. These methods will help me focus on more details about Siberian internment in USSR-Japan relations, and consider new perspectives besides these scholars' existing stances in my qualitative research.

IV. THE SOVIET STRATEGIES IN JAPAN AND ASIA-PACIFIC

The Soviet strategies on Japan was optimistic in the Cold War, since the Soviet Union thought that Japanese prisoners of war was not a complex breakthrough of USSR-Japan diplomatic relations. According to Kimura, it could be safely said that the Soviet Union would continue to attempt to separate Japan from the United States [9] as its diplomatic technique to influence other bilateral relations. The Soviet leaders did not perceive Japan to be a significant power in military terms; however, when Japan committed its resources to the support of the United States foreign policy, the Soviet Union felt that this was a potential threat in the Asia-Pacific [9] and had more burden than the World War II and Pre-World War II. The Soviet strategies seemed to follow the US-Japan alliance and adjust for its benefits in the relations with Japan, which reflected the nature of the global Cold War, that were the conflicts between two superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union. In this case, Japan's stances had to keep neutral, or would threaten the alliance with the United States and the development of the relations with the Soviet Union. Since the end of World War II, the Japanese have been extraordinarily naive and insensitive to the problem of their national security and military threats from the Soviet Union. It was simple to expect that the Soviets would come to regard it more beneficial to return Japanese prisoners of war and the Northern Territories to Japan in exchange for such an intangible factor as an advantage [9]. In the long run, however, the Soviets would gradually change their perceptions and attitudes toward Japan so that the weight of the intangible factors such as the sentiment and public opinion of the Japanese would gain relative weight in their foreign policy formation [9]. The Soviet Union had clear goals to deal with USSR-Japan relations based on its self-interests, which was unwilling to sacrifice its benefits to solve the bilateral issues with Japan. If the Soviet Union decided to make some compromises with Japan, such as the repatriation of Japanese prisoners, then it meant that the Soviet Union had made all plans to gain more benefits from Japan. Since the Soviet Union did not intend to return the Northern Territories, Japanese prisoners of war was a better

excuse to connect the Soviet Union with Japan, and consistently influenced the structure of the Asia-Pacific region to consolidate its status in the global Cold War.

Similarly, as per Allison et al., although the Soviet Union announced that the rest of the Japanese prisoners would be sent back to Japan as a part of their peace treaty in 1956, the core issue had not been solved completely, which was the Northern Territories [12]. Panov also mentioned that the benefits of the Northern Territories were greater than those Japanese prisoners of war in Siberia, so the Soviet Union would not have huge losses without these forced labors [2]. On this aspect, both Kimura and Allison et al. had similar stances on the Soviet diplomatic strategies on Japan and the United States. The Soviet Union utilized the return of Japanese prisoners to hide the fact that it did not want to return the Northern Territories, or this would strengthen the power of the US-Japan alliance in the Asia-Pacific region, and then the Soviet Union would not have any opportunities to compete with the United States in the global framework of the Cold War. In this case, the Soviet Union returned those Japanese prisoners of war to maintain the superficial relations with Japan, and gave Japan an illusion that the Soviet Union was willing to work with Japan to limit the power of the United States in Japan and the Asia-Pacific region. Nevertheless, it still could not solve the issues of post-World War II legacies, which were territorial settlement and fishery disputes in reality, as Kemp listed in his report [8]. In the normalization of USSR-Japan relations, the Soviet Union focused on the long-term benefits instead of ignoring the loss of returning Japanese prisoners of war. Therefore, it reflected the flexibility and possibility of the Soviet foreign policy, which made shrewd political decisions to preserve own benefits and avoid others from threatening own self-interests in the Cold War.

V. JAPANESE PERSPECTIVES ON THE SIBERIA ISSUE AND THE RELATIONS WITH THE USSR

From Japanese perspectives, Dahler provided a unique point of view about how Japanese prisoners of war described the difficult period (1945-1956) in their life. According to historical context, the Soviet State Defence Committee requested 500,000 Japanese soldiers who could work in Siberia, and then were transferred to Siberian internment camps as prisoners of war. About the actual number of Japanese prisoners, Dahler stated that about 580,000 Japanese were held in Soviet captivity in 1945 [13], which was different from Peter Berton's 600,000 Japanese prisoners of war [10]. In Halloran's review, the estimated number of Japanese prisoners was same with Peter Berton's expression, but the Soviet archives kept updating the number upwards [14]. From the number of Japanese prisoners, it could be seen that the Soviet Union faced up to the Siberia issue and revised this number to show its responsibility for USSR-Japan relations, which reflected the Soviet attitudes toward this part of history. Overall, Japanese prisoners' life was tortuous in Siberian internment. According to the reports of Japanese prisoners of war, they demonstrated more details regarding the situations of Japanese prisoners in Siberia.

A. The Life of Japanese Prisoners of War in Siberia

Depressive tenor, resentment, and disbelief regarding what occurred to them from August 1945 through the conclusion of the first winter, but also desired to endure, self-discipline. The prisoners of war were fighting to adjust to completely different conditions, such as quarters, food, forced labor, health, disease, and accidents. In the summer of 1946, the tenor was a little less bleak. The brutal winter has come to an end, and the number of deaths was reducing. The commencement of repatriations fueled optimism. Prisoners wondered if they would be able to endure another winter from Winter 1946 to Summer 1948. The problems generated by the communist indoctrination program place a significant burden on social life. Comments about comrades making camp life a living misery were common and harsh. The general sense of insecurity endured. Rumors about being permitted to return home continued to circulate. Repatriations continue, albeit slowly, and no one knew when his turn would be. By the end of August 1948, the total number of prisoners of war had been reduced to 211,758. From the summer of 1948 through the middle of 1949, about 95,000 Japanese prisoners were held in the Soviet Union, many of them were arbitrarily convicted of war crimes or supposed delicts committed while in captivity [13].

As the situation has improved significantly, the stories and photographs have been brighter, and emotions of pity and admiration for Soviet women and girls have begun to emerge. Climate and environment were no longer a threat; the prisoners of war understood how to live with them and could appreciate the beauty of Siberian nature [13]. As a supplementary, Halloran mentioned that at least 60,000 Japanese prisoners died from forced labor, starvation, and illness [14]. By contrast, it could be proved that more than 60,000 prisoners of war died in Siberian internment from 1945 (600,000 plus) to 1948 (211,758), even though some Japanese detainees were sent back to Japan as a part of repatriation at this stage, which was not the main trend at that time. Although most Japanese prisoners gradually adapted to this new environment, they hoped to return to Japan from Siberian internment camps. The reality was crueler than they imagined, from the aspects of food supply, heavy labor work, the Soviet indoctrination, health care, and homesickness. Japanese prisoners suffered from hunger and the lack of nutrition from unbalanced food, and they often received the food of 1100-1300 Kcal daily. However, WHO illustrated that heavy labor needed 3100-3300Kcal's food. Their food sources were only bread and potatoes, and sometimes they might steal bread for survival in those living conditions [13]. Dahler illustrated that as forced labor, Japanese prisoners were almost responsible for all work without salaries, such as felling trees, mining, heavy industry, construction of infrastructure, and defence work [13].

In terms of indoctrination, the Soviets promised Japanese prisoners to have more food, suitable clothes, easier jobs, and an early return to Japan, but they had to accept the Communist education and change their beliefs. They were also forced to edit Japanese newspapers to praise the Soviet Union and criticize the former Japanese government and the United States [13]. Japanese prisoners' health care could not be guaranteed due to the lack of food, work accidents, extreme climate, unsuitable clothes and hygiene issues,

which resulted in the tremendous losses of these forced labors [13]. At the same time, they had a strong nostalgia when they were in Siberian internment camps, but they could not have close contact with their families. For instance, they were not allowed to write more than 25 words on a postcard within a limitation of 2-4 letters per year [13]. These experiences were a burden for Japanese prisoners, and each one could make them feel devastated and disappointed in this process. It was difficult for others to imagine what these prisoners of war had experienced in Siberia, but this report revealed a strong contrast between Japanese prisoners' sufferings and the Soviets' brutality. Japanese disappointment was greater than positive aspects in the Soviet captivity. The Soviet attitude toward these prisoners of war and prisoners' life implied that the Soviets showed a deterrence to other countries, who attempted to threaten the USSR, such as the United States and its allies. It also reflected that USSR-Japan relations were negative at the beginning of the Cold War based on these Japanese prisoners' experiences.

B. Japanese Understanding of the Soviet Reactions on Japanese Prisoners

Japan had a negative image of the Soviet Union based on its fear of Siberian internment as paying a price for World War II [15]. Japanese fear derived from those Japanese prisoners' painful experiences in Siberia. During Siberian internment, Japanese prisoners of war were forced labors with harsh labor and living conditions [15], and Kemp also demonstrated that, the Soviets treated Japanese prisoners as slave labors [8]. Due to the hardships of Japanese prisoners, approximately 60,000 Japanese prisoners of war died in Siberian internment camps, which was considered as the Soviet violence [15]. After returning Japan, most Japanese prisoners of war depicted their forced labor experience and their feelings toward the Soviet Union and the Soviets in their autobiographical books and articles, and these were published in the 1960s [15]. It explained why Japanese learned about the history of Japanese prisoners in Siberia from 1945 to 1956, and these brutal facts shaped social memory of Japanese people and their perceptions toward the Soviet Union. Bukh also pointed out that most consequential issues of World War II such as the Northern Territories and the forced labor of Japanese prisoners of war were the main bilateral issues in the Japanese perception of the Soviet Union [15], because these issues brought negative impacts in Japan's shared memory and USSR-Japan post-World War II relations. Until 1992, Russia apologized to Japan based on the Siberia issue and improved the bilateral relations between Russia and Japan as a sign [15]. As a post-World War II legacy, although Siberian internment officially ended when the Soviet Union and Japan normalized their relations, it did not represent that Japan would forget this part of history and the Soviet Union would no longer exempt from this violence.

As Kimura argued that, Japan knew why the Soviet Union brutally treated those Japanese prisoners of war, since Japan was defeated during the World War II [6]. However, Japan started World War II and were confident to win this war, so Japan could not imagine that if it lost the war, then how others would treat Japan, which showed the cause and effect of World War II. Additionally, Japan knew the importance of developing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, which

could solve their post-World War II legacies and form an alliance against the United States hegemony. Under the global framework of the Cold War, foreign policy played an essential role in deciding these countries' stances, and enemies or friends was a thought for their future development. After identifying benefits and drawbacks, Japan and the Soviet Union were willing to improve USSR-Japan bilateral relations.

C. From Imperial Japan to New Japan: The Collective Memory of Japanese Prisoners

According to Muminov, his research focused on the transition from imperial Japan to post-World War II new Japan under the context of the Cold War, and discussed the case study of Japanese prisoners of war in Siberia to bridge Japan's gap between prewar and post-World War II period. Muminov aimed to connect these Japanese prisoners with the environment in the new Japan by revealing Japanese civilians' attitudes toward returnees from the USSR and the Soviet cruelty on Japanese prisoners of war. The public's attitudes toward Japanese prisoners of war were fearful because of the concerns of the future and shame in the past [1]. Japan experienced a post-World War II transition from an empire to a nation-state, and Japanese prisoners of war as post-World War II legacy, which reminded Japan of the imperial failure in World War II. On the other hand, the new Japan attempted to separate from its imperial era, but the return of Japanese prisoners recalled uncomfortable memories of the imperial past, such as unconditional surrender, painful experiences of Siberian internment, and unsolved territorial settlement.

The post-World War II Japan did not regard Siberian internment as an imperial legacy, but it had to admit that this had become collective memory in Japan and could not deny as a part of Japanese history [4]. When Muminov argued that the notion of imperial erasure was not accurate, because most Japanese people could recognize Siberian internment [1]. These people were unwilling to recall these terrible memories from the imperial period, but it did not represent that they would choose to forget this part of history. From the Soviet archives about these Japanese prisoners of war, more and more details were revealed to the public. Except for forced labor and extreme living conditions, communist indoctrination constituted a larger part and led to profound impacts among these Japanese prisoners. Japanese prisoners of war were called the red repatriates after they were indoctrinated by the Soviets successfully. The main contents of re-education were the cult of Stalin, the USSR's contributions to anti-Nazism and anti-Japanese militarism, and the struggle with American imperialism. This point was similar to Dahler's descriptions: Prisoners of war served as propagandists for the Japanese Communist Party upon their return to Japan. Young prisoners of war were recruited and trained as campaigners for this reason. Those who shown enthusiasm were rewarded with benefits such as better and more food, suitable clothes, easier work, and promises of an early return to Japan [13]. Anti-fascist cells were established with the goal of spreading communist doctrine. Along with the Soviet method of promoting mutual distrust and pressuring comrades to betray other comrades, caused severe schisms in camp society's social structure. Those who

rejected the brainwashing were viciously assaulted at public gatherings, and they were taken onto a platform and pressured to declare themselves fully guilty [4]. The anti-fascist officer and anti-fascist cells fanned the flames. Each of the accused was viciously abused and ridiculed. Everyone was required to take part. Everything was dramatically exaggerated to heighten the impression. Those who were to be turned into real Democrats were made to sing the Revolutionary War Hymn. Self-incrimination and mutual criticism were imposed, and debate groups were formed. This struggle sparked new animosity, and it all contributed to finishing off and destroying. However, in the Nakhodka democracy group, there were those who avoided criticism and created a positive mood, but if one was addressed in a friendly manner, alluding to an old relationship, a sense of danger arose.

Another brainwashing technique was a Japanese newspaper produced by Japanese prisoners. Due to a lack of literature and a lack of news, the newspaper was initially welcomed, but later rejected by many, including officers, who were the most vehement opponents of the indoctrination program. The contents of the newspaper were enthusiastic praise of the Soviet Union and its great leader Joseph Stalin, as well as sharp criticism of the former and current Japanese governments and the United States, defending the abolition of the Tenno system and the establishment of a socialist society in Japan based on the Soviet system [4]. Behind the Communist indoctrination, the Soviets cultivated these Japanese prisoners of war to develop the Japanese Communist Party and promote Japan to work closely with the USSR against the United States, which provided a foundation for later normalization of USSR-Japan bilateral relations. However, these red repatriates suffered from the public's blame and were confused about their beliefs after they returned to Japan, they had been the center of conflicts in this ideological storm [1]. It was difficult for these Japanese prisoners to experience double injuries from Siberian internment and the public's accusations. In addition, most returnees' testimonies and the Soviet archives were different from each other. Returnees reflected their life in the Soviet captivity and revealed the hardships in internment camps. They were witnesses of the enemy based on their experiences in the Soviet Union.

D. Different Reflections of Japanese Prisoners in Siberia

Nevertheless, the Soviet archives were opposite from these returnees' expressions. For example, Stalin cared about foreign prisoners of war more than the Soviet prisoners in the camps, and never treated the Japanese as slaves [1]. Some Japanese returnees admitted that they did not be treated cruelly by the Soviets. Different Japanese prisoners had uneven descriptions about the Siberia issue, but the most crucial point was that one-sided perspective could not clearly interpret Siberian internment to the public in Japan, or this would cause misunderstandings of Japanese perception of the Soviet Union. Thus, from the Japanese perspective, due to the transition from the imperial past to the post-World War II national building, the public was difficult to accept these Japanese prisoners, since they belonged to the part of the imperial era and were uncomfortable memories. The Soviet Union indoctrinated these prisoners to prepare for the

normalization of their bilateral relations in 1956 and work together against American imperialism, which demonstrated shrewd Soviet foreign policy and a clear perception of the global Cold War. No matter how Japan and the USSR considered these prisoners, they were victims of World War II and multilateral relations.

VI. CONCLUSION

To demonstrate the effects of the Siberia issue in USSR-Japan relations, this paper has analyzed the backdrop of the Soviet Union's policies in Japan and the Asia-Pacific, investigated why the USSR employed Japanese prisoners of war to obstruct Japan, and explained the nature of their bilateral ties by displaying typical Cold War diplomatic techniques. These issues have been demonstrated via the assessment of USSR-Japan legacies after WWII, their Cold War foreign policies, and the implications of the global Cold War framework based on USSR-Japan relations. This study discusses my narratives on the Siberia issue and assesses their implications for the evolution of USSR-Japan bilateral relations. I have presented a summary of existing research on this issue, as well as some unsolved questions that those academics left unanswered in their research, and show how my study will address those concerns based on my analysis of both Soviet and Japanese perspectives on the Siberia issue and its aftermath. Previous research has provided a clear framework for Siberian internment and briefly linked to USSR-Japan bilateral relations, whereas the lack of various perspectives and limited analysis of the Siberia issue has weakened their arguments. Therefore, I have discussed both the Soviet and Japanese perspectives and compared them by describing more details about Siberian internment in my findings and discussions. I also presented verbal results of the study from reviewing Siberian internment, the Soviet Union's ambitions in Japan and the Asia-Pacific, and strategies behind the Siberia issue. In the section on methodology, I analyzed the issues from previous research based on my literature review and introduced how I improved these issues by summarizing the essential points of the texts, comparing various arguments and points of view, and providing descriptive analysis based on summary and comparison. These methods have helped me focus on additional specifics of Siberian imprisonment in USSR-Japan relations, as well as examined fresh viewpoints in addition to these researchers' previous stances. In this process, I also evaluated USSR-Japan legacies after WWII, their Cold War foreign policies, and the framework of the global Cold War based on USSR-Japan bilateral relations, remarking on the findings and contributing to the body of knowledge on the subject.

Finally, I will synthesize my findings and discussions, underline the importance of this qualitative research, identify any limits, and make some suggestions for future research on this issue. From the Soviet perspectives, as long as it would not threaten the benefits of the Soviet Union, then everything could negotiate and find a solution. In this case, the Soviet Union paid more attention to the Northern Territories, as it would be the factor to impact the Asia-Pacific region and influence the US-Japan relations. Another aspect was that the Soviet Union had to normalize the relations with Japan, in

order to consolidate its own status in the Asia-Pacific region against the United States under the framework of the global Cold War. The Soviet foreign policy was flexible to adjust in this circumstance, that the Soviet Union returned those prisoners back to preserve its own authority over the Northern Territories. From Japanese perspective, Japan only thought that these prisoners were shame based on their harsh experiences in Siberia and the new Japan's transition from the imperial past. The Siberia issue was a collective memory in Japanese society, even though it included uncomfortable memories regarding prisoners of war's suffering from Siberian internment and forced labors. Japan also recognized that the Soviet Union punished these prisoners, because Japan was defeated in World War II, which was the implication of the cause and effect of World War II. Although it was controversial that both sides had different explanations regarding these prisoners' experiences based on returnees' testimonies and the Soviet archives, Japanese prisoners of war had heavy pressure and were victims of the normalization of USSR-Japan relations and multilateral conflicts in the Cold War.

This paper has several limitations. The analysis may be incomplete, and maybe there are other reasons to explain the impacts of the Siberia issue on USSR-Japan relations. The single case provides limited explanations and may not fully explain other cases. Future studies can focus on other cases, such as how the issue of the Northern Territories affected USSR-Japan bilateral relations in the Cold War, to compare and contrast different situations. Also, to fully understand the circumstance, explore other perspectives and reasons to develop a clearer perception and have a deeper insight towards the following topic.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

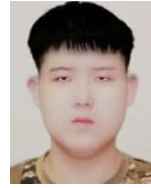
I would like to express my thanks to the editors of International Journal of Social Science and Humanity for their constructive comments on my draft. I also want to thank Qiu Datong for his advice on my earlier work that inspired me to continue developing and writing this paper. Thanks also goes to Erik Yan for his guidance on my paper submission.

REFERENCES

- [1] S. Muminov, "From imperial revenants to cold war cictims: 'Red repatriates' from the soviet union and the making of the new Japan," 1949–1952," *Cold War History*, vol. 17, pp. 425–442, June 2017.
- [2] A. Panov, "The soviet-Japanese joint declaration of 1956: A difficult path to signing, a difficult fate after ratification," *Russian Japanology Review*, vol. 3, pp. 5–51, 2020.
- [3] University of California. Timeline of Siberian Detainment. [Online]. Available: <https://japaneseinsiberia.ucdavis.edu/timeline>
- [4] P. Barclay, "Return from Siberia: A Japanese life in war and peace, 1925–2015 by Oguma Eiji (review)," *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 46, pp. 204–209, January 2020.
- [5] A. Burks, "Japan's relations with the communist world," *Current History*, vol. 34, pp. 214–222, April 1958.
- [6] H. Kimura, "The love-hate relationship with the polar bear," *Japan Quarterly*, vol. 28, pp. 39–44, January 1981.
- [7] M. Thompson, "The northern territories: Case study in Japanese-soviet relations," Master thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, California, 1982.

- [8] C. Kemp, "Japan and the sovietunion threat: Perceptions and reactions," Master Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, California, 1983.
- [9] H. Kimura, "Soviet policy toward Japan," *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 7, pp. 21-37, September 1984.
- [10] P. Berton, "Soviet-Japanese relations: Perceptions, goals, interactions," *Asia Survey*, vol. 26, pp. 259-283, December 1986.
- [11] J. Stephan, "Behind a curtain of silence: Japanese in soviet custody, 1945-1956 by William F. Nimmo (review)," *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 15, pp. 526-528, Summer 1989.
- [12] G. Allison, H. Kimura, and K. Sarkisov, "Beyond cold war to trilateral cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region: Scenarios for new relationships between Japan, Russia, and the United States," Belfer Center, October 2016.
- [13] R. Dahler, "The Japanese prisoners of war in Siberia 1945-1956," *Internationales Asienforum*, vol. 34, pp. 285-302, 2003.
- [14] F. Halloran, "Japanese POWs in Siberia, Unfinished Tragedy by Toshio Kurihara and Iwanami Shinsho (Review)/ The Japan Society Review. [Online]. Available: <https://www.japansociety.org.uk/review?review=302>
- [15] A. Bukh, "Russia in the construction of Japan's Identity: Implications for international relations," Ph.D thesis, Dept. International Relations, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, 2014.

Copyright © 2022 by the authors. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited ([CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)).



Yichen Hao was born in Inner Mongolia, China. He is a third-year Joint Honors Central and Eastern European Studies and Economic and Social History student. His research interests are feminism, Soviet studies, and European integration. His articles have been published in several international journals. After graduation, he is planning to do a master's and doctoral degree to continue his research career.