In the fall of 1952, on the pages of the *Women’s Democratic News*, Kim Talsu, one of Japan’s most prolific and well-respected writers of Korean descent, began publishing a Japanese-language short story called “Hyesun’s Hope,” which narrates many of the difficulties the eponymous high school student, Pak Hyesun, and her older brother must navigate as ethnic minorities in Japan: the fear of deportation, the militarization of the Japanese Police, discrimination at the hands of Japanese teachers, domestic violence, even the ideological division of their own family, under pressure to apply for South Korean citizenship at the height of the Korean War.¹ The affective arc of Kim’s story, however, focuses on the experience of Hyesun’s brother, who transforms from an unjustly treated student and twenty-something hoodlum into a protective brother and budding political agent, newly intent on learning more about his historical and legal status as a Korean living in Japan. Indeed, by the time Kim’s story was published, six months after Japan’s sovereignty was returned, Koreans in Japan had only recently been stripped of the Japanese nationality temporarily conferred upon them in 1946. Japan’s largest minority population—Koreans who had chosen not to voluntarily repatriate after WWII—now effectively consisted of almost half a million stateless ‘aliens.’

Simon Nantais’s article returns us to the rich archives of the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the Allied Occupation of Japan (1945-1952) in an effort to revisit this particularly complex, and torturous, moment for Koreans living in Japan, by the end of which time Japan’s prospects as a beacon of Asian capitalism had been thoroughly revived thanks to its booming procurement economy that served the Korean War (1950-1953). For historiographical reasons Nantais places particular emphasis on the question of nationality with respect to Japan’s Korean population at this time, which he claims has been studied mainly within “analytical frameworks, which emphasize Japanese racial discrimination toward Koreans” (820, footnote).² This “singular

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² Two notable works Nantais cites in this context are Eiji Takemae, *Inside GHQ: The Allied Occupation of Japan and its Legacy*, translated and adapted from Japanese by Robert Ricketts and Sebastian Swann (New York: Continuum,
focus on race has obscured a more complex history that overlaps the end of the Japanese Empire and the partition of the Korean peninsula” (820). Nantais locates “[t]he roots of this critical attitude” in the way historians have come to view one particular act of the Japanese government as “racist,” when in November, 1946, “at SCAP’s insistence and in accordance with international law, [it] treated Koreans as Japanese nationals” against many Koreans’ wishes (841). Triangulating the larger forces involved in shaping the political and social structures that had an impact on the lives of Koreans in Japan, Nantais begins his article in a polemical vein by insisting that the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) in Japan in fact “respected the legal status of Koreans as Japanese nationals until their nationality could be determined by agreement between a sovereign Japan and Korea” (821). Taking the lens of nationality as an ostensibly fresh, more “objective” (821) historiographical point of departure, Nantais then delves into the twists and turns of U.S. policy debate that worked around, and in many ways sought to undermine, the legal status of Japan’s Korean population as Japanese nationals.

Nantais’s analysis of governmental and diplomatic correspondence periodizes the Occupation into three discrete moments (“1945-1947: Koreans as Japanese Nationals,” “1948-1949: Koreans and ‘North Koreans,’” and “1950-1951: ‘Undesirable Aliens’ and ‘Subversive Elements’”), helpfully showing how the interpretation of policies towards Japan-resident Koreans was shaped from within broader geopolitical concerns related to the Cold War, and also complicating any notion that either the Japanese government or its U.S. occupiers were monolithic entities. But if the legal status of Koreans was often bedeviling to GHQ officials, who were increasingly concerned with Korean radicalization in Japan and eventually compelled to label them as ‘subversive aliens,’ Nantais asserts that “in the final analysis both the Japanese and American authorities respected Korean’s legal status as Japanese nationals” (841) even if this status was also subject to conflicting and contradictory interpretations that rendered this legal status productively ambiguous.

To the extent that Nantais acknowledges this ambiguity—and the many contradictions of GHQ policy—his work in many ways aligns itself with that of several important scholars who also take measure of the ambiguity of Korean legal status during the Occupation Period. Most significantly, both Kim T’aegi’s Sengo Nihon seiji to zainichi Chōsenjin mondai: SCAP to tai-zainichi Chōsenjin seisaku 1945-1952, and more recently, Jonathan Glade’s dissertation, “Occupied Liberation: Transforming Literary Boundaries in Japan and Southern Korea, 1945-1952,” explore the implications of these ambiguities in relation to earlier colonial practices, and with particular sensitivity to the voices of Japan-resident Koreans themselves.3 Although Nantais rarely turns to texts written by resident Koreans, he does contribute a detailed understanding of the backstage discussions that helped to shape GHQ policy toward resident-Koreans, and thus to guide the very Japanese institutions,


admittedly subordinate to the U.S. occupiers, which subjected resident Koreans—many would say unfairly—to Japanese laws that infringed on their position as newly ‘liberated’ from the terrors of Japanese colonialism.

While Nantais insists that Koreans in fact benefitted from their unwanted status as ‘Japanese nationals’ during the Occupation (given that they escaped the fate of mass deportation), he also shows how both U.S. occupiers and Japanese authorities sought to make life difficult for Koreans in Japan in an effort to realign ethnic populations with newly redrawn geopolitical boundaries. “The task was to further ‘alienize’ or ‘radicalize’ Koreans so that they might find life in Japan too unbearable and decide to repatriate after all” (833). The evidence Nantais marshals along these lines helpfully supplements the discussion in Chapter 4 of historian Tessa Morris-Suzuki’s *Borderline Japan*, itself a compelling account of the human implications of Japan’s immigration policies during and after the Occupation Period.4 It also suggests the ways in which structures which were often set in place by U.S. occupiers helped to enable local Japanese practices and institutions of a legal, political, and cultural nature to oppress Japan’s Korean population, eventually leading, for example, to the shameful episode of Korean repatriation in the late 1950s, of which Morris-Suzuki also compellingly writes in her book *Exodus to North Korea*.5

The way Nantais frames his evidence as a means of correcting a “historiography [that] has been negative toward the Japanese government” (841), however, does seem to set his work apart from those—such as Caprio, Kim, and Morris-Suzuki—who are more interested in the continuities between oppressive practices and policies instituted against Koreans in Japan and the long history of institutional racism that had for the previous half century made life for Koreans in the Japanese Empire often unbearable. Indeed, while Nantais’s research contributes in many ways to the understanding of U.S. policy-making in Japan, his claim to historiographical intervention is somewhat short-sighted, especially given that he references almost no secondary (or primary) sources written in Japanese. With compelling evidence marshaled from the English-language archive, however, suggesting the myriad contradictions implicit in U.S.-driven policy toward resident Koreans, Nantais’s work succeeds in making a welcome contribution to our understanding of the complex forces that had a lasting, if unsavory, impact on the lived experiences of Japan’s largest minority population. Indeed, what his study reveals would have been little comfort to Pak Hyesun and her brother, whose anxieties about deportation and U.S. interventionism, Nantais reminds us, were remarkably well founded.

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Crimson and Other Works by Sata Ineko (Honolulu: The University of Hawai‘i Press, 2016). He is writing a new monograph called “Across the Genkai Sea: Japanese Culture and the Korean War.”

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