

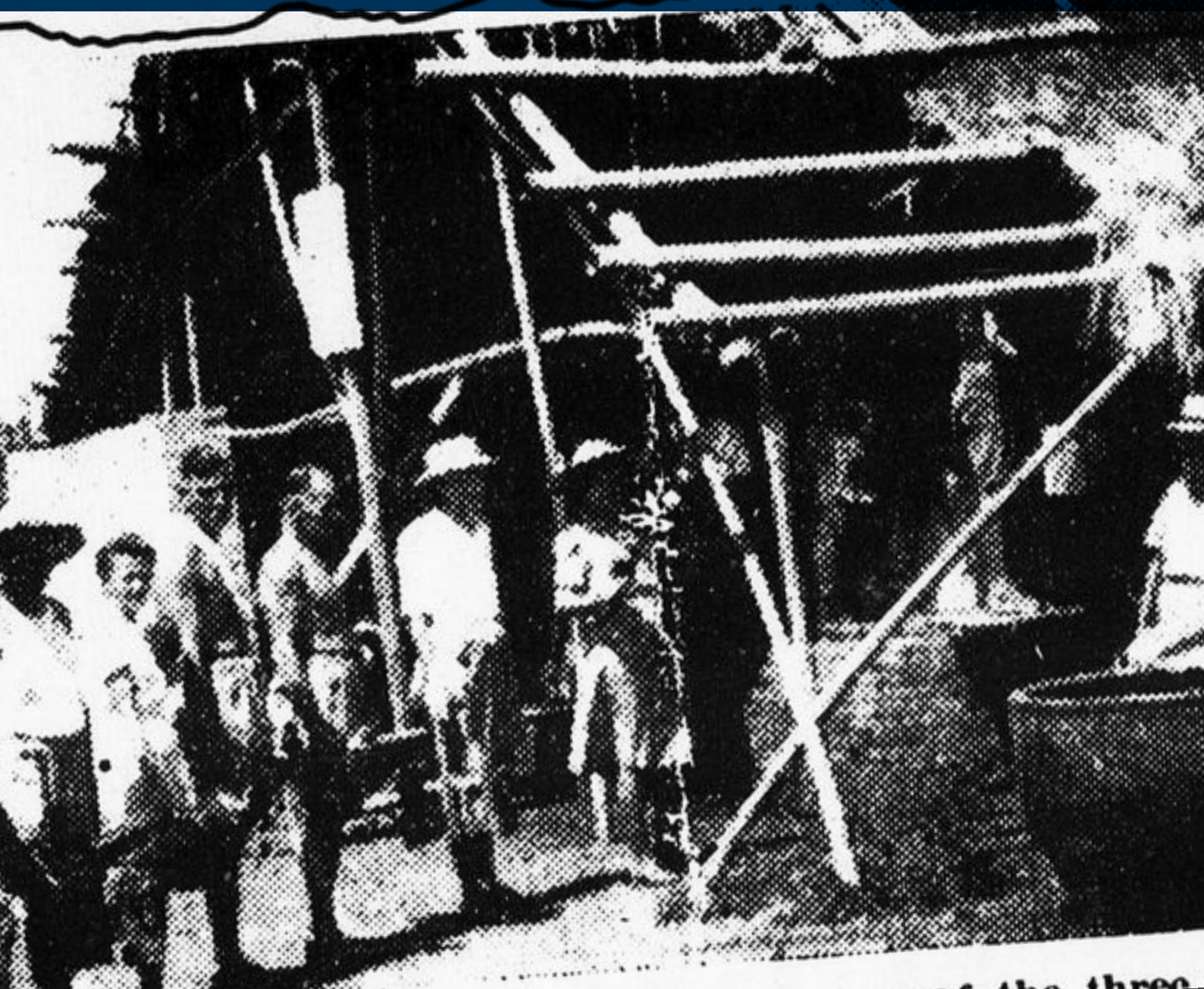
Gale Primary Sources:
Regional China and the West, 1759-1972

Managing Enemies: Civil Assembly Centers in Japanese Occupied China during the Pacific War

Ling-ling Lien

Research Fellow, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica

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On December 7, 1941, the Japanese military launched an attack on Pearl Harbor, precipitating its declaration of war against the Allied Powers. In the subsequent months, Japan rapidly occupied Allied territories across Southeast Asia with unprecedented speed. By May 1942, British, American, Dutch, and other colonial possessions and concessions in China and Southeast Asia had all come under Japanese control. However, the task of occupation posed unexpected challenges, particularly in managing Western nationals who had previously enjoyed privileges under colonial systems but were now reclassified as “enemy nationals” under the Japanese “new regime.” Between 1941 and 1945, Japan established 32 internment camps throughout China and Hong Kong to centralize the oversight of these foreign nationals within occupied territories, detaining a total of more than 10 thousand individuals.¹ While a small number of detainees were repatriated through prisoner exchange arrangements, the majority endured internment for two to three years, regaining their freedom only with Japan’s surrender in September 1945.

Among the challenges of occupation, managing foreign nationals—who were now classified as “enemy nationals”—required distinct systems of control, leading to the establishment of various types of detention facilities. One such system involved the establishment of Civil Assembly Centers, which were officially designated by the Japanese to house enemy nationals. These internment camps differed significantly from the more commonly recognized “prisoner-of-war camps,” primarily in the legal and social status of their detainees. While “prisoner-of-war camps” were used predominantly for confining enemy military personnel captured in combat or at military installations, some civilians were also subjected to such conditions. For instance, American employees deployed to Wake Island to construct a U.S. Navy base were captured by the Japanese during the Pacific War and treated as prisoners of war despite their non-combatant status.²

In contrast, Civil Assembly Centers were large-scale facilities designed specifically to detain enemy nationals residing within Japan’s territories or occupied regions. The primary rationale behind their establishment was to preempt potential acts of espionage or collaboration with the enemy, rather than to respond to immediate military threats. As civilians posed no direct threat to Japanese military operations, the administration of these internment camps tended to be less stringent compared to prisoner-of-war camps. Nonetheless, the internment system reflected broader strategies of control and surveillance during wartime, aimed at neutralizing perceived risks to Japan’s governance and war efforts.

The concept of civilian internment camps can be traced back to the Spanish Civil War in 1898 and gained prominence during World War I, when European belligerent nations employed such measures to safeguard domestic military security.³ Although Japan participated in World War I, it did not adopt this system at the time. However, shortly before the outbreak of the Pacific War, having observed the United States establishing civilian internment camps to manage enemy nationals within its borders, Japan decided to implement a similar system to prevent foreign nationals in its occupied territories from communicating with their home countries and posing potential military threats.

The establishment of civilian internment camps presented significant challenges for all parties involved. For the Allied Powers, detainees became hostages under Japanese control, restricting their strategic options during the war. For Japan, administering these camps diverted valuable resources from its military operations, increasing the costs of war. To manage the internees, Japan categorized them into two groups: those considered immediate threats and those posing no such risk. Individuals in the first group faced intensive interrogation and surveillance, with conditions resembling imprisonment. In contrast, those deemed

1 Greg Leck, *Captives of Empire: The Japanese Internment of Allied Civilians in China, 1941-1945* (Shandy Press, 2006), pp. 429-517. Van Waterford, *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II: Statistical History Concerning POWs in Camps and on Hellships, Civilian Internees, Asian Slave Laborers and Other Captured in the Pacific Theater* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1994), p. 145.

2 Chen Zhengqing, “Baoshan Internment Camp Through the Eyes of American POW Artists,” *Shiji* Oct. 2005, p. 36.

3 William Everdell, *The First Moderns: Profiles in the Origins of Twentieth-Century Thought* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997), p. 116. Jonathan Vance ed., *Encyclopedia of Prisoners of War and Internment*, 2nd edition, (Millerton, NY: Grey House Publishing, 2006), pp. 77-78.

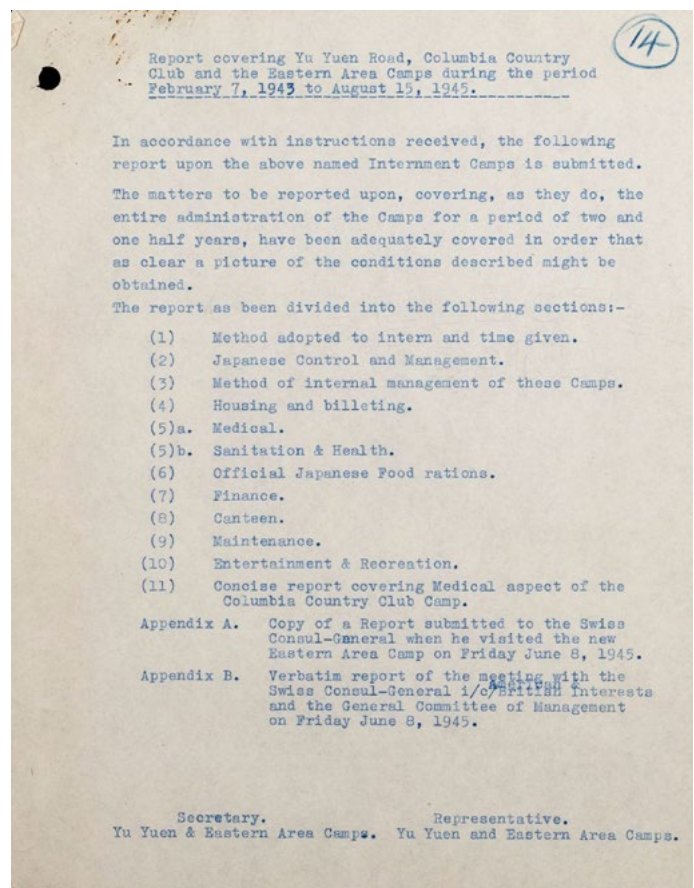
less threatening were detained in Civil Assembly Centers, where the management was comparatively less stringent.

Minimizing the expenditure of Japanese manpower and resources was the top priority in Japan's management of the Civil Assembly Centers (CACs). To achieve this, existing infrastructure was repurposed wherever possible. Many CACs operated in buildings originally designed for other purposes, such as colleges and religious institutions. For instance, the Yu Yuen Road Camp in Shanghai was established in the repurposed facilities of the SMC Western District Public School. This pragmatic approach underscores Japan's efforts to mitigate the logistical and economic strain of administering civilian internment camps amidst the broader demands of wartime governance.

The governance structure of the Civil Assembly Centers comprised two distinct components. Japanese personnel were tasked with maintaining security, ensuring that internees remained within the facilities without causing any disturbances or unrest. However, the responsibility for the day-to-day management of the camps was delegated to the internees themselves. In China, the Japanese guards assigned to CACs were predominantly drawn from the diplomatic service and often possessed extensive overseas experience.

For instance, the Yu Yuen Road Camp in Shanghai was led by two commandants with notable international credentials: Torao Kawasaki and Tomohiko Hayashi.⁴ Torao Kawasaki (1890–1982), the camp's first commandant, was born in Japan and graduated from Springfield YMCA College in the United States. Proficient in English, he joined Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1920, serving in various postings in San Francisco, Manchukuo, Beijing, and Shanghai. In 1943, he was appointed Consul at the Japanese Consulate General in Shanghai and assumed the role of commandant when the Yu Yuen Road Camp opened on April 27, 1943.

Kawasaki was later succeeded by Tomohiko Hayashi, who also had extensive international experience. Hayashi had served at the Japanese Embassy in



Enclosure No.1. Code 210 file 10740. 1946. MS FO 369 Foreign Office: Consular Department: General Correspondence from 1906 FO 369/3441. The National Archives (Kew, United Kingdom). China and the Modern World, link.gale.com/apps/doc/KVMXDM371399315/CFER?u=asiademo&sid=bookmark-CFER&xid=c289b719&pg=4.

London prior to the outbreak of the Pacific War. Following Japan's declaration of war against the Allied Powers, he was interned in London but was repatriated to Japan in July 1942 as part of a prisoner exchange between Japan and Britain. After his return, he was appointed Vice-Consul at the Japanese Consulate General in Shanghai, where he succeeded Kawasaki as commandant of the Yu Yuen Road Camp.

In addition to the commandants, camp guards were tasked with policing and maintaining order. These guards were predominantly low-ranking personnel recruited from across the Japanese empire, including regions such as Taiwan and Korea. A notable feature of the camps was the stark disparity in numbers between Japanese guards and Allied internees. Although specific statistics for the Yu Yuen Road Camp are unavailable, other camps demonstrate this disproportion. For instance, the Lunghwa Camp in

⁴ F0369/3441 "Report covering Yu Yuen Road, Columbia Country Club and the Eastern Area Camps during the Period February 7, 1943 to August 15, 1945."

Shanghai housed approximately 1,700 Allied nationals but was overseen by a Japanese staff of only 28.⁵

This significant imbalance necessitated the delegation of daily management to the internees themselves. Drawing on their familiarity with administrative committees, the Allied nationals implemented a democratic system of self-governance. A general committee of management was elected to oversee the welfare of the internees. At the core of this structure was the committee chairman, who served as the primary representative of the internees and was responsible for communicating with the Protecting Power and Japanese authorities. This system not only reflected the internees' adaptability but also underscored the resource constraints faced by the Japanese administration.

The general committee of management oversaw various units responsible for coordinating and implementing daily tasks within the camp. At the Yu Yuen Road Camp, for example, 19 subcommittees, departments, and boards were established to address diverse aspects of camp life, including secretariat and posts, food control, fresh milk, soya bean milk, canteen, finance, medical and dental care, maintenance, electrical systems, fire and air raid precautions, labor, police, education, library services, entertainment and recreation, welfare, and housing. Members of these units were selected through a process in which their names were publicly posted on the camp's noticeboards for three days. Should any objections arise, a petition signed by at least 100 voting internees could be submitted for reconsideration of the candidate.⁶

Serving as a camp representative was a challenging and often thankless responsibility. As George Wallace Laycock, a representative of Pootung Camp in Shanghai, recounted:

What were our duties? Can you imagine complaints that came in from over 1000 men, women, and children, living cheek by jowl day after day, hungry, often dirty, cut off from family

and friends, and prisoners not because they had committed a crime but because they happened to be a particular nationality? Lack of food, lack of medical and dental attention, lack of news from their loved ones; abraded by their closeness to each other day after day, bored, weak, sick... each morning from nine until noon we sat at our desk listening to their tales of woe about which we could do so little.⁷

This excerpt vividly captures the immense burden and emotional toll borne by those tasked with representing and managing the welfare of internees under such difficult circumstances.

Delegating daily management to the internees also introduced complexities, particularly in maintaining discipline and addressing misconduct within the camps. While the Japanese authorities focused primarily on preventing escapes and unauthorized contact with the outside world, they left the regulation of internal order largely in the hands of the internees. Discipline and police committees were established to handle disputes, but the punishments for infractions, such as posting offenders' names on camp bulletin boards or suspending privileges like private cooking and library access, were often insufficient deterrents. In some cases, issues were resolved only when representatives threatened to escalate the matter to Japanese authorities. Additionally, the Japanese frequently resorted to collective punishments to address individual misconduct. For example, when an internee at Chapei Camp was caught stealing coal, the punishment extended to all internees, who were prohibited from using chatties for two weeks.⁸

More serious issues occasionally arose within the internees' committees themselves. In March 1944, shortages were discovered in the Canteen and Fresh Foods Sections at the Yu Yuen Road Camp. A special inquiry committee was subsequently established to investigate the matter. Over the course of seven weeks, the committee reviewed account records, conducted interviews with involved parties, and

5 Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (JACAR) Ref.B02032519300, Documents relating to Greater East Asia War / Treatment of nationals of enemy countries and prisoners of war between belligerent countries / General and specific problems / Report of inspection tour of prisoner camp in Japanese Empire of nationals of enemy countries, Vol. 3.

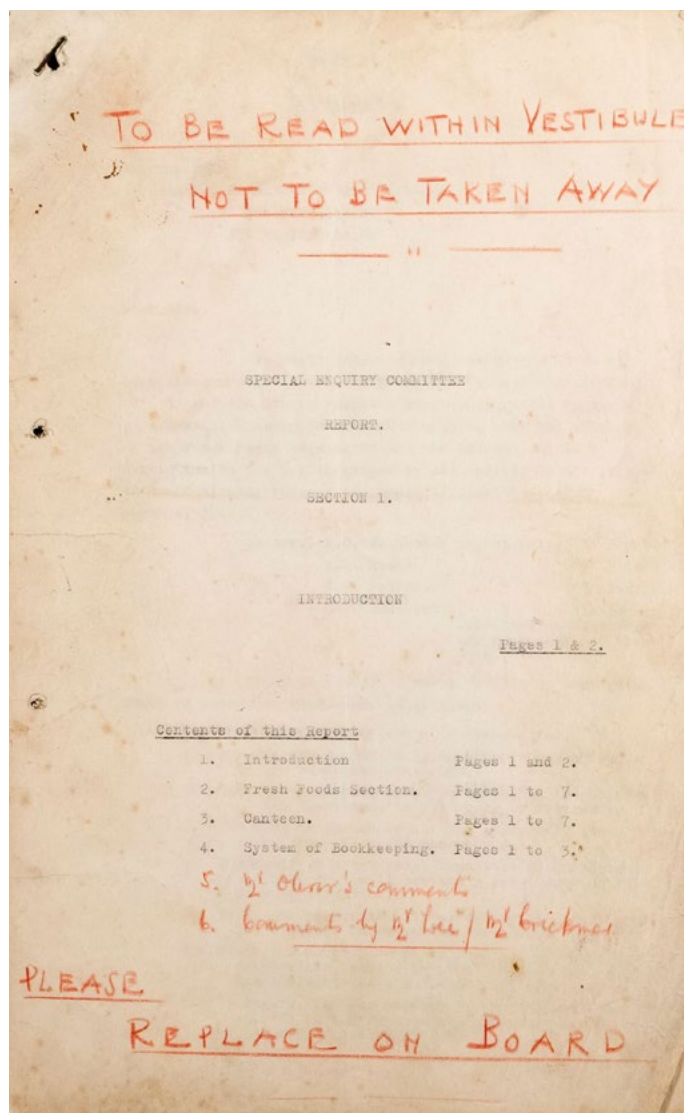
6 F0369/3441 "Report covering Yu Yuen Road, Columbia Country Club and the Eastern Area Camps during the Period February 7, 1943 to August 15, 1945."

7 Greg Leck, *Captives of Empire*, p. 239.

8 Greg Leck, *Captives of Empire*, pp. 250-1.

produced a detailed 24-page report. The investigation revealed that the accountant responsible for these sections had altered accounts and destroyed stock records. While the committee did not conclude that the discrepancies constituted intentional fraud, their findings pointed to personal culpable negligence and significant flaws in the bookkeeping procedures. This episode highlighted the inherent difficulties of maintaining accountability and effective management within the camp's self-governance system.⁹

This case study of Japanese "Civil Assembly Camps" in Asia during World War II will enrich the field of war history. On the one hand, the experiences of non-combatants under direct surveillance by enemy forces challenge conventional binary frameworks, such as the division between "battlefronts" and "homefronts," often employed in war history analysis. On the other hand, this research sheds light on lesser-known aspects of wartime history by providing concrete examples of diplomatic negotiations between belligerent nations and illustrating how individuals managed the pressures and fears engendered by war. By providing access to primary documents, such as British administrative reports and postwar evaluations, the Gale digitized collection entitled *China and the Modern World: Regional China and the West, 1759–1972*, enables researchers to delve deeper into this topic and uncover new dimensions of wartime experiences.



Enclosure No.2. Code 210 file 10740. 1946. MS FO 369 Foreign Office: Consular Department: General Correspondence from 1906 FO 369/3442. The National Archives (Kew, United Kingdom). China and the Modern World, link.gale.com/apps/doc/KTOWOL167387217/CFER?u=asiademo&sid=bookmark-CFER&xid=e03d84eb&pg=49.

⁹ F0369/3442 "Special Enquiry Committee Report," document dated on April 21, 1944.