

ORIAS presentation, 7/30/13

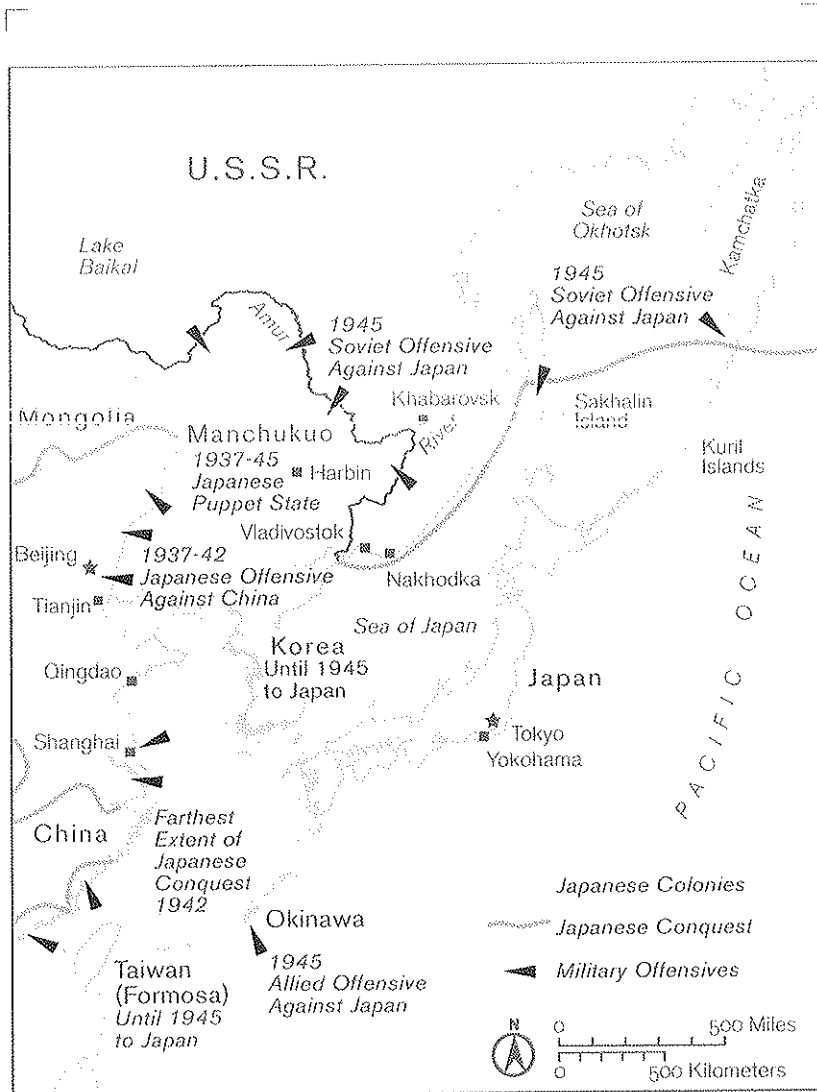
SIBERIAN SHADOWS:

JAPANESE PRISONERS RECALL THE SOVIET GULAG, 1945-1956

- I. Prologue: The Soviet-Japanese War, August 1945
- II. The Internment Decision
- III. Journeys into Captivity
- IV. The Gulag Trinity: Hard Labor, Cold, Hunger
- V. Siberia's "Democratic Movement"
- VI. Repatriation
- VII. Aftermath: The Internment Recalled

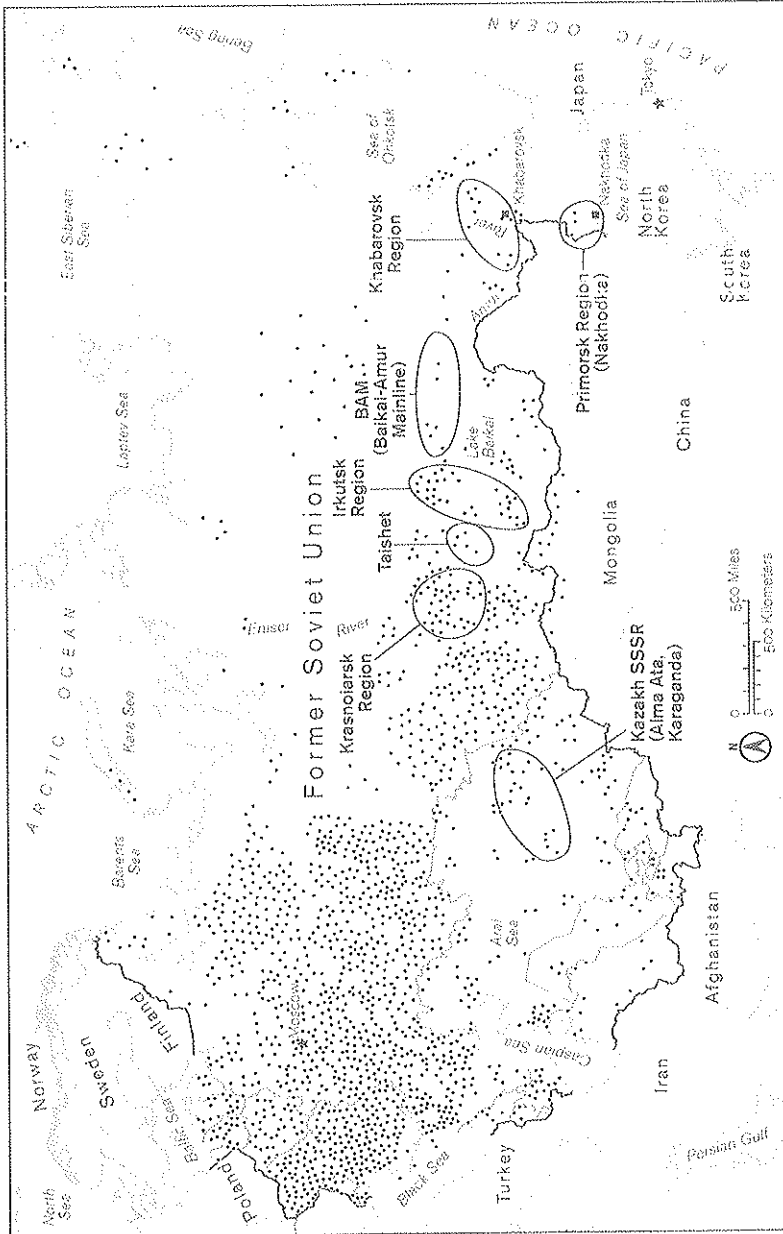
THE SIBERIAN INTERNMENT in a nutshell:

Two days after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, and on the night prior to the laying waste of Nagasaki, the Soviet Union declared war on imperial Japan, its massed armies pouring across the Manchurian border. The Kwantung Army, Japan's 700,000-strong Manchurian garrison, was decimated. Within a week, some 55,000 were dead, and on imperial order, the entire remaining force lay down in its arms. Following their surrender, nearly all of these defeated soldiers were interned in the Soviet gulag, along with many thousands of Japanese civilians. Of the total number, military and civilian, at least a tenth perished. The vast majority, including hundreds of thousands of raw, poorly trained recruits, was held for between two and four years in perhaps 2,000 camps, most in Siberia, some in Central Asia and Mongolia, and a handful in European Russia. In addition to being used for forced labor under conditions of bitter cold, crude shelter, and paltry and miserable food, they were subject to a sustained campaign of ideological reeducation, in which Japanese activists played a conspicuously important role. A small group of senior staff officers was tried for conducting bacteriological warfare in China, while others, well over 3,000 in all, were sentenced to terms of 15 to 25 years for a variety of "counterrevolutionary" offenses against Soviet law. The last remnant of these convicted "war criminals" returned to Japan in 1956, eleven years after the war ended.



Northeast Asia, 1932-1945

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Approximate locations of labor camps in the former Soviet Union. One can easily appreciate from this map both the geographical extent of the Soviet camp system and why it inspired one Japanese writer to compare it to "black-roasted sesame seeds sprinkled over white-rice porridge." As indicated by the shaded "bubbles" in the map above, the vast majority of Japanese prisoners were held in Siberia and Central Asia.

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