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American Shogun:
Reasons Why the Japanese were Fascinated with General MacArthur

An Honors Thesis

Presented to
the Department of International Studies
of the University of New Orleans

In Partial Fulfillment
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Bachelor of Arts, with University Honors
and Honors in International Studies

by

Tommy Louk

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Abstract

This paper will provide an insight into why the Japanese liked General MacArthur during the American occupation of Japan after World War II. By using letters that the Japanese sent to MacArthur I will show that the Japanese saw him as a liberator. The Japanese people were tired of the brutal rule by the military and were pleased with free speech and the right to assembly that MacArthur bestowed upon them. The Japanese people did not trust their leaders but trusted MacArthur to make fix their country. The Japanese people thought that MacArthur was liberating them from war, poverty, and despair.

Keywords: MacArthur, Occupation, Letters, Liberator, Japanese.

In 1945, a panicked Japanese citizen wrote a letter to General MacArthur asking him to abolish the emperor system. This Japanese person was afraid that the emperor would force his subjects into another war. This letter ends by saying, “To the great apostle of humanitarian love, The Honorable MacArthur.”¹ It is strange that the author thought MacArthur, an occupying general of the United States, was a humanitarian. MacArthur was placed in Japan after World War II, one of the most aggressive and destructive wars ever waged. Japan was beaten, broken, and about to be occupied by an enemy they had been fighting for five years. Their emperor renounced his divine status and told the people the nation had failed in its quest to establish an empire. Many Japanese politicians and other people in positions of power started hoarding goods and ignoring the plight of the people. The Japanese people lost their god and could not even turn to their politicians for aid. However, the United States sent Japan General MacArthur. MacArthur was going to be the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, and he was given almost complete control of Japan. It was his job to liberate Japan from the destruction and chaos of the war and the old ways.

The United States set up General Headquarters (GHQ) at the Dai-Ichi Insurance building in Tokyo. This was the home of the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers (SCAP), namely General MacArthur and the men who worked under him. General MacArthur, a prestigious war hero, was going to lead a country that was no stranger to dictatorships by military leaders. The main goal of the operation was not only to end militarism, but the circumstances that led to it. General MacArthur set out to transform Japan into a peaceful and democratic nation. MacArthur was known for his strong personality and sense of self-importance. MacArthur thought it was his

¹A Citizen of Tsuchiura City to MacArthur, 1945, Rinjiro Sodei, *Dear General MacArthur: Letters from the Japanese during the American Occupation* (Lanham, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001)

task “to see the Japanese people liberated from this condition of slavery.”² By using such strong words such as liberation, MacArthur seemed to think of himself as a savior of Japan.³ The idea of MacArthur being a savior to the Japanese people was an exaggeration. Nevertheless, the actions of the occupation gave Japan the methods it needed to change itself into the country that it is today.⁴

During this occupation, something very interesting happened; the Japanese became enthralled and obsessed with General MacArthur. They treated him with the same respect as they would their emperor. Why would they do this? MacArthur was a foreigner who had almost complete control of the country. He was not there as a tourist, but as the commander of the occupation. MacArthur only spoke to high-ranking Japanese people and never traveled around Japan.⁵ Also, he rarely addressed the Japanese people. Nevertheless, they treated him like a celebrity. Perhaps MacArthur was right in thinking that the Japanese people thought of him as a savior. The Japanese sent MacArthur many different gifts and invitations, some extremely expensive and others humble and heartfelt. The most interesting way the Japanese people expressed themselves to MacArthur was through fan mail. MacArthur received a almost 500,000 letters from the Japanese people. Some of them thanked him and America for their generosity or policies; others asked him for favors or gave suggestions. Few were criticisms of the occupation. The idea of sending letters started shortly before the occupation when the first postwar prime minister asked the Japanese people to send in letters to help him govern. His office collapsed soon after, but the idea of sending letters had already taken off. The Japanese

² James J. Orr, *The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and national Identity in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 18.

³ James J. Orr, *the Victim as Hero*, 19.

⁴ Theodore Cohen and Herbert Passin, *Remaking Japan: The American Occupation as New Deal* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 6-7.

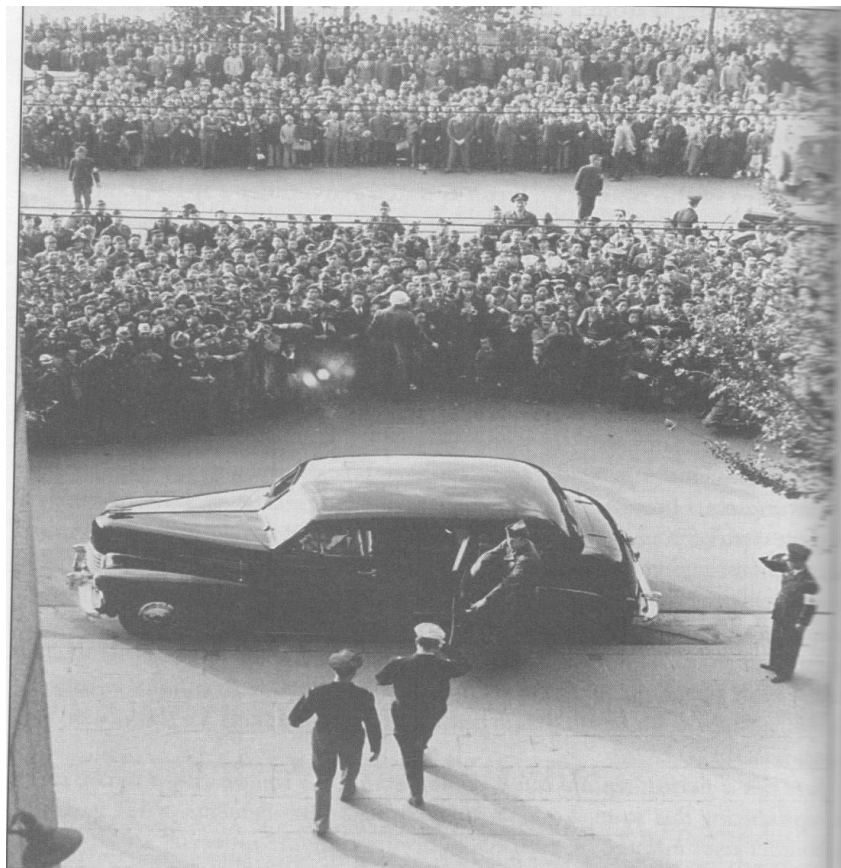
⁵ John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1999), 204-205.

started sending letters to SCAP. Sodei Rinjiro is the Japanese biographer and expert on General MacArthur, and he also published a book entitled *Dear General MacArthur: Letters from the Japanese during the American Occupation*. He read over ten thousand letters and picked interesting and important letters to be in his book. I have had access to over one hundred of the letters that Sodei has collected in his book. Sodei thinks that the Japanese people liked MacArthur because of a cultural tradition of respecting authority. I do not think that the intimacy presented in these letters is the result of a cultural tradition. However, I still use the letters Sodei has collected because they are a diverse sample of the hundreds of thousands of letters sent to MacArthur. Also, Sodei provides many useful notes and background information as editor of the letters. Others have tried to explain why the Japanese liked General MacArthur. MacArthur himself thinks that it is because he is Japan's savior. Most historians say that the Japanese liked MacArthur because of the Japanese culture of defeat that arose during the occupation or because of the policies that SCAP enacted during the occupation. I will look in the letters to discover why the Japanese liked their foreign overlord, General MacArthur, and why they thought him to be a liberator.⁶

It is clear in the letters written to MacArthur that the Japanese people thought he was a liberator. The letters provide many explanations and examples of the Japanese treating MacArthur as a liberator and their motivations for doing so. General MacArthur liberated the Japanese people from the war, from hunger, from the Japanese politicians, from the emperor, and from despair. Most of the Japanese truly enjoyed MacArthur's actions and rule as Supreme Commander. The Japanese liked MacArthur because they believed his actions and policies were

⁶ Rinjiro Sodei, *Dear General MacArthur*, 5-7.

more beneficial compared to the old ways and old government. MacArthur was seen as a liberator to the Japanese people during the occupation of Japan.



Hundreds of Japanese lined up just to catch a glimpse of their liberator, General MacArthur. Source Sodei, *Dear General MacArthur*, pg. 118

MacArthur vs. Japanese Militarists

Every defeated nation fears occupation. At the end of World War II, the Japanese were no exception, and they feared the oncoming American army. However, they would soon learn that the American occupation was far more comfortable than life under the Japanese militarists' rule. General MacArthur, once a feared enemy, became a beloved hero to the Japanese. The Japanese remembered life under the militarist's control and thought life under the American occupation was far better. The Japanese people were very grateful to MacArthur for the unexpected

kindness of his troops and the promise they would behave. The Japanese also praised MacArthur for their newly bestowed rights and freedoms. General MacArthur promised the Japanese people peace, which the people were very grateful for after years of war. The Japanese people loved MacArthur because his rule provided hope and peace for the people, much different from the fear and death the militarists provided.

The Japanese admired MacArthur for the surprisingly positive behavior and actions of the occupation forces. After Japan had surrendered, people started preparing for occupation. Radios told women to flee to the countryside; men would ride around towns with megaphones and warn the women not to go outdoors once the Americans arrived. The Japanese were afraid of the occupying army because of the stories the Japanese soldiers told while occupying China and the other parts of the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. None of these stories were published in Japan, but some soldiers came home and bragged of the atrocities they had committed abroad.⁷ Former militarist writer and Japanese Nationalist Oda Toshiyo also expected to experience punishment from the occupation force. He wrote a letter to MacArthur saying, “Because I myself and all the people waged the abhorrent Pacific War...we have received God’s admonition and punishment through the destiny of defeat...we were determined that ‘death’ was the only fate that awaited us.”⁸ The Japanese population could only expect the worst. Toward the end of the his surrender speech, the Emperor told the Japanese to, “Bear the unbearable and suffer the insufferable.”⁹ Imagine the relief and joy of the Japanese when the occupation army was kind toward them and helped the people in Japan. Oda Toshiyo experienced this joy: “Your Excellency, your officers and soldiers, and the people of your country gave all of us-uh, what

⁷Theodore Cohen and Herbert Passin, *Remaking Japan*, 119.

⁸ Oda Toshiyo to MacArthur, 1949, in *Dear General MacArthur*, 280.

⁹ Theodore Cohen and Herbert Passin, *Remaking Japan*, 119.

glory 'life' ... instead of the 'death' we had anticipated.”¹⁰ This man was a former Nationalist, a person who wrote books describing how the leaders of Japan, Germany, and Italy were heroes and should have created a new world order.¹¹ Instead of punishment, General MacArthur's men tried to help the Japanese; this complete surprise brought joy to many Japanese and cast General MacArthur in a positive light.

MacArthur's men were kind to the Japanese in many different ways. They gave candy to Japanese school children. They also gave up their seats on crowded trains and buses to Japanese women, something that Japanese men did not do. There are also other stories of the GIs helping put out fires, saving drowning children, and feeding starving families.¹² MacArthur, being the occupation's leader, would naturally receive the benefits of the well-behaved and kind occupation army. MacArthur promised the Japanese the good behavior of his men, and the Japanese believed he would uphold his promise.¹³ Another letter to MacArthur states “May I say that American soldiers, with their strict discipline, have taught us Japanese a lesson that strikes the bottom of our hearts.”¹⁴ The Japanese were very impressed with the kind actions of MacArthur's men. In fact, the Japanese term for the occupation forces actually translated to “stationed” army instead of “occupation” army. The Japanese were prepared for harsh punishment, but instead were helped. This drastic difference from their expectations made the Japanese thankful to MacArthur. They perceived him as kind and helpful rather than a vengeful military leader. The Japanese people were appreciative to MacArthur for the pleasant behavior of the American troops stationed in Japan.

¹⁰ Oda Toshiyo to MacArthur, 1949, in *Dear General MacArthur*, 280-281.

¹¹ Sodei, *Dear General MacArthur*, 282.

¹² Theodore Cohen and Herbert Passin, *Remaking Japan*, 120-121.

¹³ Sodei, *Dear General MacArthur*, 54.

¹⁴ Anonymous to MacArthur, 19 October 1945, in *Dear General MacArthur*, 53-54.

MacArthur was also seen as a liberator because of the rights that SCAP bestowed upon the Japanese people. The Japanese people saw MacArthur and the occupation as liberators.¹⁵ Life under the Japanese military rule was very brutal and harsh, especially for a woman or a member of the lower classes. Before and during the war, many people were killed and brutally punished for speaking their opinions. The Kampeitai, or military police, made sure that no Japanese citizens spoke or acted against the war effort. No one was safe from the Kampeitai. Military officers who said a few wrong words could easily find themselves fighting on the front lines of the war.¹⁶ The Kampeitai had many citizens kept under surveillance, arrested, or killed for not fully supporting the militarist ideas and efforts.¹⁷ It is easy to see how the Japanese people would rejoice at the rights and liberties bestowed upon them during the occupation. In October of 1945, MacArthur dissolved the restraints on political expression; people had freedom of speech and assembly. MacArthur then ordered the premier of Japan to give women free speech and allow them to vote. He also ordered the promotion of unions and more liberal education in schools.¹⁸ Sodei even says that the Japanese of the time thought MacArthur was the “Great Emancipator.”¹⁹

The common Japanese people were restricted and persecuted by elite, but now the new rulers allowed them new freedoms. Oda Toshiyo remarked on how much he and the Japanese people were indebted to MacArthur for their freedoms. He also claimed that he only wrote his nationalist propaganda “as an emergency mode of self-defense to escape the bonds of repeated

¹⁵ Theodore Cohen and Herbert Passin, *Remaking Japan*, 120.

¹⁶ John Toland, *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1936-1945*, (New York, Modern Library, 27 May, 2003), 476.

¹⁷ Toland, *The Rising Sun*, 524.

¹⁸ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 81.

¹⁹ Sodei, *Dear General MacArthur*, 98.

arrest and detention by the greedy and cruel police with their illegal accusations.”²⁰ Later in his letter, Oda then implied that he wrote the books because he and his family were persecuted. One cannot be sure if Oda really was threatened by the police or felt obligated to publish nationalist and militarist propaganda, but it is clear that he was afraid of what the police would do to him and his family because of what he wrote. Oda was glad that he could write and speak about anything he desired.

One of the first Japanese women that was elected to the Diet thanked MacArthur for all that he did and then said “until we were occupied by your country [Japanese women] did not have the right to speak, so we had no choice but to blindly follow the tyranny of the men.”²¹ Some people used this given freedom of expression to suggest things that would have been punished by death during the war. One letter begins by calling MacArthur “Our great liberator” and then proceeded to say how “Recently, freedom of speech has been recognized to quite an extent.”²² Then the writer proceeds to use his new freedom of speech to talk about abolishing the emperor system. Written documents like this could certainly have had the writer killed during the war. It is also interesting how the author of the letter thanks MacArthur by calling him our great “liberator” and then proceeds to remind MacArthur that he has freedom of speech, so his “blasphemy” against the emperor system will go unpunished. John Dower, author of *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, is a historian and an expert on the Japanese during and after the Second World War. He has written many books about Japan, and he perfectly sums up the joy of the Japanese people by saying, “The American regimen cracked open the authoritarian structures of the old society in a manner that permitted unprecedented individual

²⁰ Oda Toshiyo to MacArthur, 1949, in *Dear General MacArthur*, 284.

²¹ Nomura Misu to MacArthur, 9 August 1949, in *Dear General MacArthur*, 263.

²² S.I. to MacArthur, 16 December 1945, in *Dear General MacArthur*, 95.

freedoms and unanticipated forms of popular expression to flourish.”²³ The Japanese simply enjoyed their freedoms under the new regime.

Another reason the people of Japan praised and preferred MacArthur over the Japanese militarists is that the occupation promised lasting peace. The Japanese first started hostilities in 1931 against Manchuria. Ever since then, the militarists grew in power. Finally in 1937, the militarists were in complete control and started the war against China.²⁴ The Japanese were officially at war for eight years, and the situation only became more desperate. The militarists became so desperate that they began to train and encourage their entire population to fight to the death. Day by day the war was getting worse for the Japanese people, and many thought that death was the only future. Many Japanese had trouble finding basic necessities such as food. The Japanese Army encouraged the people to eat items such as “acorns, grain husks, peanut shells, and sawdust” as a supplement to regular food.²⁵ Life for the Japanese was a constant struggle and turmoil, and there was no end in sight. However, the surrender put an end to the war, and General MacArthur promised that Japan would never wage war again. General MacArthur suggested that the new constitution have a “renunciation of war” as well as a decree that stated the country was committed to pacifism.

Many Japanese were thankful to MacArthur for his promises of peace, and this gratitude can be seen in the letters they wrote to him. One letter declares “we should be very grateful to His Excellency, Supreme Commander General MacArthur for extending his deep love to the former enemy Japan and for the tremendous effort he is making daily to build a peaceful

²³ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 84.

²⁴ Toland, *The Rising Sun*, 8 & 42-47.

²⁵ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 91.

nation.”²⁶ The Japanese appreciated the work MacArthur did to ensure they would not have to endure the terrors of war again. Another letter to MacArthur says, “One example [of peaceful leadership] is the consideration you've shown in the demobilization of Japanese forces within and outside Japan.”²⁷ The Japanese people saw that MacArthur had abolished the military, and they saw that as a way of keeping the promise of peace. Some Japanese people felt so indebted to MacArthur for his actions and his promise to keep Japan a peaceful nation that they gave him gifts. A young girl sent MacArthur a doll and her letter states “Through the general's efforts, we are able to live in peace every day and every night, and I sent you the doll in the hope that our unlimited gratitude might give you some comfort during your busy days.”²⁸ Another letter from a poor fisherman states that he is thankful for the “vigor and intelligence with which you are building the basis for world peace.”²⁹ This letter then proceeds to tell MacArthur there are delicious fish in the river where he fishes. He then says that he would like to “express his humble gratitude” to MacArthur over a day of fishing.³⁰ These are only two examples of instances when people felt so indebted to MacArthur for the peace and stability he had brought. In most of the letters I have read, the Japanese mention their thanks for peace or how something needs to get done in order to preserve the worldwide peace. Oda also provides a great example of how the Japanese felt toward MacArthur for bringing peace. Oda was the chairman of the Association for Promotion of Eternal World Peace and even stood in the streets of Tokyo campaigning for General MacArthur's presidential candidacy. He told passersby and anyone who would listen that MacArthur was the best person to protect the world from the “ruffian who disturbs the peace

²⁶ A WRITER to MacArthur, 13 February 1950, in *Dear General MacArthur*, 191.

²⁷ A Mother to MacArthur, 18 November 1945, in *Dear General MacArthur*, 273.

²⁸ Sakai Reiko to MacArthur, 16 February, *Dear General MacArthur*, 124.

²⁹ Kato Ikkan to MacArthur, 28 July 1948, *Dear General MacArthur*, 44.

³⁰ Kato Ikkan to MacArthur, 28 July 1948, *Dear General MacArthur*, 44.

of the world”.³¹ The Japanese people thought MacArthur was forever liberating the Japanese people from war.³²

The Japanese Leaders compared to General MacArthur

“Japanese no fucking' good!” is a twelve year old girl’s view on the Japanese after the war.³³ This little girl lost her hand and parents to a firebombing, and her remaining relatives would not care for her. She made a living by using her only good hand to polish shoes and boats for American GIs. Theodore Cohen was a member of SCAP during the occupation and he started to write *Remaking Japan: The American Occupation as New Deal*. He passed away before he could finish writing it, and his friend and colleague Herbert Passin finished the book. Cohen and Passin say that the war caused many Japanese to dislike their own people. This phenomenon is especially true regarding the Japanese leaders both during the war and during the occupation. After the war, the Japanese people had a general mistrust of the ones who caused them so much misery. The Japanese trusted General MacArthur more than they did the current elected officials. The Japanese leadership had failed them before and was slow to implement change, which was the opposite of General MacArthur. The Japanese people looked to MacArthur to lead and help them because they did not trust the Japanese leaders.³⁴

The Japanese people did not trust their leaders because they did not appear to be working for the people. In contrast, MacArthur’s actions seemed to genuinely help the people. A great example of a mistrusted Japanese leader was the Japanese Prime Minister for a majority of the occupation, Yoshida Shigeru. Yoshida did not believe that the Japanese people were ready for

³¹ Sodei, *Dear General MacArthur*, 285-287.

³² Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 83-88.

³³ Theodore Cohen and Herbert Passin, *Remaking Japan*, 122.

³⁴ Theodore Cohen and Herbert Passin, *Remaking Japan*, 122.

democracy and thought that critics of his views were too ethnocentric or blinded by left wing propaganda.³⁵ These were the words of the Prime Minister of Japan, a man who was supposed to serve the people whom he was actually insulting. How could a Japanese citizen of the time believe in this leadership when the Prime Minister had insulted them? How could the common Japanese person not trust MacArthur when he gave the people their freedoms and rights while the current leader mocked them? Many Japanese wrote of their fears about the current government to MacArthur. They trusted that he or SCAP would keep the Japanese politicians in line.

The simple act of telling MacArthur they did not trust the Japanese leaders implies that they trusted MacArthur. One of these letters reads, “The existing political parties have forgotten their mission for a defeated Japan. They are only interested in party politics and political advantage, and they engage in political mudslinging, leading the country into confusion and panic.”³⁶ Japan had many political parties during the occupation, and they all fought hard to gain seats. The Japanese thought that MacArthur acted for the people while the political parties fought amongst each other. There is some truth to this, as MacArthur would not sit and wait for the Japanese political leaders to make laws; sometimes, he would use the Emperor to enact what Sodei calls “imperial Potsdam decrees.”³⁷ The occupation did not depose of the Emperor for many reasons, and using his power was one of the reasons. MacArthur sometimes acted quicker than the Japanese government, and Oda has something enlightening and dramatic to say. He writes, “The liberation of farmers, the liberation of laborers, the liberation of women- Oh God, behold this! The innumerable chains he has loosed! Oh who could lose the many ugly chains?”

³⁵ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 84.

³⁶ Sato Shigeki to MacArthur, 5 March 1947, *Dear General MacArthur*, 246.

³⁷ Sodei, *Dear General MacArthur*, 98.

None other than the former enemy commander, General MacArthur.”³⁸ It is easy to see that Oda was pleased that MacArthur was Japan’s great liberator. Electoral politics took a long time to get things done because they had to debate over the issues. However, General MacArthur could have something ordered immediately.

Another letter reads, “The wishy washy attitude of the present cabinet members is not acceptable, There are many points I cannot support in the speeches of the Diet members.”³⁹ The point that this one letter is trying to convey is the Diet’s attitude about free speech regarding the Emperor. Free speech was allowed, but if one spoke badly about the Emperor, it was still a crime that was punishable. The laws of lese majesty still continued, and only under pressure from SCAP were they changed in November of 1947. Many people who sent letters complaining about the Emperor or his system did not leave their names in fear of retaliation. The Japanese government was changing to a democracy, yet it would not let their people speak freely about a figurehead; this mixed message upset the Japanese. It is an example of broken trust, and the law changed only after SCAP put pressure on the Japanese lawmakers. The Japanese people saw that MacArthur’s SCAP had priorities to protect and help the Japanese, but the Japanese leaders only wanted to help themselves and the traditional forms of power.⁴⁰

Some Japanese trusted MacArthur’s leadership and rule more than they did the Emperor. For a short time, the occupation debated on getting rid of the emperor system. As stated above, they did not do so because the emperor system still was useful to the occupation. However, many Japanese thought the Emperor was responsible for the war and wanted him punished for it. They also believed that once the occupation left, Japan would return to an empire controlled by

³⁸ Oda Toshiyo to MacArthur, 1949, in *Dear General MacArthur*, 281.

³⁹ S.I. to MacArthur, 16 December 1945, in *Dear General MacArthur*, 97.

⁴⁰ Sodei, *Dear General MacArthur*, 96.

the emperor.⁴¹ SCAP, after doing some research, found the Emperor to be only a figurehead during the war and decided that he had no important part in the planning and attacking of other nations. Many Japanese wanted the Emperor to be charged as a war criminal and the imperial system abolished. They thought that the “Japanese began and ended a war through the emperor’s edicts.”⁴² It is interesting to point out that the Japanese who wanted the Emperor to be deposed of were voicing their opinion on the matter. They were using their new freedoms to speak out against the past. They no longer wanted a system of government in which the Emperor would not be responsible for the people. Even those who wanted the emperor to remain only wanted him to do so as a figurehead. The people wanted a system in which their voices would be heard, so they sent their letters to MacArthur hoping they would make a difference.

Some members of the new Japanese government still held strong to old customs, which was different from what MacArthur stood for and what many Japanese people wanted. One letter read, “I think you [MacArthur] understand why the spineless leaders of the Socialist Party make half-asleep remarks about democratic government under the emperor system.”⁴³ The author of the letter says this because at the founding of the Socialist party, one of the leaders shouted “Banzai (Glory) to the emperor.”⁴⁴ The author threatened to join the Communist party because of these actions. At the ceremony for Japan’s new Constitution, the Prime Minister even said Banzai to the Emperor. It is understandable that this was alarming to the Japanese. The politicians were seen as supporting the old ways, which led to war and misery. Also, these old ways did not support the will of the people or the rights they had received. For this reason,

⁴¹ U.K. to MacArthur, 19 January 1946, *Dear General MacArthur*, 89-90.

⁴² Country Farmer to MacArthur, Unknown, *Dear General MacArthur*, 85.

⁴³ Citizen of Tsuchiura City to MacArthur, 1945, *Dear General MacArthur*, 100.

⁴⁴ Sodei, *Dear General MacArthur*, 100.

Passin and Cohen note, “Driven by an accumulation of resentments against the snobbery, restrictions, and injustices of the old order, shocked by the devastation its irresponsibility had brought about, and inspired by both the person and the message of General MacArthur, the Japanese turned to democracy.”⁴⁵ The Japanese people wanted a voice in their government, and they wanted the government to be for the people, not for the Emperor. The Japanese leaders in power, who seemed to respect the old ways, made the people mistrust them. Naturally, these people wrote and voiced their opinion to the MacArthur. MacArthur’s job was viewed as rescuing the people from the old politicians and their ways.⁴⁶

Poverty in Postwar Japan

It is no surprise that many people in Japan after the war lived in poverty. Despite this, many Japanese still felt thankful towards MacArthur for making Japan a democracy. Times were so tough in Japan that people had to sell or trade their family heirlooms or prized possessions after the war. This became known as the bamboo-shoot existence because a bamboo shoot can be stripped away piece by piece, which is parallel to the people selling their clothes and prized possessions. Living the bamboo-shoot existence, it is obvious that children would not have many toys to play with. Instead, many children started to play other types of games and found new ways to entertain themselves. This led to some Japanese children playing as if they were GIs and prostitutes, and some children played fake black markets. Some other children got through tough times by using gifts from America and focusing on MacArthur.⁴⁷

One Japanese family is a perfect example of the dire economic times and the gratitude towards General MacArthur that many others felt and experienced. This letter was written by the

⁴⁵ Theodore Cohen and Herbert Passin, *Remaking Japan*, 137

⁴⁶ Sodei, *Dear General MacArthur*, 100.

⁴⁷ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 95 & 111.

mother of the family and described how the family received four American pumpkin seeds. The son planted the seed and was told in school to watch it grow. He soon began a diary with entries about the pumpkin growing. The mother says, “Without toys nor candies, my four little children devoted to observe the growth of the pumpkin.”⁴⁸ This family had trouble getting enough food: “The word ‘Starvation’ became a reality to us.”⁴⁹ The father saw a newspaper article about a child who brought flowers to General MacArthur as a thank you for all the chocolate given to the children. The father suggested sending MacArthur the diary, and along with it, he would send an oil painting of the pumpkin. The family’s condition got worse as the mother described how they “sold our belongings one by one to get potatoes or some other foods, and there was left only a few things to us.” This family, like many others at the time, experienced the pain of the bamboo-shoot existence. The mother promised to write the letter and got her friends at a school to help her. The entire family joined together to send MacArthur the gift. She finally says, “Here I like to express my gratitude toward your kindness and sympathy to our people and also show you that how the tiny seeds of American pumpkins gave joy last six months to my family.”⁵⁰ Even though the family had very little, they all bound together and worked through the hard times by using their gifts to MacArthur as a distraction. This family of six used a tiny pumpkin seed and the hope they could give a gift to MacArthur as repayment for the rebuilding of Japan. Many Japanese people saw MacArthur’s actions as a way to liberate the people from despair.

⁴⁸ Shigetaka’s mother to MacArthur. 22 December 1946, *Dear General MacArthur*, 104.

⁴⁹ Shigetaka’s mother to MacArthur. 22 December 1946, *Dear General MacArthur*, 104.

⁵⁰ Shigetaka’s mother to MacArthur. 22 December 1946, *Dear General MacArthur*, 106.



Some Japanese are so grateful of MacArthur's food aid, they throw a party in his honor. Source Sodei, *Dear General MacArthur*, pg. 40

Food Shortage and Starvation

Japan lost the war and, with it, the supplies to feed its own people. Japan was heavily dependant on China and Korea for the import of produce. Starvation became a reality to many Japanese after the war. The food harvest in 1945 was the worst one in over thirty years. Many of the crops that were grown were put on the black market and sold for huge profits. In 1946 and 1947 the harvest was much better, but even then, most of the food went to the black market because the price could be as high as 7.5 times the normal price. The Minister of Finance announced that ten million people would starve if Japan did not receive food imports. Food activities and managing to survive became a popular topic in the media. A popular radio show in

the postwar era interviewed people on sidewalks and asked them “How do you manage to eat?”⁵¹ Magazines for women began running articles on how to make meals with scarce food items. Dower says that, “Simply putting food on the table became a massive undertaking.”⁵² The government said that the average adult needed to eat 2,200 calories a day in order to work. Right after the war was over in 1945, people barely got half this amount. In 1946 and 1947, many Japanese had a little over one-third to one-fourth of the required 2,200 calories. This caused many Japanese to become very upset and angry with the government and the occupation. They were upset with the government for spotty food deliveries and about its corruption. For awhile, the Japanese were upset with the occupation because they seemed more focused on changing the government and ideologies of the Japanese rather than helping them survive. One early letter to MacArthur asked, “Are you planning another mass killing of the people with a passive atomic bomb?”⁵³ However, the Japanese government and farmers took most of the blame for the food shortages, while MacArthur became a hero for getting Japan more food.

The Japanese people were disillusioned by their leaders and fellow citizens. The food shortages caused the people to lose faith in each other as well as in the Japanese leadership. Some of the letters to MacArthur speak of the anger towards mistrust of the Japanese leadership who forced the people into a war, but did not suffer alongside them. One of these letters says, “The misguided military cliques led our innocent people into war and caused great difficulties for your country. [A]s a result, the Japanese people are experiencing indescribable suffering. At present, many have no place to live, there is not enough food to eat.”⁵⁴ Another letter sent to

⁵¹ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 96.

⁵² Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 90

⁵³ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 90-96.

⁵⁴ Yagi Chosaburo to MacArthur. 15 February 1946, *Dear General MacArthur*, 24.

MacArthur perfectly captures the anger and frustration toward the Japanese leaders of the time: “Not only I, but anyone who has a heart would abhor those in power right now.”⁵⁵ The writer of the letter, initials H.K., then talks about the corrupt military and police officers. H.K. says that during the war and after it, military officers and the police came and took car loads of food supplies and alcohol. H.K. further mentions how the people in high positions use their wealth and power to buy expensive items and live extravagant lives. He or she then says, “Those in power started a war on their own and made us suffer.”⁵⁶ Not only did they make the Japanese suffer through the war, but they also made them suffer afterwards. H.K.’s anger shines through when he or she says, “Those Japanese in high positions went off and started a war, and they are to blame for us not having a place to live and not being able to feed my eighty-year old mother and my sick sister.”⁵⁷ H.K. and many other Japanese were just trying to obtain the bare essentials, so it is no surprise that they would attack the high ranking Japanese who supported the war and made money off of their poor countrymen. The Japanese people were angry at the Japanese in power because most of the common people were suffering, while the high-ranking Japanese were seen taking supplies and making money off the black market.

The Japanese people were also upset with GHQ and SCAP, but this soon changed into feelings of appreciation and heartfelt devotion to MacArthur. The Americans’ main goal in the occupation of Japan was to change the government. The Americans were only to interfere with the economy if it completely failed under the Japanese.⁵⁸ Naturally, GHQ only focused on democratizing Japan. Cohen and Passin state, “they [the Japanese] could not eat, live in, or wear

⁵⁵ H.K. to MacArthur, 20 October 1945, *Dear General MacArthur*, 108.

⁵⁶ H.K. to MacArthur, 20 October 1945, *Dear General MacArthur*, 109.

⁵⁷ H.K. to MacArthur, 20 October 1945, *Dear General MacArthur*, 109.

⁵⁸ Theodore Cohen and Herbert Passin, *Remaking Japan*, 139.

the new democratic reforms” that MacArthur passed.⁵⁹ The Japanese people were also well aware of this. One letter to MacArthur read, “If the United States does not bring us food, what will happen to Japan? We will have to die gradually.”⁶⁰ Other people were bolder with statements such as, “The problem of democracy should be addressed after ample food has been obtained.”⁶¹

MacArthur realized the people were suffering. He knew that no real change would happen unless people had food to eat and places to live, so he made recovery a priority. One step MacArthur made was to decrease the number of U.S. troops in Japan from 600,000 to 200,000 toward the end of 1945. This population decrease left large amounts of food surplus, which was given to the Japanese people. The U.S. government then asked MacArthur in the spring of 1946 if he needed more food or soldiers, and MacArthur said he needed more food. Congress gave him what he requested, and the next year MacArthur asked for 330 million dollars and then for 297 million dollars the following year. In 1948, many people were eating around 2,000 calories a day. The food stock went from empty to over 3 million tons by 1949. While talking to Congress, MacArthur had said “starvation...renders a people an easy prey to any ideology that brings with it life-sustaining food.”⁶² Did MacArthur fully understand the gravity of the words he said that day? He surely meant that the United States should provide food for the people because the nationalists or communists could provide food and sway the people. It is interesting to wonder if he also meant that the Japanese would be more accepting of democracy if the United States feed them. Intended or not, MacArthur and democracy became very popular in Japan. Many Japanese people were thankful for the food they received. Another letter reads,

⁵⁹ Theodore Cohen and Herbert Passin, *Remaking Japan*, 138.

⁶⁰ Ume to MacArthur, 7 December 1949, *Dear General MacArthur*, 261.

⁶¹ Anonymous to MacArthur, 28 November 1945, *Dear General MacArthur*, 54

⁶² Theodore Cohen and Herbert Passin, *Remaking Japan*, 145.

“what would become of us Japanese faced with the terrible shortage of foodstuff. Particularly at the time when our food situation was in a critical condition you showed profound interest.”⁶³

The people’s trust was broken with the Japanese in power, and this misguided trust found was placed in General MacArthur. The Japanese leaders only seemed concerned for themselves and did not seem to suffer like the people. Meanwhile, the Japanese people were barely getting by. Then, MacArthur and the Americans increase the amount of food given to the Japanese. One letter to MacArthur reads, “Every time we receive food rations, we are grateful for your kindness with tears in our eyes.”⁶⁴ The author of another letter goes on to say how he builds miniatures and wants to send a miniature of Mount Fuji to MacArthur in appreciation for the food he and his countrymen received. The Japanese became extremely enthralled with MacArthur because he helped Japan with its food crisis. The Japanese people saw MacArthur as a rescuer, saving the Japanese people from hunger and starvation.⁶⁵

MacArthur’s Legacy in Japan

The Japanese people lost their infatuation with MacArthur soon after he left Japan. MacArthur was dismissed from command after overstepping his orders in the Korean War. He attacked too far into North Korea, which caused the Chinese to enter into the war against the United States. Due to these events MacArthur was also dismissed from command in Japan, as well. Many Japanese were shocked at the thought of MacArthur leaving so soon. Many were also surprised at how the civil side of government had such power of the military.⁶⁶ When MacArthur left Japan, thousands of Japanese crowded the streets in order to see him leave. When

⁶³ Kamakichi Miichi to MacArthur, 24 November 1950, *Dear General MacArthur*, 153.

⁶⁴ SOMA Kose to MacArthur, 1 January 1950, *Dear General MacArthur*, 224.

⁶⁵ Theodore Cohen and Herbert Passin, *Remaking Japan*, 140.

⁶⁶ Sodei, *Dear General MacArthur*, 294.

he returned to America, MacArthur was in congressional hearings for several days. In one of these hearings MacArthur said that the Japanese were “like a boy of twelve.”⁶⁷ This quote was taken out of context, but it does not change the fact that the man who liberated the Japanese people had now insulted them. This headline and quote from MacArthur embarrassed the Japanese people. Plans to build a statue of MacArthur in Tokyo were abandoned. Many Japanese were angry and chose to forget and ignore MacArthur’s actions in Japan from the previous few years. MacArthur was never remembered or treated the same by the Japanese after occupation.⁶⁸ However, this does not mean that the Japanese people of today ignore or dismiss what MacArthur did. Many Japanese today know of MacArthur, and he is remembered for being a benevolent and wise leader. However, he is not remembered for being the great liberator that the Japanese thought of him as during the occupation.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 551.

⁶⁸ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 551.

⁶⁹ Sodei, *Dear General MacArthur*, 299.



Thousands of Japanese line the streets, bidding farewell to General MacArthur. Source Sodei, *Dear General MacArthur*, pg. 295

Some people argue that MacArthur was not loved in Japan as a liberator. Dower states that the Japanese people “embraced” MacArthur as commander in almost every aspect of life. He says that the letters written by women stating they wanted to have MacArthur’s child is proof that the Japanese also sexually embraced MacArthur. Dower says that MacArthur was looked on as an image of masculinity and power. However, I think the Japanese did not like MacArthur because of his masculinity or sexuality. First, Dower’s argument only works for the women who sent him such letters. Also, it would only apply to women, which is why Dower then says that many men also looked toward MacArthur as a model of manliness. Dower is implying too much upon the men of the occupation.⁷⁰ Also, none of these letters make it into Sodei’s collection of

⁷⁰ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 233.

letters. He does mention them, and if they were truly enlightening or if they reflected a popular viewpoint of the time, Sodei surely would have included them. I do not think that a prestigious academic would leave this out of one of his works if it had been so significant. I think it is clear that the Japanese people liked MacArthur because of what he did for the people, instead of what he represented. The Japanese people liked MacArthur because they saw him as a liberator, a person in power fighting for their welfare. The letters from women mentioned before are interesting, but I do not think that they were so numerous as to say that General MacArthur and the occupation were looked upon sexually.

Sodei also says throughout his book that he thinks the Japanese liked MacArthur because of a “national characteristic of subservience to authority.”⁷¹ Sodei says this is the reason why the Japanese treated MacArthur the way they would treat their own emperor and why they were so eager to send him gifts and invitations. I agree that some of the reverence for MacArthur had to do with the common act of showing great respect to the leaders, but not all of it. Many of the letters were sent to MacArthur asking him for favors or to get certain things done. This ranged from fixing the government to making sure the people had enough food to eat. Many of the gifts were given to MacArthur because of what he did for the people. Sodei is confusing the gratitude of the Japanese with what he thinks is subservience to authority. Also, if Sodei’s agreement is true, then why did the Japanese not trust the authority of their politicians and emperor?

MacArthur was not the only authority in postwar Japan. In fact, MacArthur was responsible for setting the framework in which many of these Japanese politicians worked. If the Japanese were acting out of respect for authority, then why did some people ask MacArthur to change or fix the political system he set up in Japan? The Japanese people liked and wrote to MacArthur because

⁷¹ Sodei, *Dear General MacArthur*, 76.

he was their liberator; he could correct problems or issues that no one else could or would care about.

Lastly, MacArthur himself thought he was like a savior to the Japanese people. In his memoir, he mentions how he liked the way a Japanese writer talked about the surrender ceremony. He puts this writer's written work about the ceremony in his memoir instead of writing about it himself. The passage gets very dramatic and almost biblical as it describes MacArthur speaking. "[T]he skies parted and sun shone brightly" is one example of this flattering speech.⁷² Another passage in this text reads, "General MacArthur...a shining obelisk in the desert of human endeavor that marks a timeless march onward toward an enduring peace."⁷³ It is very clear from these readings and his other sayings that General MacArthur thought of himself as Japan's savior. This idea might have been reinforced through the letters he received. He did save the Japanese people from a lot of problems, but was not their savior. If Japan thought of him as a savior, he would have not have been immediately forgotten after the occupation. His remarks to Congress would have been remembered differently or taken in a different context. After speaking to Congress about Japan, MacArthur was shoved away from the immediate memory of the Japanese because their liberator had betrayed them. If some sort of religious savior had said what he said, then Japan would not have reacted in the same way it did to MacArthur. One cannot simply ignore the actions and words of a religious figure, but the words and actions of a man who helped you for a brief period can be more easily forgotten.

Overall, the Japanese enjoyed MacArthur's time as Supreme Commander because he liberated the people. MacArthur released the Japanese people from the corruption of the military

⁷² Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences: General of the Army* (New York, McGraw-Hill Company, 1964), 275.

⁷³ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 277.

and war-time government. The Japanese people saw MacArthur as the one who gave them the rights of free speech and assembly. The Japanese people were grateful to MacArthur for the food he sent Japan and for saving them from hunger. The Japanese also thought MacArthur could save the people from greedy politicians. Some of the Japanese people even wanted MacArthur to liberate them from the emperor. The Japanese people trusted MacArthur because of what he did or appeared to be doing for the good of the people. They make this clear in the letters that they wrote to him. The American occupation of Japan was a very unique and interesting time. Instead of losing all hope, the people believed that their conquest and defeat could only help them grow stronger. The Japanese people believed MacArthur's actions and edicts would liberate them from the ashes of war and lead them into a better and brighter future.

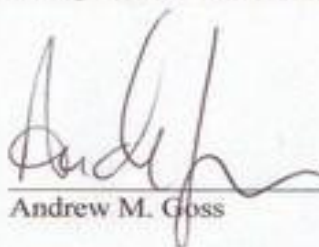
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APPROVAL SHEET

This is to certify that Tommy David Louk Jr. has successfully completed
his Senior Honors Thesis, entitled:

*American Shogun:
Reasons Why the Japanese Were Fascinated with General MacArthur*



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May 3, 2012
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