

# RE-IMAGINING JAPAN – NORTH KOREA RELATIONS

## PART 1

*Tessa Morris-Suzuki*

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### *Collateral Damage*

On 23 November 2010, immediately following North Korea's military strike on the South Korean island of Yeongpyeong, the Japanese cabinet established an emergency response centre to gather information on the unfolding crisis, and promised harsher sanctions on the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea or North Korea). In the ensuing weeks, however, a flaw in this strategy emerged. Since earlier rounds of sanctions imposed on North Korea following its 2006 nuclear test, extended in 2009 following its long-range missile test, and further tightened in May 2010 following the sinking of the South Korean warship *Cheonan*, Japan's trade and communications with North Korea have dwindled virtually to zero. There is, in other words, no leverage: there is nothing left to sanction.<sup>1</sup>

In any case, the series of sanctions imposed on North Korea by Japan and other countries in recent years is widely regarded by scholars as having had very little effect on the DPRK regime.<sup>2</sup> As we shall see, however, this does not mean that sanctions have had no impact at all. Rather those most seriously affected are people other than the North Korean elite. In fact, many of those hit hardest by sanctions are residents of Japan itself, victims of 'collateral damage'.

Meanwhile, like South Korea and the United States, Japan responded to the November 2010 North Korean attack by demanding that China (as the one power which still retains major economic and other ties to North Korea) should do something to rein in its rogue neighbour. China's strategy for dealing with the crisis was to propose an emergency meeting of the Six Parties (China, Japan, the two Koreas, Russia, and the United States), which since 2003 have been engaged in the search for a solution to the North Korean nuclear issue. But Japan, along with South Korea and the United States, promptly rejected this suggestion, triggering an alarming

---

<sup>1</sup> See 'Japan's Options on North Korea Sanctions Limited', *Asahi* online (English), 26 November 2010, <http://www.asahi.com/english/TKY201011250331.html>

<sup>2</sup> See for example Michael Whitty, Suk Hi Kim and Trevor Crick, 'The Effectiveness of Economic Sanctions Against North Korea', in Suk H. Kim and Semoon Chang eds., *Economic Sanctions Against a Nuclear North Korea: An Analysis of United States and United Nations Actions Since 1950*, McFarland 2007, pp. 73-102; Marcus Noland, 'The (Non-)Impact of United Nations Sanctions on North Korea', *Asia Policy*, no. 7, January 2009, pp. 61-88

deterioration in the already worsening relationship between East Asia's two major powers.

In the long run, all this has very troubling implications. The Korean Peninsula has always been the fulcrum in the power relationship between Japan and China. Conflicts over influence on Korea in the 1890s and 1900s marked both the rise of the Japanese empire and start of a half century of region-wide friction and violence; conflicts over influence on Korea today threaten the stability post-Cold War East Asia. Regional cohesion, indeed, is the other great victim of collateral damage from current conflicts on the Korean Peninsula. The problem is aggravated by the apparent inability of the governments of North Korea's neighbours, including Japan, to look beyond the present, and consider the enormous long-term consequences that major political or economic changes in the DPRK (whether brought about by war and violence or by peaceful transition) will inevitably have upon the people of the region. For the past two years, constant anticipation of the impending demise of North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il, and of transition to a successor (now identified as youngest son Kim Jong-Eun), have intensified a 'freezing of the imagination' about North Korea's present and future.<sup>3</sup>

The first signs of this freeze became evident in Japan in 2002, in the wake of the North Korean admission that thirteen Japanese citizens had been abducted by its agents during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>4</sup> The media and policy response to the abduction issue led to a rapid severing of economic, communication and human ties between Japan and its North Korean neighbour. North Korea quickly came to be seen as an incomprehensible and terrifying pariah, and any form of contact with this rogue state came to be viewed as suspect, if not potentially treasonous. By way of evidence, we might consider the regular opinion polls conducted by the Jiji Press Agency, which asks Japanese people to choose, from a prepared list, the three countries they most dislike. When the polls started, the Soviet Union, the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea) and China led the list of disliked countries, in that order, but in the 1970s and 1980s perceptions of these countries diverged, with China and South Korea becoming relatively popular while the Soviet Union, until the advent of Gorbachev, became increasingly unpopular. But the most striking trend in the survey (unsurprisingly) is the soaring unpopularity of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea). In 1973–74, less than 20 per cent of Japanese people surveyed cited North Korea as one of their most disliked countries. By 2006, the figure was over 80 per cent.<sup>5</sup> This mood of aversion has encouraged a forgetting of the complex range of economic and social ties which had connected the two countries in earlier decades, and this amnesia in turn has added to the difficulties of conceiving any positive image of a future relationship between Japan and North Korea.

---

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion, see Tessa Morris-Suzuki, 'The Forgotten Japanese in North Korea: Beyond the Politics of Abduction', *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, vol. 43-2-09, October 26 2009.

<sup>4</sup> As discussed below, North Korea implausibly claimed that these were 'rogue' agents acting without official sanction; Japan disputes the figure of thirteen abductees, claiming that the number kidnapped was higher.

<sup>5</sup> See Robert Scalapino, *The Foreign Policy of Modern Japan*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977, p. 125; Mindy Kotler, Naotaka Sugawara and Tetsuya Yamada, 'Chinese and Japanese Public Opinion: Searching for Moral Security', *Asian Perspective*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2007, pp. 93-125 (particularly p. 97)

The current crisis on the Korean Peninsula makes it vitally important to unfreeze the imagination. This series of articles is a preliminary attempt to suggest some ways in which this conceptual thaw might occur. In order to rethink the present and future, it is, I believe, necessary to re-examine the past, and in particular to draw attention to forgotten economic, social and cultural facets of the relationship between Japan and North Korea as it has evolved over the past six decades.<sup>6</sup> For that relationship has been an unusually discontinuous one. As I shall try to show, it has been characterized by repeated cycles which swing between cautious engagement and rupture:

- engagement from the mid-1950s to mid-1960s, followed by retreat in the late 1960s;
- renewed engagement in the early 1970s, followed by estrangement in the late 1970s to early 1980s;
- a further phase of engagement from the end of the 1980s to the late 1990s;
- renewed tensions punctuated by Prime Minister Koizumi's 2002 visit to Pyongyang — which seemed to hold out a promise of full normalization of relations; but then a swing back to an estrangement as deep as anything since the time of the Korean War.<sup>7</sup>

In each phase of engagement new issues have become the focus of attention. Yet, rather than each issue being resolved in turn as the relationship matured, time and time again problems have been left hanging unresolved or half resolved, to be forgotten as the cycle of relations swings through another phase of chill. The result has been an accumulation of unresolved problems, but also of unrecognized linkages, all of which need to be brought back into focus if we are to understand the challenges that confront the Japan–North Korea relationship in the immediate future.

---

<sup>6</sup> A number of studies have examined aspects the development of Japan's relationship with North Korea, including Wada Haruki, *Kita no Tomo e, Minami no Tomo e: Chôsen Hantô no Genjôto Nihonjin no Kadai*, Tokyo, Ochanomizu Shobô, 1987; Okonogi Masao, *Nihon to Kita Chôsen: Korekara no Gonen*, Tokyo, PHP Kenkyûjo, 1991; Myonwoo Lee, 'Japanese-North Korean Relations: Going in Circles', in Samuel Kim and Tai Hwan Lee eds., *North Korea and Northeast Asia*, Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield, 2002, pp. 89-108; Kang Sang-Jung, *Nicchô Kankei no Kokufuku*, Tokyo, Shûeisha Shinsho, 2003 (revised edition 2007); Takasaki Kôji, *Kenshô: Nicchô Kôshô*, Tokyo, Heibonsha, 2004; Gavan McCormack and Wada Haruki, 'The Strange Record of 15 Years of Japan-North Korea Negotiations', *Japan Focus*, 2 September 2005; Linus Hagström and Marie Söderberg eds., *North Korea Policy: Japan and the Great Powers*, London, Routledge, 2006; Gavan McCormack, *Japan and North Korea: The Long and Twisted Path Towards Normalcy*, Washington DC, US-Korea Institute at SAIS Working Paper 08-06, 2008, and Park Jung-jin, *Reisenki Nicchô Kankei no Keisei (1945-1965 nen)*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tokyo, 2009. The main focus of these studies is generally the political and security relationship. Christopher W. Hughes, *Japan's Economic Power and Security: Japan and North Korea*, London and New York, Routledge, 1999, also looks closely at economic ties, but less so at the social contacts which, I shall argue, have been crucial to the relationship. While drawing on these works, I therefore seek to emphasize some less well-known social and cultural dimensions.

<sup>7</sup> This periodization differs from the one used by a number of writers on the subject, including Myonwoo Lee, who divide pre-1991 the relationship into a first phase from 1945 to 1960, a second phase from 1960 to 1977 and a third phase from the late 1970s to 1991. See Myonwoo Lee, 'Japanese-North Korean Relations', in Samuel Kim and Tai Hwan Lee eds., *North Korea and Northeast Asia*, particularly pp. 94-98. One reason for this difference is that Lee and others focus primarily on regional strategic problems, whereas in this paper I am considering the social and economic as well as strategic dimensions of the bilateral relationship.

## *The Tiger's Footprint*

Any attempt to re-imagine the relationship between the two countries must begin in the colonial period, since the events of that period continue to exert an influence over mutual perceptions and mutual misunderstandings to the present day. I shall therefore begin with a brief example of neglected colonial era connections between Japan and the northern half of Korea, before going on to reconsider developments from the 1950s onward.

In July 2008, the Mt. Geumgang tourism complex, on the northern side of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, was the focus of a crisis in North-South relations, when a South Korean tourist strayed beyond the bounds of the permitted area and was shot dead by North Korean security forces. Since 2000, Geumgang had been the site of a major joint tourism development run jointly by the North Korean authorities and the South Korean Hyundai conglomerate, but the death of the tourist led to the closure of the tourist resort, a significant step in recent a rolling back of the joint North-South projects which had emerged from the 'Sunshine Policy' of the Kim Dae-Jung and Roo Moo-Hyun eras. The incident at Mt. Geumgang was extensively reported in the Japanese and international media. I could not help wondering, however, how many Japanese viewers of news items on the shooting were aware just how deeply Mt. Geumgang is embedded in Japan's own 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural history.

For in a curious way, the division of the Korean Peninsula seems even to be reflected in a division of Japanese public memory of the colonial era. The centenary of the annexation of Korea in 2010 was commemorated with a variety of conferences, exhibitions and other events in Japan, but the vast majority of these focused on the evolving relationship between Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea) rather than on the troubled relationship with the DPRK.<sup>8</sup> While a growing number of Japanese studies have explored the social history of life in colonial Keijō [Seoul] and other parts of Korea below the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel, there are surprisingly few studies of the colonial society of Heijō [Pyongyang], or of the rest of the area (including the Mt. Geumgang region) that was to become North Korea.<sup>9</sup> This forgetting of North Korea's colonial past obscures the ways in which colonial policies influenced the destiny of the postwar divided Korea. During the colonial period, Korea's economy became deeply embedded in the Japanese imperial system. The mineral wealth of the northern half of the peninsula was developed by Japanese enterprises as part of a scheme of industrialization that extended into Manchuria. The southern half, meanwhile, was envisaged as the 'rice bowl' of the empire, and from the early 1920s onwards was the focus of energetic policies to develop the production of rice, much of which was exported to Japan. These divergent development paths had effects which continued to be felt long after liberation.

Within the DPRK, of course, memories of Japanese colonialism are ubiquitous and inescapable. These, however, generally focus on the exploitation and brutality of

---

<sup>8</sup> See Alexis Dudden, 'Memories and Aporias in the Japan-Korea Relationship', *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 14-3-10, 5 April 2010, <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Alexis-Dudden/3337>

<sup>9</sup> Among the very few works which examine aspects of the social and economic history of colonial Heijō, for example, are Heijō Gakuōkai, *Omoide no Heijō*, Tokyo, Heijō Gakuōkai, 1977, and Hagata Shōichi et al eds., *Shashi de Miru Nihon Keizaishi*, (Colonial Section, vol. 18), Tokyo, Yumani Shobō, 2003.

the colonizers and on the misery of their Korean subjects, neglecting the complex texture of the colonial relationship: a texture which has been increasingly acknowledged and explored by recent South Korean scholarship on the colonial era. As a result of such blanks in memory on both sides of the relationship, many crucial aspects of the social links forged between Japan and the northern half of Korea in colonial times have been consigned to oblivion. The history of Mt. Geumgang provides a vivid example of this collective forgetting.



*Japanese artist Maruyama Banka's map of Mt. Geumgang*

Mt. Geumgang had for centuries been a revered place of pilgrimage for Korean monks, painters and poets.<sup>10</sup> But for Japan's artists and literati, which encountered the mountains in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Geumgang [known in Japanese as Mt. Kongô] acquired a place similar to that occupied by the British Lake District or the Swiss Alps in the 19<sup>th</sup> century European romantic imagination. The pioneering newspaper editor and social commentator Tokutomi Sohô (1863–1957) composed poems extolling Geumgang's peerless beauty<sup>11</sup>, while Ishii Hakutei (1882–1958), Maruyama Banka (1867–1942) and a host of other early 20<sup>th</sup> century landscape artists traveled from Japan to the mountain range to paint its astonishing landscape. The writer Ômachi Keigetsu (1869–1925), who visited Geumgang in 1918, reflected the cultural world of the early Taishô period when he wrote:

The days have now passed when it was said that one could not speak adequately of landscape with those who have never climbed Mt. Fuji. More recently, it was said that one could not speak adequately of landscape with those who have

<sup>10</sup> For a sample of Korean literary and artistic works on Geumgang from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onward see Kim Dong-Ju, *Geumsan Yurangi*, Seoul, Kkontong Munhwa Yeonguhwoe, 1999; for further discussion see Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *To the Diamond Mountains: A Hundred Year Journey Through China and Korea*, Lanham NJ, Rowman and Littlefield, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Mantetsu Keijô Tetsudô Kyoku ed., *Chôsen Kongôsan*, Tokyo, Mantetsu Keijô Tetsudô Kyoku, 1924, p. 2.

never climbed the Japan Alps. But nowadays they say that one cannot speak adequately of landscape with those who have never climbed Mt. Kongô.<sup>12</sup>

Geumgang inspired the imagination not only of Taishô and early Shôwa artists and writers but also of engineers. The Mt. Kongô Electrical Railway, built by a Japanese company between 1923 and 1931, included feats of engineering such as the construction of zigzag track over the precipitous Danbal [Japanese *Danpachi*] Pass. The creation of the railway encouraged a boom in tourism to Geumgang, with visitor numbers rising from 186 in 1925 to over 24,000 in 1938.<sup>13</sup> By this time, plans were underway to have Geumgang declared a national park, alongside sites such as the Seto Inland Sea, Mt. Unzen in Kyushu, and the Fuji Hakone district, all of which had been designated under Japan's new National Parks Law of 1931, but the war intervened, and the plans came to nothing.<sup>14</sup>

In the postwar period, Geumgang came to assume a central role for North Korea as a site of literary and artistic creation and tourism. In North Korean works, such as the revolutionary opera *The Song of Mt Kumgang*, which was given by Kim Il-Sung as a gift to ethnic Korean performance artists in Japan, the Japanese colonial presence in the mountains is reduced to that of exploitative landlords, whose depredations lead the hero to flee his beloved mountain village and join Kim Il-Sung's partisans fighting imperialism in Manchuria.<sup>15</sup> But the historical record suggests a much deeper and more complex set of cross-border connections. Exploitation undoubtedly occurred on a large scale. The Mt. Kongô Electrical Railway was built by Korean labourers working in appallingly dangerous conditions. Local recruitment of labour for projects such as this was just a foretaste of the mass recruitment of Korean labourers who were sent all over the Empire during the war years, and many of whom never returned. The artist Ishii Hakutei found part of the landscape he had come to paint scarred by the mining activities of the Mitsui Zaibatsu, who had also imported substantial numbers of Japanese military police [*kempei*] to protect their operations in Geumgang.<sup>16</sup>

But colonial interactions included the presence of Japanese migrants who were neither landlords nor zaibatsu managers nor military police, but settled in the mountains to do things such as running family guesthouses. Japanese and Korean artists came into contact in the mountains, and Korean colonial subjects were of course among the tourists who took advantage of the Mt. Kongô Electrical Railway to flock to Geumgang. One young Korean woman student from Hamheung, for example, published a breathless account of her college class outing to Geumgang, in which almost the only low point was the travel sickness which she and many of her

---

<sup>12</sup> Ômachi Keigetsu, *Mansen Yuki* (1919), in *Taishô Chûgoku Kenbunroku Shûsei*, vol. 8, Tokyo, Yumani Shobô, 1999, pp. 1-2.

<sup>13</sup> Kongôsan Denki Tetsudô Kabushiki Kaisha, *Kongôsan Denki Tetsudô Kabushiki Kaisha Sanjûnenshi*, Tokyo, Kongôsan Denki Tetsudô Kabushiki Kaisha, 1939, p. 70.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 165-166; see also P. F. Brovko and N. I. Fomina, 'The History of Establishment of the National Park Network in Countries of the Asia-Pacific Region', *Geography and Natural Resources*, vol. 29, no. 3, September 2008, pp. 211-225; Ministry of the Environment, Japan, 'National Parks of Japan', [www.env.gov.jp/en/nature/nps/park/welcome/index.html](http://www.env.gov.jp/en/nature/nps/park/welcome/index.html), accessed 9 December 2008.

<sup>15</sup> *The Song of Mt. Kumgang*, (revolutionary opera libretto), Pyongyang, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1973.

<sup>16</sup> Ishii Hakutei, *E no Tabi: Chôsen Shina no Maki*, Tokyo, Nihon Hyôronsha, 1921, reproduced in *Taishô Chûgoku Kenbunroku Shûsei*, vol. 13 [?check], Tokyo, Yumani Shobô, 1999, pp. 11-12.

classmates experienced as their train zigzagged over the crest of the Danpal Pass.<sup>17</sup> The reluctance of the Japanese government to acknowledge and educate its citizens about the memory of the violence of colonialism — the exploitation of resources and people, the suppression of dissent and the forced recruitment of labourers and the institutionalized sexual exploitation of women by the Japanese military — encourages an avoidance of the whole subject of the colonial presence in the north of Korea, and in this way has contributed to a concurrent loss of memory of these more peaceable cultural intersections.

The interwoven paradoxes of the colonial encounter are perhaps nowhere more vividly expressed than in the poetry which Ômachi Keigetsu composed as he made his way through the Geumgang range, dressed (as he tells his readers) in Korean garb worn over a western outfit under which lay a true male Japanese soul [*Yamato danshi no Yamato damashii*].<sup>18</sup> As he ascends the winding rocky tracks, he marvels at the scenery around him, and at the millennia of Korean history contained in its temples and hermitages. One of his poems evokes the wild landscape as follows:

The grave of the prince of Shilla lies in the deepest depth of Mt. Kongô.  
The auxiliary *kempei* who travel with me, seeing an animal's footprint, say:  
that is a tiger.  
So deep in the heart of the mountains, surely the only visitor could be a tiger.<sup>19</sup>

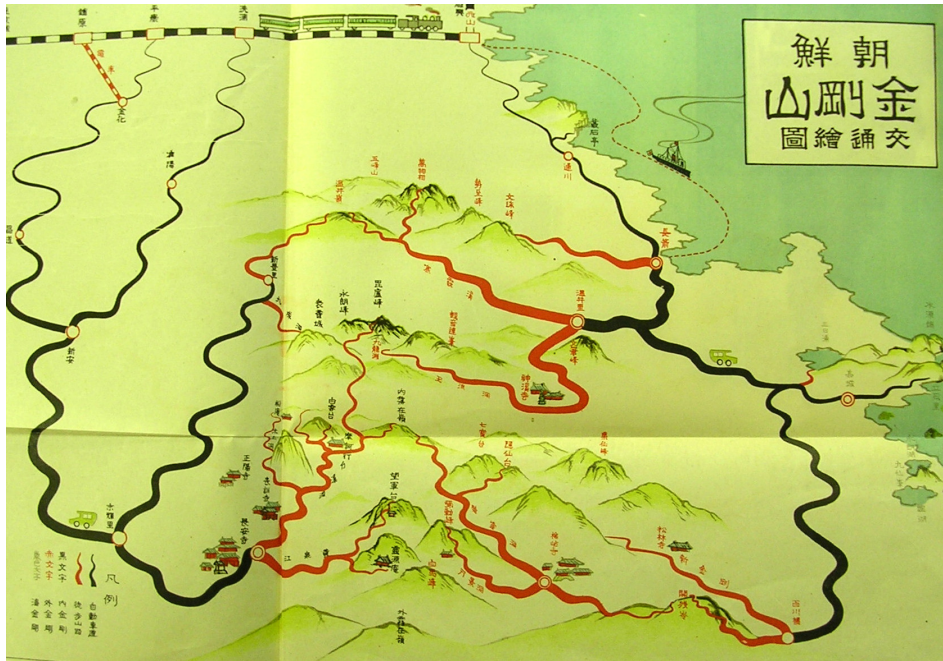
Ômachi, the poet, wearer of many clothes and admirer of Korean culture, traveled with a retinue of auxiliary military police, those most violent enforcers of colonial rule. His auxiliary *kempei* guides, however, were themselves not Japanese but Korean. To understand the colonial history which has so profoundly shaped the Japan-North Korea relationship, it is surely necessary to see all sides of such encounters — the cultural exchange, the engagement with the 'other', the collaboration, the nationalism and the violence. None cancels the others out. All are necessary parts of the story. In the mutual forgetting induced by political hostility, however, the contradictions and subtleties of these historical interconnections have vanished almost as completely as the tigers have vanished from the Geumgang mountain range.

---

<sup>17</sup> Kim Ok-Seon, 'Keugangsan Tamseunggi' (1938), reproduced in Kim Yeong-Seok et al., *Sinyeoseong, Gil uie Seoda*, Seoul, Homi, 2007, pp. 29-38, citation from p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> Ômachi, *Mansen Yuki*, p. 276.

<sup>19</sup> Ômachi, *Mansen Yuki*, p. 269



*Colonial Era Tourist Map of Mt. Geumgang*

## II. THE FIRST CYCLE: REPATRIATIONS AND THE START OF THE ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP, 1948–1970

### *Japan and the Korean War*

Memories of colonialism have haunted Japan's relations with both halves of the divided Korea, but in the case of North Korea these unhappy memories were further compounded by the more recent experience of the Korean War. Japan was still under allied occupation when the War broke out, and was officially a non-combatant, constrained by its new postwar peace constitution. For this reason, Japan's part in the Korean War is all too often underestimated. In fact, its role was crucial. Symbolic of that role was the fact that the headquarters of the United Nations Command, which oversaw the military activities of the multinational force fighting on the South Korean side in the war, was established in the heart of the old imperial capital, Tokyo, in July 1950, and remained there until it was transferred to the former Japanese colonial military base of Yongsan in central Seoul some four years after the end of the war.<sup>20</sup>

Most of the UN forces fighting in Korea spent a large part of their tour of duty in Japan, which was a crucial staging post, not just for more than quarter of a million US troops engaged in the conflict, but also for the troops of other countries including Britain and Australia. Tens of thousands of wounded or weary troops were regularly flown from the Korean battlefield to hospitals or rest and recreation centres in

<sup>20</sup> 'UN Command Set Up', *New York Times*, 25 July 1950; on Yongsan, see also American Forces' Spouses' Club, 'History of US Forces at Yongsan', in *Seoul Survivor 2010–2011*, <http://yongsan.korea.army.mil/pdf/seoulsurvivor.pdf>.

Japan.<sup>21</sup> At a time when normal travel and migration between Korea and Japan was almost impossible, at least 8,000 young South Koreans recruited directly into the US forces under the KATUSA (Korean Augmentation to the United States Army) scheme were also shipped to Japan for training.<sup>22</sup>

Although Japan officially had no military force, recent research has drawn attention to the substantial number of Japanese people who appear to have participated in the Korean War in combat or combat-support roles. According to the first head of the Maritime Self-Defense Force, a special Japanese minesweeping squadron of 25 ships and some 1,500 former members of the Imperial Navy supported US Naval forces in Korean waters in the latter part of 1950. Twenty Landing Ships (Tank) (LSTs) — each probably manned by a crew of around fifty Japanese seamen — were also reportedly sent from Japan to transport men and materiel to the battlefield. Marine engineers and salvage workers hired by private companies were sent from Japan to Korea to assist with wartime activities, and some Japanese working in US bases volunteered for action and joined Japanese forces fighting in Korea.<sup>23</sup> At least nineteen Japanese engaged in minesweeping and related activities died on active service in the Korean War, and a smaller number died in land battles.<sup>24</sup>

The South Korean government had unrealized plans to recruit as many as 50,000 members of the Korean community in Japan into the wartime armed forces. In the end, however, just 644 ethnic Koreans living in Japan also volunteered for service on the South Korean side, of whom 135 were killed or went missing in action.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile an unknown number of Koreans in Japan and (apparently) some Japanese soldiers who had remained in China after the Pacific War volunteered to fight with the Northern side.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, while at least one Japanese combatant — Tsutsui Kiyohito — was taken prisoner by North Korea, another — Matsushita Kazutoshi — was captured by United Nations forces fighting on the North Korean side, and was held for some time in the UN prisoner of war camp in Busan.

The outbreak of the Korean War of course gave a significant stimulus to the process of Japanese rearmament, and provided the impetus to the establishment of the quasi-military ‘National Police Reserve’ [*Keisatsu Yobitai*], the precursor to today’s Self-Defense Force. War procurements related to the conflict in Korea also gave the Japanese economy its first postwar boost, leading Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru (with breathtaking insensitivity) to describe the war as ‘a gift from the gods’.<sup>27</sup> These

---

<sup>21</sup> ‘Welding Together the UN Team’, *Pacific Stars and Stripes* (24 September 1951).

<sup>22</sup> See Kim Yun-sik, ‘KATUSA in US Army’, *Korea Times*, 18 September 2007.

<sup>23</sup> See Ônuma Hisao ed., *Chôsen Sensô to Nihon*, Tokyo, Shinkansha, 2006, pp. 105–111.

<sup>24</sup> Nishimura Shigeki, *Ôsaka de Tatakatta Chôsen Sensô: Fukita Maikata Jiken to Seishun Gunzô* (Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 2004) p. 117; ‘No Compensation Given Father of Nippon Youth Killed in Korea’, *Nippon Times*, 14 November 1952, copy held in National Archives of New Zealand, file W2619, 324/4/29 pt. 1, ‘Individual Countries, Korea: Political Affairs, War in Korea: Use of Japanese Personnel’

<sup>25</sup> For further discussion of the fate of the *Zainichi* Korean volunteers, see Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Borderline Japan: Foreigners and Frontier Controls in the Postwar Era*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, chapter 5.

<sup>26</sup> Kim Chang-Jung, *Zainichi Giyûhei Kikan sezu: Chôsen Sensô Hisshi*, Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in John Dower, , *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, New York, W. W. Norton, 1999, p. 541. On these aspects of the Korean War, see also Reinhardt Drifte, ‘Japan’s Involvement in the Korean War’, in James Cotton and Ian Neary eds., *The Korean War in History*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1989, pp. 120–134; on the economic effects of the war on

events help explain the complete absence of official contacts between Japan and North Korea between the establishment of the DPRK in 1948 and the middle of the 1950s, and the wariness with which each country regarded the other thereafter.

### *The Japanese Returnees*

The Korean War, however, had disastrous consequences not only for the population of Korea, but for the small number of Japanese who had remained on the Korean Peninsula after the collapse of the Japanese empire. Following Japan's defeat in the Pacific War, some 320,000 Japanese people had been repatriated to Japan from the northern half of the Korean Peninsula, either directly or via southern ports such as Busan.<sup>28</sup> Many suffered traumatic experiences as they fled in fear before the advancing Soviet forces, sometimes facing anger and violence at the hands of those they had colonized. A small number, though, particularly Japanese women married to Korean husbands, remained in the North even after the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic in 1948. Almost half a century before Prime Minister Koizumi's 2002 visit to Pyongyang, the fate of these Japanese in North Korea became the focus of moves which initiated the first cycle of relations between Japan and the DPRK.<sup>29</sup>

Some three years after the end of the Korean War and more than a decade after the collapse of Japan's empire, the first Japanese ship to be officially received into a DPRK port arrived in the harbour of Chaho. The ship, the *Kojima*, was on a Red Cross mission to collect thirty-six Japanese nationals who had remained in North Korea since colonial times, but now wished to go home. The *Kojima's* crew received a warm welcome from the people of Chaho, and during their two-day stay in port were treated to parties, theatre performances and film screenings. The departing Japanese residents were given a rigorous customs inspection before being allowed out of North Korea, but otherwise their departure went smoothly, accompanied by a chorus fond farewells from a large group of North Korean schoolchildren. Two of the returning Japanese women were pregnant, but their voyage was fortunately a smooth one, and they were greeted with tears and embraces by relatives in Japan whom they had not seen for over a decade (and in some cases for much longer).<sup>30</sup>

The process which had finally brought these colonial migrants home to Japan had been a long and complex one, for Japan, along with most other non-Communist countries, had no diplomatic ties to the DPRK. There was no trade, no postal communication and no form of transport link between the two neighbouring countries. Contacts were therefore assisted by private intermediaries such as former Asahi Newspaper Moscow correspondent Hatanaka Masaharu, who visited Pyongyang in

---

Japan, see Robert Dingman, 'The Dagger and the Gift: The Impact of the Korean War on Japan', in William J. Williams ed., *A Revolutionary War: Korea and the Transformation of the Postwar World*, Chicago, Imprint Publications, 1993, pp. 201–223.

<sup>28</sup> The Allied occupiers estimated the number of Japanese to be repatriated from northern Korea in August 1945 at 322,500, compared with 594,800 from southern Korea; see GHQ SCAP, *Reports of General MacArthur – MacArthur in Japan: The Occupation: Military Phase* (Volume I supplement), Washington, US Army Center of Military History, facsimile reprint, 1994, p. 148.

<sup>29</sup> I have discussed the story of the Japanese returnees from North Korea in further detail in Tessa Morris-Suzuki, 'The Forgotten Japanese in North Korea', op. cit.

<sup>30</sup> Letter from Inoue Masutarô to Léopold Boissier, ICRC, 1 May 1956, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 055-001.

May 1955.<sup>31</sup> In November of the same year, Hatanaka also played a central role in establishing the Japan–Korea Association [*Nitchô Kyôkai*], which aimed to promote better relations between Japan and North Korea. Following a visit Shimazu Tadatsugu, the President of the Japan Red Cross Society, to Moscow in 1953, the Japanese Red Cross had contacted its North Korean counterpart via the League of Red Cross Societies in Geneva, asking the North Koreans to identify Japanese in the DPRK who wished to return home.<sup>32</sup> In response, the North Korean Red Cross acknowledged that there were ‘a very small number’ of Japanese remaining in North Korea, and agreed to help with the repatriation of those who wished to leave for Japan.<sup>33</sup>

By August 1955, the North Korean government had brought potential Japanese repatriates (who were believed to number around 50, almost all of them women and children) to Pyongyang, and in late January of the following year a delegation of Japanese Red Cross representatives arrived in the North Korean capital to negotiate their return. This meeting, which lasted almost a month, was potentially of enormous importance. Red Cross negotiations over repatriation had helped to open up channels of communication and trade between Japan and two communist countries — the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China — in the Soviet case leading to the normalization of diplomatic relations, and it seemed likely that the 1956 Pyongyang Conference might also open doors to closer political and economic links with North Korea. However, the Conference soon became entangled instead in the murky politics of the repatriation of ethnic Koreans to the DPRK (discussed below), and produced few positive results other than the repatriation of the one group of returnees brought home on the *Kojima*.

By the start of 1956, the fate of the Japanese in North Korea was attracting considerable Japanese media interest. The 36 repatriates who returned to Japan on the *Kojima* told the Japanese Red Cross that they believed there to be around 600 other Japanese in the DPRK who wished to leave. Some sources, however, suggested a figure as high as two thousand.<sup>34</sup> But the decision to return to Japan was fraught with difficulties. It is likely that the North Korean government may have prevented some would-be returnees from leaving, and those who did return to Japan in many cases had to leave behind friends and relatives in the DPRK. This may explain why, although the Japanese Red Cross identified around fifty Japanese who wished to return to Japan immediately, only thirty-six ultimately boarded the *Kojima* in April 1956.<sup>35</sup>

The thirty-six returnees who arrived in April 1956 turned indeed out to be the last Japanese colonial settlers to be repatriated from North Korea. The Japanese media

---

<sup>31</sup> See Australian Embassy Tokyo, Weekly Situation Report no. 21, ‘Relations with North Korea’, in Australian National Archives, series no. 1838, control symbol 1303/11/91 Part 1, *Japan – Relations with North Korea*.

<sup>32</sup> Telegram from League of Red Cross Societies to Red Cross Society, DPRK, 6 January 1954, in Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (hereafter ICRC Archives), B AG 232 055-001, *Ressortissants japonais en Corée-du-Nord*, 22.01.1954-11.05.1956.

<sup>33</sup> Telegram from Red Cross Society DPRK to League of Red Cross Societies, 6 February 1954, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 055-001.

<sup>34</sup> Letter from Harry Angst to ICRC, 12 March 1956, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 055-001.

<sup>35</sup> Letter from Angst to ICRC, 12 March 1956; see also *Asahi Shimbun*, 22 April 1956 (evening edition).

soon lost interest in the story, and the Japan Red Cross Society, which had become deeply involved in the much larger venture of repatriating Koreans from Japan to North Korea, did little to follow up their cases. So they remained in the DPRK. In 1997, Japan's Health and Welfare Ministry produced a list of 1,442 people whom it believed to have remained in North Korea since colonial times. Of these, however, all but 67 had been officially declared dead by their relatives. Red Cross negotiations in 2002 raised the question of fifty-one Japanese believed to be still alive.<sup>36</sup> But, while the fate of the Japanese 'stragglers' [*zanryû Nihonjin*] in the 1950s came to be overshadowed by the issue of the repatriation of Koreans from Japan to North Korea, after 2002 their fate was overshadowed by the mass outcry surrounding the abductees, and nothing has been done to resolve the plight of the few who remain, still separated from their families after more than sixty years.

### *Official and Unofficial Visitors*

In an article published in the newspaper *Haebang* on New Year's Day 1956, Hatanaka Masaharu suggested that the previous year would be remembered as a turning point in the history of the improving relationship between Japan and the DPRK.<sup>37</sup> His optimism is not surprising, for negotiations over the return of Japanese citizens were just part of a gradual but nonetheless significant opening of communications between the two countries in the mid-1950s. Japan's first Liberal Democratic Party government, headed by Hatoyama Ichirô, as well as a number of Japanese business leaders, favoured cautious moves towards re-establishing links with Japan's Communist neighbours. As North Korea struggled to recover from the devastation of war, meanwhile, its political leadership saw the advantages of closer relations with Japan. In February 1955, DPRK Foreign Minister Nam Il issued a statement in which he expressed his government's wish to enter into discussions with Japan on the development of trade, cultural ties and ultimately the normalization of diplomatic relations, and this marked the start of efforts by Pyongyang to engage more closely with Japan and with the Korean community in Japan.<sup>38</sup> This policy seems to have been driven by both economic and strategic considerations. Economically, Japan could be an enormously valuable source of technical assistance, particularly for modernizing heavy industrial plants, some of which dated back to the colonial era. At a time when Japan's relations with the South Korean Yi Seungman [Syngman Rhee] regime were very troubled, the DPRK competed energetically with the Republic of Korea (ROK) for Japan's favours.

One sign of the opening of doors between Japan and North Korea was the warm welcome given to a delegation of Japanese opposition parliamentarians who visited Pyongyang in October 1955. In the same month, DPRK Foreign Minister Nam Il granted an interview to Japanese journalists, and the following year *Yomiuri* Newspaper reporter Akimoto Hideo was granted an exclusive interview by Kim Il-

---

<sup>36</sup> 'Zanryû Nihonjin, Gidai ni: Jikai Nicchô Sekijûji Kaidan 51-nin Meibô Teishutsu e', *Chûgoku Shimbun*, 8 July 2002, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Hatanaka Masaharu, 'New Year's Message', translation of an article from *Haebang*, 1 January 1956, held in the archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, ICRC Archives, B AG 232 055-001.

<sup>38</sup> Park Jung-jin, *Reisenki Nicchô Kankei no Keisei (1945-1965 nen)*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tokyo, 2009, ch. 2; see also Official Diary of Soviet Ambassador V. I. Ivanov for the period 29 September to 18 October 1955, entry for 18 October, in Russian archival material held by the *Jungang Ilbo*, Seoul, (*Jungang* Russian archive, hereafter JRA) file no RU-secret, 55-2-2.

Sung.<sup>39</sup> Though economic relations remained embryonic, an unofficial Japanese trade delegation signed an agreement with North Korean representatives in Beijing in October 1955, opening the way the beginnings of trade between Japan and the DPRK via China.<sup>40</sup> A number of Japanese writers, artists, trade unionists and others also made visits to North Korea in the mid-1950s, one of the most interesting of these cultural interactions being a conference held in Pyongyang in 1956 to commemorate the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the Japanese Buddhist monk and renowned landscape artist Sesshu. Among those invited to this commemoration were the husband and wife artist team Maruki Iri and Toshi, who simultaneously staged an exhibition for North Korean audiences of their acclaimed series of ten artworks depicting the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and its aftermath. The Marukis were taken on a tour which included Gaesong and the Geumgang mountain range, where Maruki Toshi reportedly stated that she hoped to include the landscape of Geumgang in the background of the couple's next work in the Hiroshima series.<sup>41</sup>

But in a situation where Japan had no diplomatic relations with the DPRK, and where any form of contact between the two countries evoked fierce protests from South Korea and suspicion from the United States, such travel between Japan and North Korea was constrained by tight official restraints. Authorized travel required special permission from Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as an invitation from the North Korean side. Some visitors evaded these restrictions, though, by making unauthorized trips to the DPRK via China or the USSR, or by using other more perilous routes, and among them were *Zainichi* Koreans — members of the Korean community in Japan.

Over 600,000 Koreans (prewar migrants as well as those brought over under wartime recruitment schemes) remained in Japan after the end of the Asia-Pacific War. Although the vast majority — some 97 per cent — of these Koreans in Japan [*Zainichi* Koreans] came from the southern half of the Korean Peninsula, some were leftwing in their political views, and a considerable number felt a degree of sympathy towards the North Korean regime of Kim Il-Sung. Many more hoped that the division of their homeland would be a temporary phenomenon, and identified themselves as belonging to a single united Korea [K=*Joseon*, J=*Chôsen*]. Since, in the divided Korea, the term *Joseon* had been adopted by the northern side, while the South used the national appellation *Hanguk* [J=*Kankoku*], the self-description of many *Zainichi* Koreans as *Joseonin* [J=*Chôsenjin*] often led them to be mis-identified as 'North Koreans in Japan'. This self-identification also has legal implications which (as we

---

<sup>39</sup> See 'Name List of Japanese Supporting North Korean Policies and/or Visiting North Korea (as noted in Radio Pyongyang broadcasts 16 August 1956 to 15 May 1957)', in Australian National Archives, series no. 1838, control symbol 1303/11/91 Part 1, *Japan – Relations with North Korea*.

<sup>40</sup> Diary of Soviet Ambassador V. I. Ivanov, 18 October 1955; see also Hiroko Kawai, 'North Korean 'Open Policies' and Trade with Japan: The Effects and Function of Japan-DPRK Trade', in Masao Okonogi ed., *North Korea at the Crossroads*, Tokyo, Japan Institute of International Affairs, 1988, pp. 147–160, see particularly p. 147.

<sup>41</sup> See 'Name List of Japanese Supporting North Korean Policies and/or Visiting North Korea', op. cit. Unless the obscure grey shapes on the left side of the Maruki's eleventh Hiroshima painting are interpreted as being mountain peaks, I can see no evidence that they in fact used scenes from Geumgang in this picture. It should be noted that the Marukis, who were at that time Communist Party members, were later expelled from the Party for their opposition to all nuclear weapons, whether 'socialist' or 'capitalist'; see John W. Dower and John Junkerman eds., *The Hiroshima Murals: The Art of Iri Maruki and Toshi Maruki*, Tokyo, Kodansha 1985, p. 18; the eleventh painting, 'Mother and Child', is reproduced on pp. 70–71.

shall see) are still important today. Those who identify with the south [*Hanguk / Kankoku*] can obtain South Korean nationality, but those who identify with *Joseon / Chôsen* have a status — *Chôsenseki* — which does not equate to nationality in the full internationally-recognized sense of the term.

Ideologically committed left-wing members of the Korean community in Japan supported the North Korean side during the Korean War, and some staged demonstrations against US bases in Japan, or even traveled clandestinely to the DPRK to volunteer as soldiers. Until the mid-1950s, many of these leftwing ethnic Koreans had belonged to the Japanese Communist Party, but after fierce internal ideological controversies, in 1955 a major realignment occurred in *Zainichi* Korean politics, out of which the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, [known in Korean by the abbreviation *Chongryun* and in Japanese by the abbreviation *Chôsen Sôren* or just *Sôren*] emerged as the major pro-North Korean grouping. *Sôren* existed outside the framework of the Japanese Communist Party. It argued that Koreans in Japan should identify themselves as loyal citizens of the DPRK, and should work to improve relations between Japan and North Korea. Its leaders also saw their aim as being to support a North Korean led re-unification of the Korean Peninsula.

One of the early acts of *Sôren* was to send secret shipments of reconstruction aid from Japan to North Korea. These were, of necessity, small in scale, and were of greater symbolic than material value to the DPRK. According to one man who participated in one of these secret aid missions in 1956, those chosen for the dangerous task of delivering the aid were young *Zainichi* Koreans who had formerly been activists in the Japanese Communist Party, and who were regarded with considerable suspicion by the *Sôren* leadership.<sup>42</sup> Aid was collected and sent in fishing vessels which set out under cover of darkness from small ports on the west coast of Japan. Those who arrived safely received a warm welcome in Pyongyang, but faced the risk of arrest as ‘illegal entrants’ if caught as they attempted to slip back into Japan on their return journeys.

### ***Going Home: Zainichi Koreans and the Japan–North Korea Relationship***

The Korean community in Japan has been, and continues to be, central to the Japan–North Korea relationship. To make sense of its role, however, it is necessary first to understand a defining historical event: the 1959–1984 mass migration (usually called a ‘repatriation’) of ethnic Koreans from Japan to North Korea. An issue that has received far less attention than the abduction problem, both within Japan and internationally, the repatriation involved a vastly greater number of people, and its long-term implications for the relationship are arguably more profound than those of the abductions. I have discussed the history of the repatriation in detail elsewhere<sup>43</sup>, so here I shall try merely to clarify the main outlines of this complex and troubled story, while placing it within the wider context of the Japan–DPRK relationship.

The question of the repatriation of ethnic Koreans from Japan to North Korea emerged in parallel with negotiations about the return of Japanese from the DPRK. In 1955 a group of several hundred Koreans in Japan began to lobby the Japanese

---

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Mr. S., former *Sôren* activist, Tokyo, 11 Jan 2007.

<sup>43</sup> Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Exodus to North Korea: Shadows from Japan’s Cold War*, Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield, 2007.

government to assist their resettlement in the DPRK. They included some of the small proportion of *Zainichi* Koreans who actually originated in the north of Peninsula, as well as students graduating from *Sôren*-run ethnic schools, who wished to go on to study at North Korean colleges and universities. One further special category were Koreans detained by the Japanese government in its Ômura migrant detention centre near Nagasaki for violations of migration control law and awaiting deportation to South Korea. Some of these detainees regarded themselves as political refugees from the Yi Seungman regime, and sought to be sent to North Korea instead.<sup>44</sup>

As declassified documents now make clear, senior officials of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as certain politicians in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), perceived this as an opportunity to support and encourage a much larger exodus of Koreans from Japan. As early as 1953, a group of bureaucrats from various ministries attempted unsuccessfully to use a planned visit by a left-wing *Zainichi* Korean (Lee Ho-Yeon) to Pyongyang as an opportunity to open informal discussions with the DPRK about the Ômura detainees and the possibility of repatriating Koreans to North Korea.<sup>45</sup> By 1955, some officials were beginning to sketch out plans for a repatriation which would 'return' left-wing and particularly economically destitute ethnic Koreans in their tens of thousands to the DPRK. At that time, ethnic prejudice against Koreans in Japan was widespread, and was further fuelled by fears of left-wing Korean subversion and by the perception that Koreans were a disproportionately large burden on Japan's welfare budget. From the start, Japanese Foreign Ministry officials envisaged that the mass repatriation would be carried out jointly by the Japan Red Cross Society and *Sôren*, with Japanese government agencies such as the Health and Welfare Ministry providing logistic back-up.

In December 1955, the Fifth Section of the Asia Bureau of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs produced a secret 'Plan for Arranging the Sending to North Korea of those who wish to be Repatriated' [*Hokusen* [sic] *e no Kikan Kibôsha no Sôkan Shori Hôshin*<sup>46</sup>], which specifically requested the Japan Red Cross Society to draw up a confidential collaborative agreement with *Sôren* to carry out the repatriation.<sup>47</sup> It is not known whether such an agreement was ever signed. However, *Sôren* and the Japan Red Cross Society were indeed the main actors in the repatriation project which was put into effect in four years later. The 1955 Plan also specified that those repatriated were to be 'the destitute' [*seikatsu konkyûsha*].

Opinions on this plan within the Japanese political establishment were evidently divided. Some bureaucrats and LDP politicians believed that Japan should focus on normalizing relations with South Korea, and they saw repatriation to North Korea (which was inevitably going to evoke intense anger from the South Korean

---

<sup>44</sup> See for example 'Nihon Ômura Shûyôjo Chôsen Minshushugi Jinmin Kyôwakoku Kikoku Kibôsha Yôseisho', 27 September 1957, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 105-003.03, *Pétition des Nord-Coréens du centre d'immigration d'Omura concernant leur repatriation*, 16.10.1957-25.10.1957.

<sup>45</sup> *Nikkan Kokkô Seijôka Kôshô no Kiroku Sôsetsu Vol. 6 – Zainichi Chôsenjin no Kikan Mondai to Kikan Kyôtei no Teiketsu*, document 126 of the third release of official material pertaining to Japan-ROK relations, released 16 November 2007, pp.44-53, [www7b.biglobe.ne.jp/~nikkan/nihonkokai/3ji-kokai/2006-00588-17/2006-00588-0126-01-01-IMG.xdw](http://www7b.biglobe.ne.jp/~nikkan/nihonkokai/3ji-kokai/2006-00588-17/2006-00588-0126-01-01-IMG.xdw) (accessed 23 December 2007); see particularly pp. 14-35.

<sup>46</sup> The term 'Hokusen' is a derogatory abbreviation of the full name of North Korea.

<sup>47</sup> The report is reproduced in *Nikkan Kokkô Seijôka Kôshô no Kiroku Sôsetsu Vol. 6*, op.cit., pp.44–53.

government) as a dangerous obstacle to this objective.<sup>48</sup> Others, however, felt that the benefits of encouraging a mass departure of ethnic Koreans outweighed the risks, particularly as it was (correctly) expected to be very popular with Japanese public opinion.<sup>49</sup> All sides, though, were well aware that the issue had the potential not only to seriously aggravate tensions with South Korea, but also to damage relations with the United States (which could be expected to take a dim view of a scheme to send tens of thousands of people to a communist country at the height of the Cold War). In order to minimize these risks, the scheme's advocates within the Japanese government hoped that the project could be overseen by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), with an ICRC-run 'confirmation of free will' being used to reassure critics that those leaving Japan for North Korea were doing so of their own accord.<sup>50</sup>

Throughout the period from 1956 to 1959, intensive, complex and highly secret negotiations linking the Japanese government, the Japan Red Cross Society and the ICRC were conducted in an attempt to establish a repatriation scheme. Secret negotiations on the same issue were simultaneously conducted between the Japanese and North Korean Red Cross Societies.<sup>51</sup> Though some recent studies by Japanese researchers have sought to deny or downplay the active role played by the Japanese government in this process, a mass of documentary evidence shows an ongoing policy of backdoor lobbying by Japanese Red Cross and Japanese government officials, as well as by prominent politicians including Foreign Ministers Shigemitsu Mamoru and Fujiyama Aiichirô.<sup>52</sup> As declassified documents from the former Soviet Union show, North Korea had begun to develop strategies for fostering links with the Korean community in Japan around the middle of the 1950s. One reason for this move was the belief that Koreans in Japan could serve as a 'bridge' to South Korea, and that connections to the *Zainichi* Korean community could help the DPRK both gather information about and exert some form of influence on the ROK.<sup>53</sup> Although willing

---

<sup>48</sup> For a discussion of these internal political divisions, see for example letter from Inoue Masutarô to Léopold Boissier, 31 May 1957, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 105-005.01, *Généralités: Correspondance avec les Sociétés nationales de Japon, de la République démocratique populaire de Corée et de la République de Corée au sujet du rapatriement des Coréens du Japon et du retour des pêcheurs Japonais détenus en République de Corée*, 01.08.1956-29.12.1957.

<sup>49</sup> Douglas MacArthur II (then US Ambassador in Tokyo) told his Australian counterpart in 1959 that the 'American Embassy had checked Japanese opinion and found it was almost unanimously in favour of 'getting rid of the Koreans''; see confidential telegram from Watt, Australian Embassy, Tokyo, to External Affairs, Canberra, 15 July 1959, in Australian National Archives, series no. A1838, control symbol 3103/11/91 Part 1, Japan, *Relations with North Korea*.

<sup>50</sup> The significance of this proposal needs to be understood in the context of the history of the Korean War, when the US strongly backed an ICRC supervised 'confirmation of free will' of North Korean and Chinese prisoners-of-war, allowing them to decide the place to which they should be sent on their release.

<sup>51</sup> See for example letter from Inoue Masutarô to Léopold Boissier, 2 July 1956, in ICRC Archives 232 105-002.

<sup>52</sup> Two recent studies which deny Japan's active role in initiating negotiations towards a mass repatriation are Kikuchi Yoshiaki, *Kita Chôsen Kikoku Jigyô: 'Sodai na Rachi' ka 'Tsuihô' ka*, Tokyo, Chûkô Shinsho, 2009 and Sakanaka Hidenori, Han Sok-Kyu and Kikuchi Yoshiaki, *Kita Chôsen Kikokusha Mondai no Rekishi to Kadai*, Tokyo, Shinkansha, 2009. I have discussed their arguments in detail in Tessa Morris-Suzuki, 'Exodus to North Korea Revisited: The Repatriation of Ethnic Koreans from Japan to North Korea', paper presented at the Institute of Japanese Studies, Seoul National University, 28 May 2010.

<sup>53</sup> See conversation between Soviet Ambassador Ivanov and DPRK Foreign Minister Nam Il, in official diary of A. M. Ivanov, Soviet Ambassador to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 1 October 1955, in JRA, RU-secret 1955-2-2.

to accept a small number of *Zainichi* Korean students, detainees, and others from Japan, North Korea was not initially interested in accepting a mass influx of ethnic Korean immigrants.

However, the North Korean position on the issue rather suddenly changed in the middle of 1958.<sup>54</sup> At that time, the DPRK was preparing to embark on a very ambitious economic development plan, and Koreans from Japan began to be seen as a potential supplement to the country's labour force. The DPRK leadership clearly expected the repatriation to promote closer ties between Japan and North Korea, thus giving their country access to Japanese technology, while damaging relations between Japan and South Korea. They may also (incorrectly) have anticipated that the plan would cause a rift between Japan and the United States, who were then entering the delicate process of re-negotiating their Security Treaty.

Eventually, after months of painfully drawn-out negotiations in Geneva, an agreement on the repatriation was signed in Calcutta in August 1959, and the first repatriation ship left the Japanese port of Niigata bound for Cheongjin in North Korea on 14 December 1959.<sup>55</sup> Between then and the termination of the scheme in 1984, 93,340 people, most of whom had no relatives or roots in North Korea, were 'repatriated' from Japan to the DPRK. The vast majority were ethnic Koreans, although their number also included 6,731 Japanese migrants (most of them either spouses of Koreans or children of mixed marriages) and six Chinese citizens. Over 70,000 left during the first three years of the scheme — between December 1959 and the end of 1962.<sup>56</sup> The Calcutta Accord, which initially ran for fifteen months, was repeatedly renewed until 1967. Between 1971 and 1984, a further 4,729 people were repatriated under a new agreement between the Japanese and North Korean Red Cross Societies in which the International Committee of the Red Cross did not participate.<sup>57</sup>

The repatriation forged a deep and enduring social link between Japan and the DPRK, for almost all the 'returnees' to North Korea left behind some relatives still living in Japan. Because of the lack of accurate knowledge about conditions in the DPRK, at the time of repatriation many families deliberately chose some members to go on ahead to North Korea while others remained in Japan, so that those who went first could advise their relatives whether to follow them or not. Conscious that their letters would probably be censored, some families developed codes by which repatriated members could convey messages about conditions in the DPRK to their relatives in Japan, and these messages often discouraged others from making the journey to North Korea.<sup>58</sup> As a result, a particularly large number of families have

---

<sup>54</sup> See 'Zapis' Beseda s Tovaishchem Kim Ir-Syenom', 14 and 15 July 1958', in the official diary of V. I Pelishenko, 23 July 1958, Foreign Policy Archives of the Russian Federation, archive 0102, collection 14, file 8, folder 95.

<sup>55</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these negotiations, see Morris-Suzuki, *Exodus to North Korea*, Ch. 15.

<sup>56</sup> Kim Yong-Dal and Takayanagi Toshio eds., *Kita Chôsen kikoku jigyo kankei shiryô*, Tokyo, Shinkansha, 1994, p. 341.

<sup>57</sup> Kim and Takayanagi, *Kita Chôsen Kikoku Jigyô*, p. 341.

<sup>58</sup> Strategies for sending messages included inserting secret notes into the lining of envelopes, or agreeing on codes based on the use of pencil or pen for writing letters. For example, if a letter was written in pen this would mean 'you can believe what I have written here', but if it was written in pencil, that would mean 'do not believe what you are reading'. Letter from Testuz to Maunoir, 4 Aug.

been divided by the scheme, with those remaining in Japan often feeling deeply anxious at the fate of those who had left.

This, then, is a human link filled with suffering, and the unhappy history of the repatriation may be one element behind the unease which many Japanese politicians experience in dealing with issues related to North Korea. The departure of the *Zainichi* Koreans was, on the face of it, voluntary: their ‘free will’ assiduously confirmed by teams of representatives dispatched from Geneva by the ICRC. But in fact they were responding to enormous pressures, and these pressures were deliberately intensified in the period leading up to the start of the repatriation by the North Korean government, its representative agency in Japan *Sôren*, and by members of the Japanese political elite, including senior LDP politicians.<sup>59</sup> (It should also be remembered that over 2,000 of the ‘returnees’ were actually deportees — scheduled for expulsion from Japan for violations of migration regulations or other laws, and given a choice of being sent to South or to North Korea, but not of remaining in Japan or being sent to a third country.<sup>60</sup>)

During the 1950s and early 1960s, *Zainichi* Koreans faced many forms of discrimination (including an uncertain residence status and exclusion from state pensions, public housing and all forms of public employment). The Japanese government of the day made no effort to reduce these discriminatory barriers, instead tightening restrictions on the one form of welfare for which Koreans were eligible.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, from 1958 into the early 1960s Koreans in Japan were subject to a barrage of misleading propaganda about the wonders of life in Kim Il-Sung’s socialist paradise. Much of this propaganda emanated from the DPRK and was broadcast by *Sôren*, but the Japanese authorities did little or nothing to help balance the picture. Instead, bodies like the *Zainichi* Korean Repatriation Assistance Association, which was headed by former Prime Minister Hatoyama Ichirô and included representatives from all the major political parties, added its own voice to the propaganda urging Koreans to ‘go home’.

In allowing *Sôren* a relatively free hand to organize key sections of the repatriation scheme, the Japanese government, unintentionally but predictably, enabled that organization to greatly magnify its size, wealth and influence over the Korean community. It should be said that *de facto* collaboration in carrying out the repatriation was not the only example of links between Japan’s political establishment and *Sôren*. At a local level, a number of politicians from both government and opposition parties developed links with the local branches of *Sôren* as well as with the pro-South Korean community association *Mindan*.<sup>62</sup> Some senior Japanese bureaucrats or former bureaucrats have also cultivated links to these organizations: a

---

1966, ICRC Archives B AG, 232 105-035; Japanese communication, Ms. Y., returnee-refugee, Tokyo, 3 June 2005.

<sup>59</sup> There is a somewhat uncomfortable personal connection here. The LDP figures most actively engaged in seeking to promote an exodus of Koreans from Japan in the 1950s included Yoshida Shigeru, Hatoyama Ichirô, Koizumi Junya and Kishi Nobusuke. The sons, grandsons, nephews or great-nephews of these all politicians are among contemporary Japan’s political leadership.

<sup>60</sup> Immigration Control Bureau, Justice Ministry, ‘Monthly Report on Repatriation to North Korea no. 59, Nov. 30 1964’, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 105-030, 31.03.1961-31.12.1964.

<sup>61</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, 26 April 1956; *Asahi Shimbun*, 25 May 1956;

<sup>62</sup> Mark E. Manyin, ‘Japan\_North Korea Relations: Selected Issues’, Washington, CRS Report for Congress, RL32161, p. 14; Interview with Mr. S., former *Sôren* activist, Tokyo, 11 Jan 2007.

fact dramatically illustrated in 2007 by the arrest of Ogata Shigetaka, former head of the Japanese Public Security Investigation Agency [*Kôan Chôsa Chô*] on charges of conspiring with senior *Sôren* officials to carry out illegal financial and real estate deals.<sup>63</sup>

The tragedy was greatly compounded by the fact that in the course of the 1960s an unknown but substantial number of ‘returnees’ from Japan became targets of political persecution by the North Korean government. It is clear that North Korea was ill-prepared to deal with the very large and rapid inflow of immigrants, and had failed to appreciate how hard it would be for the new arrivals (many of whom spoke little Korean) to adapt to their new surroundings.<sup>64</sup> Initially, returnees were given some degree of ideological latitude, and some did indeed establish successful careers in the difficult environment of North Korean society. But from about 1964 onward reports of arrests and disappearances increased, as many thousands of ‘returnees’ were accused of subversion or of being ‘South Korean spies’ and sent to labour camps, from which many never returned.<sup>65</sup>

### ***Engagement and Tension in the 1960s***

The repatriation of ethnic Koreans from Japan to the DPRK was thus, to a surprising extent, a ‘co-production’ between two governments who stood at opposite ideological poles in the Cold War world, but who had a shared interest in promoting this scheme. It is clear, however, that the long-term expectations of the two sides were very different. North Korea expected the repatriation to strengthen political, economic and social ties with Japan, and perhaps to lead to the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. At first, these expectations seemed partially to be fulfilled. In 1961 Japan lifted its trade ban on North Korea, and cargo shipping links between the two countries were established.<sup>66</sup> The volume of trade was still extremely small, but was increasing rapidly. In 1959 total two-way trade between Japan and the DPRK had been around US\$3.6 million, but in 1961 it rose to around \$8 million, and by 1963 it had almost doubled again to almost \$15 million, with Japan exporting industrial products like electrical wire, stainless steel tubing, tyres and fishing nets, and importing raw materials like clinker, pig iron and anthracite. Japan at that stage also served as an intermediary in exports of Australian wheat to the DPRK.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> See *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 29 June 2007.

<sup>64</sup> See ‘Re- Call on Messrs. Satoshi Kurisaka’, ICRC Archives, B AG 232 105-017.

<sup>65</sup> See Cheong Ki-Hae, *Kikokusen*, Tokyo, Bungei Shunjûsha, 1997; ‘I Met Korean Repatriates and their Japanese Wives in the North Korean Concentration Camp’, in *Life and Human Rights* (the journal of the Society to help Returnees to North Korea, English edition), no. 4, 1997, pp. 26–31; see also Heo Man-Ho, ‘North Korean Human Rights in Cooperative-Antagonistic Relations: Intervention and Education’, in National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea ed., *North Korean Human Rights: Trends and Issues*, Seoul, National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea, 2005, pp. 12–40. Kang Cheol-Hwan, whose account of his imprisonment in a North Korean labour camp has reached a wide readership, was the son of a ‘returnee’ family from Japan.; see Kang Chol-Hwan and Pierre Rigoulot (trans. Yair Reiner), *Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag*, New York, Basic Books, 2001. Opera singer Chon Wolson has also published an account of the fate of her four brothers, who ‘returned’ to North Korea where all were imprisoned in labour camp from 1969 to 1978. One of the four died in the camp at the age of 24. See Chon Wolson, *Kaikyô no Aria*, Tokyo, Shôgakkân. 2007.

<sup>66</sup> *Daily Yomiuri* [English edition], 7 April 1961.

<sup>67</sup> Kazuo Tokita, ‘North Korea: Increasing Trade with Japan’, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 12 April 1962; Kazuo Tokita, ‘North Korea: Japan Deals’, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 27 February 1964;

The new economic openness was reflected in an increasing willingness of large Japanese firms to become engaged in trade with North Korea. In the early stages, economic relations were largely handled through relatively small trading ventures set up by Koreans in Japan, and in 1972 one newspaper report estimated that 40–60 per cent of trade was passing through *Zainichi* Korean firms.<sup>68</sup> North Korea also benefited materially from the arrival of the ‘returnees’, who were encouraged to bring with them products ranging from watches and sewing machines to cars and industrial equipment. However, little by little, major Japanese trading houses and manufacturing firms were entering the field. In the 1960s, for example, the trading firm C. Itoh financed the creation of a Japan–Korea Trading company to develop links with North Korea, and companies including C. Itoh and the Marubeni and Sumitomo trading firms entered into negotiations about the export of plant and equipment to the DPRK.<sup>69</sup>

Meanwhile, though, neither the repatriation nor growing economic ties with North Korea diverted the Japanese government from the goal of negotiating the establishment of diplomatic relations with South Korea. Normalization talks between Japan and the ROK, which had been grinding slowly forward ever since the end of the occupation of Japan in 1952, gathered pace after the establishment of the Park Chung-Hee regime in 1961, and in 1965 a Treaty of Basic Relations was signed between the two countries. The North Korean government (along with many *Zainichi* Koreans and Japanese critics of the ROK) protested vigorously against this Treaty, and its ratification led to a temporary chill in the political relationship between Japan and the DPRK. Conflict was intensified by disagreements over the issue of travel between the two countries. As we shall see in the following section, from the mid-1960s onward North Korea strongly pressed Japan to allow freer movement of people between Japan and the DPRK, but this demand met with resistance in Tokyo. Despite the diplomatic tensions, however, the trading relationship continued to grow quietly, and by 1969 total trade between the two countries had reached some \$56 million.

---

Christopher W. Hughes, *Japan's Economic Power and Security: Japan and North Korea*, London and New York, Routledge, 1999, p. 142.

<sup>68</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, 26 January 1972.

<sup>69</sup> Tokita, ‘North Korea: Japan Deals’, op. cit.



*Repatriation Ship Carrying Koreans from Japan arriving in Cheongjin*

### III. THE SECOND CYCLE: FROM TRADE BOOM TO ABDUCTIONS, 1971–1989

#### *The Economic Relationship: Boom and Bust 1960–1980*

By the beginning of the 1970s, shifts in global politics and economy were setting the scene for a new moment of rapprochement between Japan and the DPRK. North Korea's First Seven-Year Economic Plan (1961–1967), which had been extended to become a Ten-Year Plan lasting to 1970, had run up against barriers of a limited labour supply and lack of access to advanced technology. It was obvious that, despite its ideology of self-reliance, North Korea would need to become more economically and culturally open to the wider world if it were to achieve the ambitious targets for modernization and heavy industrialization set in its new Six-Year Plan (1971–1976). North Korea's concerns about access to technology dovetailed neatly with growing Japanese concerns about access to raw materials. As the Japanese economy entered the later phases of its 'miraculous' high growth period, it was facing growing problems of rising energy prices and limited global supplies of natural resources, and Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) developed far reaching strategies to diversify sources of Japan's raw material imports. It was not surprising that this search should extend to Japan's neighbour North Korea, which was known to have reserves of various important raw materials including zinc and magnesium.

In January 1972, a delegation of Japanese parliamentarians led by the LDP's Kuno Chûji visited Pyongyang and signed a memorandum which envisaged a seven to eight-fold expansion of trade between Japan and the DPRK over the next five years.<sup>70</sup> At almost the same time, Japan and North Korea were both caught unawares by a major event on the global scene. In February 1972, US President Nixon made a surprise visit to China, during which he signed the Shanghai Communiqué, opening the way to the normalization of relations between the two countries. This seismic shift in international diplomacy presumably came as a shock to the DPRK leadership just as much as it did to Japan, and it pushed both countries into a new international framework which both required them and gave them the opportunity to improve relations across the Cold War divide.<sup>71</sup> The emerging cracks in the Cold War barriers were widened a little further in July 1972 when Lee Hu-Rak, head of the South Korean Central Intelligence Agency, made an equally surprising visit to Pyongyang, where the North and South Korean governments issued a joint statement on their aspirations for peaceful reunification.

The result of this thaw was another of those phases of North Korean opening to the outside world which were to be repeated, in changing circumstances, over coming decades, only to be punctuated by phases of disillusionment and withdrawal behind the barricades. The Japan–DPRK trade memorandum of 1972 initially produced striking results. Japan's trade with North Korea doubled from \$132 million in 1972 to \$361 million in 1974.<sup>72</sup> Although this was still very small in terms of Japan's total trade (Japan's trade with the DPRK at the beginning of 1972 was only one-tenth the size of its trade with the ROK<sup>73</sup>), Japan was now North Korea's third-largest trading partner, and its most significant partner outside the Communist world.<sup>74</sup> A number of large Japanese corporations, including Hitachi Shipbuilding, the Hino Motor Company, the Nichirô Fishing Corporation began developing trade or investment ties to the DPRK, and Japan's official export promotion body JETRO planned to hold its first ever trade fair in the DPRK.<sup>75</sup>

However, the honeymoon was short-lived. North Korea's new economic development plan, which focused on heavy industrial development, was over-ambitious, and North Korean managers were unfamiliar with international business practices beyond the bounds of the Communist world. The timing was also unfortunate. Following the first oil crisis of 1973, the global economy entered a phase of low growth, and with this came a sharp drop in the prices of the raw materials on whose export North Korea depended.<sup>76</sup> The centrally planned economic system was poorly equipped to adapt to such challenges, and North Korean state enterprises quickly amassed major foreign debts which they were unable to repay. The problem of debt defaults began to be evident as early as 1975, and in the end, many of the

---

<sup>70</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, 24 January 1972.

<sup>71</sup> See Wayne S. Kiyosaki, *North Korea's Foreign Relations: The Politics of Accommodation 1945-75*, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1976, pp. 95–98.

<sup>72</sup> Hughes, *Japan's Economic Power*, p. 142.

<sup>73</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, 22 January 1972.

<sup>74</sup> Hughes, *Japan's Economic Power*, p. 140.

<sup>75</sup> *Asahi Shimbun* 24 May 1972, 27 August 1972, 20 October 1972 and 19 January 1973; see also Hughes, *Japan's Economic Power*, p. 141.

<sup>76</sup> Kim Seong-Bu, Gi Gwang-Seo and Yi Shin-Jeol eds., *Bukhan Hyeondaesa*, Seoul, Woongjin, 2004, p. 226.

more grandiose Japan–DPRK schemes for joint projects were abandoned, leaving a legacy of economic losses and suspicion towards North Korea in Japanese business circles. Efforts to reach agreement on rescheduling North Korean debt payments repeatedly failed, and it is believed that some 80 billion yen worth of debts (over US\$600 million) remained unpaid at the time of Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to Pyongyang in 2002.<sup>77</sup> Levels of trade between Japan and North Korea remained well above the levels of the 1960s, and (since North Korea’s trade with other non-communist countries also fell because of the debt problem) Japan remained a major trading partner, accounting for about 15 per cent of the DPRK’s total trade in the mid-1980s.<sup>78</sup> But the brief moment of enthusiasm for economic collaboration was not recaptured. During the 1980s, most of the new joint investment schemes developed were small-scale projects initiated by *Zainichi* Korean firms.<sup>79</sup>

### ***Cross-Border Movement and the Remittance Economy***

As trading links developed, North Korea pressed the Japanese government to ease restrictions on the entry of North Koreans to Japan, but the Japanese response was cautious, with the government merely agreeing to treat requests for entry by North Korean business visitors on a ‘case-by-case’ basis.<sup>80</sup> In general, while the Japanese government did allow a growing number of Japanese businesspeople to travel to the DPRK, it was very reluctant to allow the entry of North Koreans, because it feared the reaction from South Korea and was concerned that North Koreans might use their visits for intelligence gathering or ideological purposes. Koreans in Japan also had almost no opportunity to visit family or friends in the DPRK. Between 1963 and 1971, just 24 *Zainichi* Koreans, all of them aged over fifty, were given re-entry permits allowing them to visit ancestral graves or ageing relatives in North Korea and return to Japan.<sup>81</sup>

Japan’s reluctance to allow entry from the DPRK had particularly grave consequences for those who had migrated from Japan to North Korea. Many of the 6,731 Japanese nationals who took part in the repatriation had been led to believe that they would be allowed to make a journey home after they had lived in North Korea for three years.<sup>82</sup> But in fact, once in the DPRK, they found that the return journey was barred to them. It is, of course, impossible to say how many would have been given exit permits by the North Korean side (particularly since the North Korean authorities were well aware that many ‘returnees’ regretted their departure from Japan<sup>83</sup>). However, the available records show that the North Korean government did

---

<sup>77</sup> Manyin, ‘Japan-North Korea Relations’, 2007, p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> Kawai, ‘North Korean ‘Open Policies’’, p. 155.

<sup>79</sup> Hughes, *Japan’s Economic Power and Security*, p. 132.

<sup>80</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, (evening edition), 10 August 1965.

<sup>81</sup> Telegram from Australian Embassy, Tokyo, to Department of External Affairs, Canberra, 31 August 1971, in Australian National Archives, series no. A1838, control symbol 3125/11/87 Part 1, ‘North Korea – Relations with Japan’.

<sup>82</sup> Personal communication, Ms. Y., Japanese returnee-refugee, Tokyo, 5 June 2005; also *Asahi Shimbun*, (evening edition) 30 January 1998.

<sup>83</sup> This fact is made clear by information provided to the International Committee of the Red Cross and others by Oh Gi-Wan, a North Korean official who had been involved in planning the reception of ‘returnees’ from Japan, and who defected to South Korea in the mid-1960s. See letter from Michel Testuz, ICRC representative in Tokyo, to J.-P. Maunoir, ICRC Geneva, 4 August 1966, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 105-035, *Problème du rapatriement de Coréens du Japon, dossier XXI*, 12.01.1965-24.11.1967.

urge Japan to allow return visits by these repatriates in the mid-1960s, and that it was the Japanese side that resisted giving re-entry permits, amongst other things expressing doubts ‘that many North Korean repatriates would actually want such permits’, and suspecting that ‘North Korea is seeking the concession as a political tactic.’<sup>84</sup>

During the 1970s Japan did move to ease some of the restrictions on visits to North Korea by *Zainichi* Koreans.<sup>85</sup> Visitors traveled either by airplane via China or on the *Mangyongbong*, a North Korean cargo and passenger ship which made its maiden voyage between Wonsan and Niigata in September 1971, and was initially used to take ‘returnees’ from Japan to North Korea.<sup>86</sup> (In 1992 the first *Mangyongbong* was replaced by a new vessel, the *Mangyongbong 92* which continued to make the crossing between Wonsan and Niigata until its entry to Japanese ports was banned in 2006 as part of Japan’s sanctions against the DPRK.)

These new travel routes provided a welcome link for the divided families, but it was a link beset with problems. Group travel was organized by *Sôren*, and family members visiting from Japan found that they were very closely supervised in North Korea, and hardly ever had an opportunity to speak privately with their relatives. Those who had continued to believe in Kim Il-Sung’s *Juche* ideology were sometimes shocked at the physically wasted appearance of the sons, daughters, siblings or parents whom they had not seen for more than a decade.<sup>87</sup> Besides, because the start of these tours coincided with North Korea’s debt crisis, *Sôren* and the North Korea government saw the visits as one means of acquiring much needed hard currency. According to journalist and former *Sôren* member Kim Chang-Jung, families were expected to make large donations via *Sôren* to the North Korean government in order to gain a place in the first few groups traveling to the DPRK.<sup>88</sup>

The human contacts linking families thus became part of the complex ‘remittance economy’: a vexed topic widely debated by observers of the DPRK. During the late 1950s, the North Korean government contributed substantial sums of money to *Sôren* to develop Korean schools and other community schemes in Japan. Since the start of the repatriation, however, there has been a large flow of money in the opposite direction — from the Korean community in Japan to North Korea. By the 1980s and 1990s, this had come to play a significant part in the DPRK economy and, although the scale of remittances from Japan to North Korea is thought to have declined significantly since the early 1990s, the flow continues to have a social as well as an economic impact on North Korea today.

---

<sup>84</sup> Letter from A. B. Jamieson, Australian Embassy Tokyo, to Secretary, Department of External Affairs, Canberra, ‘Korea’, 2 July 1966, in Australian National Archives, series no. A1838, control symbol 3103/11/91 Part 1, Japan, *Relations with North Korea*; see also memo from Kiuchi Risaburô, Vice-Director of Foreign Affairs Department, Japan Red Cross Society, to Michel Testuz, ICRC representative in Tokyo, ‘Information sur la question du ‘libre passage’ entre Japon et la Corée-du-nord’, 9 April 1965, in ICRC Archives B AG 251 105-009.02, *Correspondence reçu du 12 juin 1962 au 21 janvier 1966*, 12.06.1962-21.01.1966.

<sup>85</sup> Kim Chan-Jung, *Chôsen Sôren*, Tokyo, Shinchô Shinsho, 2004, p. 134.

<sup>86</sup> From 1959 to 1967, ‘returnees’ had traveled on Soviet ships loaned to the North Korean Red Cross; on the *Mangyeongbong*, see also Dudden, ‘Memories and Aporias in the Japan-Korea Relationship’, *op. cit.*

<sup>87</sup> See for example Chon, *Kaikyô no Aria*, pp. 82–84.

<sup>88</sup> Kim, *Chôsen Sôren*, p. 135.

Estimating the scale of remittances is very difficult. For example, in testimony given to a Japanese parliamentary committee in 2002, Nishioka Tsutomu of the Modern Korea Institute [*Gendai Koria Kenkyûjo*] claimed that the figure was around 180-200 billion yen [c. US\$1.5-1.7 billion a year].<sup>89</sup> This estimate, however, needs to be seen as part of an ideological debate in which groups like the Modern Korea Institute — which is fiercely hostile to any accommodation with North Korea — argue for a tightening of sanctions.<sup>90</sup> *Sôren*, on the other hand, often itself seeks to minimize the significance of its contributions to the North Korean economy.<sup>91</sup> While Japanese government sources have tried to calculate the size of flows by multiplying the presumed number of *Sôren* supporters by their likely per capita contributions, US researcher Nicholas Eberstadt in the late 1990s attempted an estimate by looking at North Korea's foreign currency balances, and calculating the percentage that might emanate from Japan.<sup>92</sup> Eberstadt concluded that the figure for remittances was much lower than previously thought — probably less than \$100 million a year.<sup>93</sup> A similar conclusion was reached by Kim Chang-Jung, who (on the basis of information from *Sôren* insiders) has suggested that annual remittances never exceeded 10 billion yen (about \$85 million)

Understanding the scale and impact of the remittances is complicated by the fact that they take a variety of forms. Some are monetary transfers and gifts of goods made by *Sôren* to the North Korean regime. Campaigns to raise particularly large donations are conducted to coincide with major political anniversaries, or in response to natural disasters such as floods. These campaigns were often run through bodies such as the *Chôgin* Credit Union [*Chôgin Shinyô Kumiai*], a financial institution set up in the 1950s under *Sôren*'s de facto control mainly to provide credit to *Zainichi* Korean entrepreneurs (who at that time found it very difficult to raise finance from Japanese banks). Following North Korea's credit crisis of the late 1970s, the Bank began to place pressure on employees and customers to make substantial contributions to the DPRK via *Sôren*.<sup>94</sup> A major source of such transfers was believed to be *pachinko* [pinball] and other businesses run by *Sôren*-affiliated Koreans in Japan. However, these fund-raising activities have declined sharply since the 1980s. Since the bursting of Japan's speculative bubble in the 1980s, many small and medium-sized *Zainichi* Korean firms, particularly in areas such as real estate and the *pachinko* industry, have struggled to survive. Following the revelation of the abduction issue in 2002, political support for North Korea and for *Sôren* has fallen drastically, and the *Chôgin* Credit Union itself was forced to close the majority of its branches. A number of local governments have added to *Sôren*'s difficulties by seeking to strip it of tax exemptions normally given to community organizations, moves some observers see as amounting to deliberate political harassment.

---

<sup>89</sup> *Kokkai Gijiroku, Shûgiin Anzen Hoshô Inukai* [Japanese Official Parliamentary Record, Lower House Security Committee], 25 July 2002.

<sup>90</sup> See for example Nishioka Tsutomu, 'Tsuika Seisai de 'Kita' o Oikome', *Sankei Shimbun*, 22 October 2008, p. 13.

<sup>91</sup> See Jennifer M. Lind, 'Gambling with Globalism: Japanese Financial Flows to North Korea and the Sanctions Policy Option', *The Pacific Review*, vol. 10, no. 3, 197, pp. 391–406, particularly pp. 395–396.

<sup>92</sup> Nicholas Eberstadt, 'Financial Transfers from Japan to North Korea', *Asian Survey*, vol. 36, no. 5 May 1996, pp. 523–542

<sup>93</sup> For example, Mark Manyin, 'Japan–Korea Relations', 2007, p. 14.

<sup>94</sup> Kim, *Chôsen Sôren*, p. 141.

Another type of remittance to North Korea, however, comes in the form of the crates of goods regularly and carefully packed and sent by *Zainichi* Korean families to their relatives in North Korea. These packages are generally sent through the normal postal system, and contain things like children's clothes, food and household items. Estimating their quantity and value is almost impossible. Despite the fact that many *Zainichi* Koreans face their own financial hardships, some have continued to send parcels to family members in the DPRK every few months for decades. Until the *Mangyongbong* was banned from entering Japanese ports in 2006, bundles of gifts for relatives were also sent on the ferry. Such gifts too have attracted their share of suspicion. One US newspaper report claimed that 'the PlayStations and other gadgets carried onto the Mangyongbong-92 ferry ended up not as children's gifts but as components in Pyongyang's military hardware.'<sup>95</sup> Others have argued that transfers are extorted from relatives in Japan by *Sôren* and North Korea, who use the former 'returnees' as hostages.<sup>96</sup> Such claims illustrate the complex interweaving of the personal and the political in the contentious world of Japan-North Korea relations. There is indeed evidence to suggest that the *Mangyongbong* may have on occasion been used for smuggling military-related goods, and that *Sôren* has sometimes pressured *Zainichi* Koreans with relatives in the DPRK to make contributions to its coffers.<sup>97</sup>

Yet the fact remains that most of the parcels sent to North Korea are simply assistance given by families to relatives who depend on this generosity for their everyday well-being. The parcels not only help former 'returnees' to survive, but have played a role in the development of North Korea's informal economy.<sup>98</sup> In other words, goods sent from Japan are quietly sold on the market by recipients. For example, watches or electronic goods brought by visitors from Japan are often resold, and items like dry goods sent in bulk may be repackaged into small portions for private trade. For this reason, it is likely that a considerable proportion of former 'returnees' have played an active part in the growth of the unofficial small-scale market for good in North Korea. These flows of goods, however, have been severely affected by the imposition of sanctions on North Korea. The banning of North Korean ships from Japanese ports has made the transport of goods much more difficult and uncertain, and rigorous checks for 'prohibited' goods place added barriers on transfers to the DPRK. One Japan-based family member whom I have spoken to described how a parcel of gifts to young relatives in North Korea was stopped because it contained a plastic harmonica (musical instruments are defined as 'prohibited luxury goods' under the sanctions aimed at changing the behaviour of the Kim Jong-Il regime).

Observers of the remittance economy have tended to see it as a flow of funds from 'North Koreans' 'pro-DPRK elements in Japan', and have assumed that this flow props up the North Korean regime. Though transfers of funds via *Sôren* may

---

<sup>95</sup> *Washington Times*, 16 October 2006.

<sup>96</sup> See Lind *op. cit.*, p. 394.

<sup>97</sup> Evidence of smuggling, for example, was put forward in the documentary film *Kita Chôsen Kikokusen: Shirazaru Hanseiki no Kiroku*, NHK Special documentary, directed by Kawaguchi Jun, first broadcast 10 October 2007.

<sup>98</sup> Examples of this practice can be seen in the documentary films *Kita Chôsen Kikokusen*, dir. Kawaguchi Jun, 2007, and *Dear Pyongyang*, dir. Yang Yong-Hee, Cinequanon, 2005; further information from interview with Mr. R., Korean returnee-refugee, 20 June 2005, and personal communication, Mr. O., relative of 'returnees' to North Korea, Tokyo, July 2008.

indeed serve that purpose, those who send goods to their families in North Korea are not North Koreans, nor are they necessarily politically sympathetic to DPRK. Indeed, as information about the state of life in North Korea has become increasingly available, many who formerly sympathized with the regime have become deeply critical. However, the basic demands of humanity and family ties may lead them to continue to send remittances to their relatives, who are (after all) in many ways themselves victims of the regime's failings. To the extent that these remittances encourage private economic activity, rather than merely propping up the regime, they may, in their small way, be promoting internal change within the DPRK.

### *The Context of the Abductions*

The early 1970s were seen by many contemporary observers as a period of renewed engagement between North Korea and the outside world, marked not only by a degree of economic opening, but also by the 1972 joint statement on reunification issued by the North and South Korean regimes.<sup>99</sup> After the debt crisis of the mid-1970s deepened, however, the pendulum again swung towards tension. The late 1970s and early 1980s were a time of change and instability on the Korean Peninsula. In the ROK, President Park Chung-Hee was assassinated in 1979, and in 1980 demonstrations in the South Korean city of Gwangju against the new Chun Doo-Hwan regime were violently suppressed, resulting in many hundreds of deaths. In 1983, a bomb attack in the Burmese capital Rangoon, aimed at visiting President Chun Doo-Hwan, killed seventeen people, including senior South Korean government figures as well as Burmese bystanders; and in 1987, 115 passengers were killed when a South Korean airlines plane was blown up in Baghdad.<sup>100</sup> Mystery still surrounds some aspects of these two terrorist incidents, but both are widely believed to have been planned and instigated by North Korea, and to mark a phase of violent action by the DPRK against its perceived enemies. Both also led to the imposition of limited and temporary economic sanctions on North Korea by Japan.

It was during the period of tension from the late 1970s to the early 1980s that the known kidnappings of Japanese citizens by North Korea took place.<sup>101</sup> The abduction cases to which the DPRK government confessed in 2002 were not in fact the first incidents in which Japanese people had mysteriously disappeared, only to

---

<sup>99</sup> See for example Kiyosaki, *North Korea's Foreign Relations*, 1976.

<sup>100</sup> The Rangoon attacks were carried out by dissident members of the ROK armed forces, of whom one was executed shortly after the incident while two others committed suicide. One surviving attacker, Kang Min-Chul, was tried and imprisoned in Myanmar [Burma]. He was reported to have died in prison in May 2008. See *Hankyoreh Sinmun*, 18 August 2007; 'Aunsan Poktan Tereo Sageon Bukhan Gongjakweon Samang', *Voice of America* (Korean language edition), 21 May 2008, [www.voanews.com/Korean/archive/2008-05/2008-05-21-voa14.cfm](http://www.voanews.com/Korean/archive/2008-05/2008-05-21-voa14.cfm), accessed 16 December 2008.

<sup>101</sup> The actual number of kidnappings is unknown. Here I use the term 'known kidnappings' to refer to those which the DPRK has admitted, and others for which there is very strong evidence. The most obvious of the latter is the case of Soga Miyoshi, who disappeared with her daughter Soga Hitomi on 12 August 1978. As discussed in the text, the DPRK has stated that it has no record that Soga Miyoshi ever entered North Korea. However, the only plausible explanation for her disappearance is either that she was taken to North Korea and kept there separately from her daughter, or that she was killed by North Korean agents in Japan or on the way to North Korea. The DPRK has admitted to thirteen abductions. As of December 2008, the Japanese government claims that there were at least seventeen. Other lobby groups in Japan have compiled lists of suspected abductions that run into many hundreds and date back to the 1940s. However, most of these are missing persons cases for which there is only slim evidence of a connection with North Korea.

reappear later in North Korea. In 1963, two fishermen, Terakoshi Sotoo and Shôji together with their teenage nephew Takeshi disappeared while on a fishing trip off the coast of Japan's Ishikawa Prefecture.<sup>102</sup> Fourteen years later, their family in Japan finally received a letter from Sotoo, informing them that Shôji had died, but that he and Takeshi were living in the DPRK. The most plausible explanation of the Terakoshis' fate is that their boat encountered, and possibly collided with, a North Korea vessel on a secret military mission, and that they were taken to North Korea and prevented from returning to Japan, for fear that they would reveal what they had witnessed. Terakoshi Takeshi subsequently become a senior union official in North Korea, changed his name to Kim Yeong-Heo, and has consistently denied that he was abducted. He made a short visit to his old home in Japan soon after Prime Minister Koizumi's trip to Pyongyang in 2002, but has chosen to remain living in North Korea.<sup>103</sup> His father moved from Japan to live with Takeshi in Pyongyang, and died there, while Takeshi's aging mother Tomoe continues (despite increasing difficulties) to make frequent visits to her son in North Korea.<sup>104</sup>

The Terakoshi case was a precursor to an equally mysterious incident which caused much vexation in Japan-North Korea relations throughout the 1980s and 1990s: the *Fujisan Maru* case. By the 1980s, Japanese cargo and fishing vessels were moving regularly back and forth between the western coast of Japan and North Korean ports such as Wonsan and Cheongjin, and in November 1983, a North Korean soldier named Mr. Min stowed away on one of these ships, the *Fujisan Maru 18*, and sought asylum in Japan. Although Japan had recently become a signatory to the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, it did not initially grant Mr. Min asylum, but instead took him into custody, suspecting him of spying for North Korea. Two weeks later, when the *Fujisan Maru 18* returned to North Korea, the DPRK authorities retaliated by seizing the ship's crew and accusing them of spying for Japan. North Korea clearly wished to push Japan into exchanging Mr. Min for the Japanese crew, but the Japanese authorities insisted that they could not return the North Korean soldier to the DPRK against his will. Most of the *Fujisan Maru* crew were released not long after, but two (including the ship's captain) were put on trial and sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment. Meanwhile, Mr. Min remained under detention in Japan for four years, until he was released to live anonymously in the Japanese community and allowed to apply for a 'special resident's permit'.<sup>105</sup> The incident, as we now know, occurred within the period when the abductions took place, though there is no known evidence of a direct link between these events.

As Patricia Steinhoff has emphasized, however, it is illuminating to see the abductions in the context of a further incident from the 1970s, the *Yodogô* hijacking.<sup>106</sup> In 1970, Japanese members of the far left Red Army Faction [*Sekigunha*] hijacked a plane [the *Yodogô*] on a flight from Tokyo to Fukuoka, and demanded to

---

<sup>102</sup> On the Terakoshi case, see *Chûnichi Shimbun*, 12 February 1997, p. 11; *Sankei Shimbun*, 9 May 1997, p. 29; *Hokkoku Tôyama Shimbun*, 29 January 1998, p. 32.

<sup>103</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun* (Tokyo), 17 June 1987; *Mainichi Shimbun* (Osaka), 16 October 2002; *Asahi Shimbun*, 18 September 2003; *Hokkoku Shimbun*, 19 September 2003; *Yomiuri Shimbun* (Tokyo), 21 May 2005.

<sup>104</sup> For further discussion, see Tessa Morris-Suzuki, 'The Forgotten Japanese in North Korea', op. cit.

<sup>105</sup> David Sanger, 'A Japan-North Korea Dispute Takes a New Turn', *New York Times*, 17 December 2008.

<sup>106</sup> See Patricia Steinhoff, 'Kidnapped Japanese in North Korea: the New Left Connection', *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2004, pp. 123–142.

be flown to North Korea. Though the DPRK authorities may have welcomed the propaganda value of this event, they were probably also taken aback by the hijackers' action. Certainly, North Korean officials would have had little sympathy for these middle-class Japanese New Leftists and their dreams of self-realization through world revolution. The hijackers were therefore kept confined in the relative comfort of a compound near Pyongyang, but were subjected to intensive re-education in North Korea's distinctive *Juche* philosophy.

In 1975 the Japanese girlfriend of one of hijackers voluntarily joined the *Yodogô* group in North Korea and (according to information gathered by the freelance journalist Takazawa Kôji and cited by Steinhoff) at least one other Japanese man also joined the group of his own accord. It was, however, only after the hijackers had been in North Korea for some seven years that the DPRK authorities apparently decided to take their own action to expand the size of the group, initially by recruiting wives for the male Japanese hijackers. Agents of the North Korean government began by targeting Japanese women belonging to pro-North Korean study groups in Japan. At least two of those brought to the DPRK in this way believed that they were going to North Korea for short visits, but found on their arrival that they were unable to leave.<sup>107</sup> The marriages of the hijackers and these imported brides took place in May 1977, and some of the wives were subsequently sent on missions to Europe and Asia, one aim of which was to bring other young Japanese to North Korea. In Steinhoff's words, 'the purpose, as they understood it, was to expand the *Yodogô* group, which was to become the vanguard for a North Korean-style revolution in Japan.'<sup>108</sup> None of the wives themselves is defined by the Japanese government as having been abducted, but some of those they persuaded to go with them to North Korea are on the official Japanese list of abductees.

It is worth noting that the first abduction case acknowledged by the DPRK — that of Yokota Megumi in November 1977 — took place just six months after the mass wedding of the *Yodogô* hijackers. This was one of a series of cases in 1977 and 1978, involving at least nine victims who were snatched from coastal parts of Japan by North Korean agents to be taken by boat to the DPRK. Three of the other abductions — those of Arimoto Keiko, Ishioka Tôru and Matsuki Kaoru — occurred in Europe in the early 1980s, and appear to have been carried out by wives of the *Yodogô* group, who persuaded young Japanese travelers to go with them to North Korea for visits which the victims (presumably) believed would be no more than a short adventure. Yet other cases, such as that of Taguchi Yaeko, are more obscure — it is not clear when and how she was kidnapped, although North Korea has admitted to abducting her.

Media accounts of the abductions often describe the victims as having being taken to the DPRK to give Japanese language and culture training to North Korean spies<sup>109</sup>, and some certainly were employed as language teachers or translators during their time in the DPRK. Thanks to the repatriation program, however, North Korea in the 1970s already had many thousands of native speakers of the Japanese language on

---

<sup>107</sup> Steinhoff, 'Kidnapped Japanese', pp. 133–134.

<sup>108</sup> Steinhoff, 'Kidnapped Japanese', p. 134.

<sup>109</sup> See for example Richard Lloyd Parry, 'Girls 'Kidnapped by North Korea to Teach Japanese'', *The Independent*, 13 March 2002; 'Japan's Radio Pleas to North Korea', BBC News, 5 March 2008, [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7275598.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7275598.stm), accessed 16 December 2008.

its soil, and (since the repatriation continued until 1984) more were arriving every year by a legitimate route. The apparently senseless campaign of kidnappings becomes slightly more comprehensible if it is seen, not so much as a bizarre method for obtaining language teachers, but rather as linked to dreams of destabilizing Japan (and possibly other Asian countries) via revolutionary cells, composed either of kidnap victims themselves or of North Korean agents who had assumed the identities of the kidnap victims. The start of the abductions coincided with the peak of left wing terrorist activity in Western Europe. Attacks by the Red Army Faction in Germany (popularly known as the Baader-Meinhoff Group) reached a crescendo in the autumn of 1977, and in 1978 the leading Italian politician Aldo Moro was kidnapped and killed by the Italian Red Brigades. In this environment, the idea that Japanese society could be propelled into chaos through the actions of North Korean trained revolutionaries may have seemed marginally less far-fetched than it does today.

Abduction cases such as those of Yokota Megumi and others — snatched off the street, forced into sacks and bodily carried out of the country never to return — present extreme examples of state agents violently separating individuals from their families. Yet in a sense, the abductees joined a large group of people in North Korea separated from their families in Japan in circumstances that involved varying degrees of coercion. The suffering created by the violent abductions cannot be wholly divorced from the experiences of the naïve young men and women persuaded to visit the *Yodogô* hijackers and then prevented from leaving; the 6,000 or more Japanese citizens misled into thinking they would be able to visit their families three years after their ‘repatriation’ to North Korea; the tens of thousands of *Zainichi* Koreans enthusiastically encouraged to ‘return home’ to a place they had never seen, and then forgotten or persecuted by the very authorities who had planned their departure; or the ‘left behind’ Japanese, whose stories simply vanished into history. And their stories in turn emerge from a colonial history full of the forced separations endured by labour conscripts, ‘comfort women’ and others. Putting the abductions back into these circles of history does not diminish their significance, but it does highlight the need for a perspective on the Japan–North Korean relationship that is broad and deep enough to encompass that relationship’s complex and multi-layered social problems.