

# How Japanese Student Radicals Became Juche Believers in North Korea

**Takazawa Kōji edited by Patricia G. Steinhoff**

Excerpted and adapted from the English translation of *Destiny: the Secret Operations of the Yodogō Exiles*, by Takazawa Kōji, edited by Patricia G. Steinhoff.

## Abstract

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Japan had a New Left protest cycle that paralleled those in western Europe and the United States. The Japanese New Left was separate from the parliamentary Japan Communist Party and drew many of its ideas from Japanese translations of the latest revolutionary New Left literature including works by Regis De Bray (1967), Che Guevara (1968, 1969), Rudi Dutschke (1968), Daniel Cohn-Bendit (1968), Howard Zinn (1968), Stokely Carmichael (1968), Eldridge Cleaver (1969), Alberto Bayo (1969), and Carlos Marighella (1970). Japanese New Left groups identified with student movements in the west and protested about similar issues, including opposition to the Vietnam War and American military bases in Japan, as well as tuition increases, overcrowding, and authoritarian regulations at universities. Frustrated by the Japanese government's intransigence in the face of huge protest demonstrations, they despaired of change through either electoral or street politics, and instead saw revolution as the only alternative. New Left street demonstrations steadily escalated into violent clashes resembling medieval battles. The students wore

color-coded crash helmets emblazoned with names of their organizations, carried long fighting poles, and threw paving stones or firebombs at the police. They confronted squads of riot police wearing medieval style helmets, who battled the students with tall aluminum body shields and police batons, supported by water cannon trucks that sprayed fire hoses of water laced with tear gas at the students. At the peak of the protest cycle in 1968-69, Japanese authorities suddenly cracked down with mass arrests and prolonged incarcerations of thousands of students. This turned the tide, in part by producing splits within New Left groups.



この日赤軍派が初めて公然と登場した

**Public debut of the independent Red Army Faction at the National Zenkyōtō convention, Hibiya Park, September 5, 1969. Red Army Faction members (right) battled with members of Bund (left)**

**outside Hibiya Outdoor Amphitheatre. Takazawa, Kōji, author and editor, *Zenkyōtō Gurafuitei*. Tokyo: Shinsensha, 1984, p. 55.**

One major national New Left protest organizations nicknamed Bund expelled its radical Red Army Faction for advocating urban guerrilla warfare with guns and improvised explosives to incite a revolution in Japan, as part of the simultaneous worldwide revolution that their leader Shiomi Takaya believed was imminent. As the newly-independent group experimented with explosives in fall 1969, heavy police pressure pushed them underground. In March 1970 nine students from the Red Army Faction hijacked a plane to North Korea. Two years later they renounced the Red Army Faction's ideology of simultaneous world revolution and converted to Kim Il Sung's *juche* ideology. Little was heard from them until they re-established contact with supporters in Japan in 1988. After one Yodogō member was arrested in Japan, his lawyer and the leader of a support organization began visiting the group in North Korea. Takazawa Koji knew the group's leader Tamiya Takamaro from his days as a student activist, first in Bund and then on the fringes of the Red Army Faction, where he helped publish Red Army Faction publications and provided support when people were arrested. He became an editor and authority on the New left, and first visited North Korea in 1990 at the group's invitation. In this excerpt from chapters 5 and 6 of *Destiny*, he uses manuscripts they gave him for publication in Japan to examine their conversion process. As he explored their experience in North Korea, he found disturbing parallels to the United Red Army Incident in Japan that happened at almost the same time.

**Keywords:** Yodogō group, *juche* ideology, Red Army Faction, thought reform process, self-criticism, mutual criticism, self-reliance, *sōkatsu*, United Red Army

A certain fateful day can mark the moment when all traces of a person whom we have been following closely suddenly disappear. The flow of information concerning our subject dries up abruptly. We hear nothing more of how he is living, or where. In this kind of situation we usually say "his whereabouts are unknown," or "he has disappeared." These words perfectly describe the situation after the Red Army Faction students arrived in Pyongyang. Of course, they did not "disappear," but spent the first several years in Pyongyang undergoing intensive daily ideological and life-style remolding ("brainwashing"). But to us, their lives in Pyongyang were a blank during those years. It was as if a wire had been cut, with silence falling suddenly after all the noise. They might as well have hijacked themselves across the river of the dead.

This impression may just be in contrast to the flood of information that preceded the moment of the hijackers' disappearance. The testimony of every passenger aboard the *Yodogō* was public information; there was not a newspaper, magazine, or weekly tabloid that had neglected to cover the subject. Live, unceasing, on-the-spot television coverage had provided countless images of the crisis. There is even a recording of the speech Tamiya made to the passengers aboard the *Yodogō*. On this tape, Tamiya is shouting at the top of his lungs, his distinctive, piercing voice delivering a political speech in language the listeners found very difficult to understand. With such a proliferation of information, viewers could easily imagine themselves at the scene.

But the hijackers' daily lives in Pyongyang remained a blank. Not only were there no relations between the two countries, but there

was no news of the students, and no way to make contact with them. The public knew only that they had indeed gone to North Korea, and many believed, without reason, that they were jailed there. So, twenty years passed....

When I visited North Korea for the first time, upon my arrival in Pyongyang, I checked into the Koryo Hotel on Changuang Avenue. Tamiya was waiting for me in the hotel lobby. A man of rather small physique, he stood in the shadow of one of the pillars in the lobby, his head tilted slightly to the side. Memory can fade with the passage of time, but this was indeed Tamiya, leader of that student movement of twenty years past. But I was struck by the impression that this man, the leader of that long-ago hijacking, did not seem comfortable in the luxurious hotel lobby.

That evening, we enjoyed a fabulous banquet in a private dining room at the hotel, in the company of several high-ranking North Korean Workers' Party members. After the meal, we moved to another room in the hotel, and continued our party late into the night. My interest and excitement overcame any travel exhaustion: here I was, in North Korea! It was not a place one ordinarily visited. In addition, here were the *Yodogō* hijackers themselves who had come to meet me, and with twenty years of catching up to do, we had plenty to talk about. ...<sup>1</sup>

The North Korean Workers' Party had promised to dispatch cadres to serve as instructors for the students, and [once they had settled into their new home] the students prepared to make their self-introductions. For the first time they told each other their true names, since they had continued to use pseudonyms when addressing each other. Before the hijacking, the group had met in full only twice. Since they did not even know each other's names, it is hardly surprising to learn they had no agreed-upon plan to follow now, after their arrival in North Korea. Tamiya quickly called a meeting

so they could agree on a plan. The discussion grew heated: suddenly they were no longer dealing with an amorphous future. They found themselves in Pyongyang, but they still had no firm ideas of what they wished to do.

The meeting resulted in the entire group agreeing on three resolutions, embodied in three slogans. Much later, Tamiya read the slogans to me one by one and explained their meaning:

Item: We live and die together.

Item: We will defend and nurture the simultaneous world revolutionary transition.

Item: To complete the success of the hijacking, let us prepare for a triumphant return to Japan!

In the end, they agreed to make the following five requests:

Item: Military training

Item: A solution for our return to Japan sometime this year

Item: Lectures on philosophy, economics, and the Korean Anti-Japanese Resistance

Item: Training field trips

Item: Japanese newspapers and magazines; access to a radio

These requests were immediately relayed to the Workers' Party. The response to the request for military training: "We will consider it."

As for returning to Japan, "It was a rash decision on your part to come here, and this

will not be a simple matter. We will do what we can. Please consider any future requests carefully."

Lectures began immediately. A curriculum was developed, and a teacher was dispatched to deliver the lectures every day at the appointed time. The professors from the Social Sciences Institute in Pyongyang spoke in soft tones, but there was no room for compromise in interpreting their message. Their text was Kim Il Sung's writings, and the topic of study was his personal leadership ideology, the only ideology acceptable in North Korea. Other lectures covered the revolutionary history of North Korea, and the history of the international labor movement.

Their wish to go on field trips was soon granted. To learn about the resistance movement against Japan, they visited museums dedicated to the Revolution, as well as historical sites, and listened to lectures afterwards. They were usually asked to write opinion essays on what they had seen and heard after these trips.... Once a week they watched ideological movies. Many of the movies were about the Korean resistance against the Japanese; others concerned the accomplishments of Kim Il Sung, or were socialist propaganda vehicles. ...

Apparently, they were not very diligent students in those early days, mainly because the lectures had nothing to do with the topics they wished to study. Where they had wanted to study economics and Marxist-Leninist texts, they were given lectures on *juche*<sup>2</sup> ideology and the "masterpieces" of Kim Il Sung. ...It was only after their arrival in Pyongyang that the hijackers heard of "*juche*" ("self-reliance"). And they could not easily agree with the professors' words. As far as the Red Army Faction was concerned, even if this ideology was well-suited to the circumstances in communist North Korea, it was still just a local brand of Marxism-Leninism. ...

Consequently, their daily routine had two parts: the days were spent studying *juche* ideology, and the evenings, Shiomi Takaya's theory of the transition into simultaneous world revolution.<sup>3</sup> Once classes were finished for the day, they conducted their own study sessions and discussions to meet the requirements of item two on their list of slogans, "We will ensure the success of simultaneous world revolution."

Of course they did not only study and debate issues. Their physical training sessions were an important part of their schedule as well and continued throughout their stay.

"Military training! Military training! Always military training!" wrote Abe Kimihiro. "If we didn't get military training, then we had no reason for coming.... Because one of our motives for coming to North Korea was to receive military training, our daily routine also included running in the mornings. It felt very good to run in the fresh, early morning air, far from the city. We agreed that we shouldn't just run, but that we should 'run in the spirit of activism.' So we shattered the still of the early Korean mornings by shouting out our Red Army slogan of "Achieve the Uprising, Victory in War!"

However, they were immediately obliged to stop this demonstration. They received a message from the Workers' Party: "You can be heard in all the nearby farms. Wouldn't it be best if you stopped shouting your slogan?"

"What's wrong with being heard?"

A counselor from the Party advised them, "You might have some trouble if it got out in the neighborhood that some Japanese people are doing something here." (p.170).<sup>4</sup>

The hijackers had no response to this, the perfect squelch....

Since arriving in Pyongyang, the Red Army students' world had been completely circumscribed by the North Korean Workers' Party. Even if they tried, they would not have been able to escape its control. When they became restive, the manipulation simply became more intensive. Escape was impossible. A little later in their studies of *juche*, they came across the term "the art of guidance." Handled skillfully, a person can be made to believe a decision has been made completely freely, without either restrictions or coercion on the part of a handler. But no one wants to believe he can be controlled in such a way, so he thinks his decision has been made of his own will. The "art of guidance" is a highly developed form of mind-control, and when the students agreed to give up the show of activist spirit on their early-morning runs, they took their first voluntary step into the embrace of the Workers' Party. They chose to interpret their instructor's advice in a positive way: "Isn't this a sign that our request for military training is going to be accepted?"

Instead of shouting slogans, they cleared out a three-kilometer-long running course in the pine woods around their residence, adding an exercise area with horizontal and parallel bars. Sweating allowed them a small sense of fulfillment. With the help of some Korean workers, they enlarged the open ground even more, and made a field large enough to play soccer. Every day in their small square of land, they spent themselves to build up their physical strength. Naturally, they were not allowed to wander around freely outside.

"The only thing we worked really hard at was the physical exercise," wrote Abe Kimihiro. "Anyway, I went all out. It was an urgent matter, since we thought the plan was to return in the autumn and lead the revolt."

The season had shifted to summer, and soon it would be autumn, the time for their departure. Still no military training curriculum had been

offered, and there was no firm date set for their return to Japan. ...

Tamiya Takamaro accompanied me to the airport on the morning of my departure from Pyongyang....

It was time to board. I passed through passport control and entered the boarding lounge, then walked across the airport tarmac to board the airplane waiting on the runway. It was the same little twin-engine aircraft in which I had come to North Korea. Through the round window, I could see my companions waving continually. At that moment, I had no idea of how many repeat visits I would make to North Korea in the future.

In those days, as now, there were no direct flights between North Korea and Japan. Traveling between them always means a stopover, often in Moscow or Beijing. North Korean Airlines has only one or two weekly flights to Moscow, Beijing, Khabarovsk, and Sofia. From Japan, the usual transit point is Beijing.

It was a relief to return to Beijing. There, the city hummed with people and cars. Waves of bicycles filled the streets; the crowds were full of energy. Used to the hubbub of metropolitan Tokyo, I had felt uncomfortable in the silence and stillness of Pyongyang. In contrast, Beijing felt like a place where people lived and worked. It was with a strange sense of nostalgia that I wandered among the crowds on Dongdan Street and Chang'an Avenue, near the Qianmen gate and Wangfujing. In Pyongyang, there had been no sense of people living their daily lives, but in Beijing, activity swirled around me in all directions.

The martial law imposed in Beijing after the Tian'anmen Square incident in June 1989 had only recently been rescinded, and armed soldiers were still stationed on street corners. Circumstances were hardly normal even in Beijing, but to my eyes, compared to North

Korea, people here seemed free to lead their own lives....

At my hotel in Beijing, I began reading the memoir manuscripts the *Yodogō* group had given me. Some of the manuscripts were handwritten, and some had been typed on a word-processor; yet others had apparently already been published in magazines or newsletters. Each writer described in detail his life beginning with his experiences as a student activist, and the process of joining the Red Army Faction. The essays described the period immediately before and after the hijacking; the atmosphere and events on the airplane; the hijackers' shift of attitude after arriving in Pyongyang; and the current ideological standpoint of each writer. Disappointingly, the stories only continued for the first [two years] of their stay in North Korea. The intervening twenty years remained a blank. However, their voices, which I had previously encountered only in political newsletters and articles, came through clearly in the short manuscripts.

Wakabayashi Moriaki had this to say about the days spent in lectures and study: "Our debates took many different tacks. The instructors never directly contradicted us, nor agreed with us; they just circumvented our arguments. It was as if they were saying, 'Do as you like, we don't care.' We tried to engage them in [Shiomi's theories of] simultaneous world revolution and international bases for revolution, but it was no use. We got absolutely nowhere with it. We soon grew frustrated." (p. 174)

Abe Kimihiro, on the sought-after military training: "There was no indication we would be granted the military training we had requested to accompany our academic studies. Whenever we asked about the military training, the response was always, 'Let us think about it,' or 'We are looking into it.' As we gradually figured out, 'Let us think about it' is North Korean for 'This is not possible, but we can think about it.'

Or more clearly, 'No.'" (p.176)

In short, they were not taken seriously. Their impatience came through clearly in the manuscripts. None of their requests were fulfilled, except for the lectures on *juche* ideology, and the field trips.

I had just one simple question: So why did they remain in North Korea? After all the effort of hijacking an airplane and flying there with the primary goal of receiving military training, why did they remain in North Korea when it became obvious that the military training would not be forthcoming? Why didn't they follow their initial plan of only stopping over in North Korea, and continuing on to Cuba or the Middle East? Why couldn't they do that? The more times I read the words 'We were not able to get military training,' the more I began to feel I was not getting the whole story. ...

What I wished most to learn, as I shuffled through the thick sheaf of manuscripts, was the how and why of their conversion to *juche* thought. While no one could doubt the immaturity of their Red Army ideology, their total submission to *juche* was too extreme to be believable. To put it directly, was their conversion a voluntary matter of free choice, or were they forced to accept it?

Perhaps North Korea's much-rumored techniques of "brainwashing" really did exist.

The manuscripts contained the statement, "We entered into the struggle of systematically re-evaluating the errors of our earlier ideology after the middle of 1971." I began to read more carefully from this point. Both Konishi and Wakabayashi wrote about this. Wakabayashi wrote,

While defending the idea of simultaneous world revolution within our ranks, a serious ideological dilemma was

developing.

In contrast to the success of the revolution and reconstruction of North Korea, the failure of our own efforts was obvious. This failure meant our ideology and theory, our party line, our strategy and tactics were all bankrupt....

Tamiya came into my room to talk. I looked up from my book and listened to him. He summarized what our struggle had achieved. I think I answered a number of questions, and had several opinions to add. The conversation went on for a while, then Tamiya asked slowly, "So, on whose behalf were you fighting, anyway?"

I was stumped by this sudden question. I turned the question over in my mind, "On whose behalf...on whose behalf....?" The only response that came to mind was, "For the people...right?" But I said nothing, feeling at a loss.

Why couldn't I just say, "For the people"? Although I knew what I should say, why could I not say it out loud? Why was I at such a loss for words?

It was from this time that my ideological conversion began. I entered a period of self-examination.

"For what? For whom? Have I ever thought about this? Have I really been working for a grand cause?" Looking back to when I was in Japan, I knew the words "for the people" had seldom crossed my lips. There seemed to be something fishy about them even on those few

official occasions when I did say them out loud. It seemed almost hypocritical. I thought it might be because I did not really believe in some of the actions taken in the name of "the people." If someone had asked me if I was fighting "for the people," I would not have been able to answer with confidence. I must have started out believing it.... So why? ...I began to re-think my childish ideology, in order to be able to say, without hesitation, and with full responsibility, "for the people." This was the start of my new endeavor. (pp. 183-185)

Konishi wrote,

We had to face reality. Why, instead of expanding or effectively organizing, were our own organizations collapsing? It must have been because of some fundamental error on our part. While we defended our idea of simultaneous world revolution in debates with our teachers, I became more aware of this issue.

I will not go into the details of the re-evaluation that the group undertook, but only mention a little of what my own intuition told me.

I had begun to doubt the collective people's power, the power of my comrades, and especially my own power. This doubt grew stronger as the contrast between these and the history and the current reality of the revolution in North Korea became clear....

We had frequently repeated the word "world" when we spoke of the

"simultaneous world revolution," the "world revolution," or the "armed and organized world proletariat," but this was mainly because the will of the Japanese people to take the initiative and carry out the revolution in Japan was very weak. (p. 187)

Ah, so that's how it was. "We had to face reality." That was true. I wondered at the statement that the theory of "simultaneous world revolution" was an expression of the weak will of the Japanese people to take the initiative in achieving their own revolution. But my real question concerned "reality." What kind of reality were the *Yodogō* hijackers facing after their arrival in North Korea? What kind of re-evaluation were they being forced to make? What was the process of their conversion? What was the process of re-evaluation? What were the facts? These questions remained in my mind as I continued to read through the memoirs.

I was not so interested in knowing the results of this process: it was fairly obvious from their present ideology and their discussions of their re-evaluations what they currently believed. I began to feel irritated. I had more sympathy for the Wakabayashi who, newly arrived in Pyongyang, was still sensitive enough to find phrases like "for the people" untrustworthy, than I felt for the Wakabayashi who now used the words without hesitation. Suppressing my disgruntlement, I continued to read. The following are from Tanaka Yoshimi and Abe Kimihiro. Tanaka wrote:

... The much-awaited "preliminary revolt" [in Japan] did not happen and faced with the reality of North Korea I began to taste how green my own ideological stance was.

On whose behalf had I myself

fought in the struggle? To what end? Had I really meant to share in the lives of workers and learn from them? This self-examination led me to the conclusion that I had not been a genuine revolutionary. I determined to eradicate the petit-bourgeois world-view I had held until now, and to rebuild from the foundation a revolutionary, popular world-view. (p.181)

Abe Kimihiro's memoir reported:

Each of us underwent a separate ideological conversion. In my case, my moment came during a trip to the east coast in the summer of 1971.

Of course, I had been greatly troubled until then. During our discussions of simultaneous world revolution, I found myself becoming more and more sympathetic to the story of the North Korean revolution. There was the reality of modern North Korea, but I found the story of the anti-Japanese resistance, as we saw it in films, particularly affecting. When I watched the movies, great tears would drip down my face. They were tears of sympathy, for even though I was very young, I too stood for armed struggle. They were tears of homage and admiration.

However, that was a separate issue from the question of simultaneous world revolution. I may have felt sympathetic to the struggles of the North Korean revolution, but I clung strongly to my belief that "under the siege of imperialism, it

is impossible to achieve socialism or communism in a single country. Sooner or later, it would collapse. The North Korean revolution is no exception to this." Put simply, I thought any socialist country surrounded by imperialism must be negatively affected by it, or even forced to submit to it.

With the situation thus, we went on a trip to the east coast in July. It was our first such trip, and our first outing in a while. Yay! I felt refreshed by the change. The train reached the coast, and we could see the ocean, our first sight of it since our arrival in North Korea. I saw a sentry box from the window of our train as it followed the coastline. It had neat stone walls, and a soldier armed with a bayonet stood within. The area was very clean and looked as if it had been carefully swept. "Ah, yes, North Korea is fighting the fight," I thought to myself. Suddenly, I was overcome by a vision of the glory of North Korea's struggle against U.S. imperialism.

My whole body began to shake in unbelievable shock.... That was the start of my active participation in the work of re-evaluating simultaneous world revolution. (pp. 189-190)

It is all well and good to be moved by the sight of a soldier armed with a bayonet standing in a sentry box against the background of a beautiful view of the sea, but it isn't logical. ...More significant here is the statement that this was their first trip since coming to Pyongyang, their first outing "in a while," implying that they lived under conditions of near-imprisonment.

Tamiya wrote about his own process of conversion:

The principle of simultaneous world revolution had come to seem increasingly hollow. None of us could explain clearly why we had tried so hard to achieve it. But if we gave up this slogan, we felt our entire reason for existence would disappear, and we would have no idea what we should be struggling for.

During this period, we were all thinking over various issues. How could we undergo our ideological conversion together? This was the main question in my mind at this time.

Some of my comrades felt deep commitment to the Red Army Faction and the idea of simultaneous world revolution; others had decided that the philosophy of *juche* was correct.

There may have been only nine of us, but there were differences between us all the same. Each had his own opinion. It would not be easy to reach a consensus, though we continued to agree on one thing: "We live and die together." Anyway, we had only each other to rely on. How could there be any life in separating from these comrades and going off on one's own? Therefore none of us had any intention of striking out alone.

For this reason, those of us who thought *juche* ideology was correct in its claims did not go so far as to say that the idea of simultaneous world revolution was nonsense.

But someone had to say it. And it came down to me. But even I was reluctant to voice it, since there were still those who clung to the idea, and I could not ignore them.

Despite our slogan of "We live and die together," and despite our shared purpose, the group relations became more awkward as our thoughts and ideology began to differ. In addition, I had come to think that as long as we held on to our ideas of "simultaneous world revolution," we would not be able to make any progress. We could not move on to the new until we had shed ourselves of the old.

So I proposed to the others that we deal with far more fundamental matters than wasting time in pointless discussions on simultaneous world revolution. Why had we thrown ourselves in with the revolution? Were we really fighting for the workers? Was not our own ideology flawed? By asking these and other questions, we began to revise our own ideological foundations. (pp. 190-91)

Because they could not make any logical progress or discoveries as things stood, Tamiya said they should start over from scratch. As the group's leader, Tamiya's problem was to find a way out of their current deadlock. How could he move the group forward while still preserving their unity? He was not proposing a new theory or a new ideology, which is clear when he refers to their discussions of simultaneous world revolution as "wasting time." He was proposing a whole new life-view. Only in this way could they overcome their differences of ideology and theory. "Let's start over," he said. Tamiya's writing here shows

frankly how the unity of politics and ideology among the *Yodogō* group members had at this time disintegrated. There was no orderly or logical process of conversion.

Here I have to touch once again on the circumstances of their decision to stay in North Korea. The haphazardly planned hijacking had not ended in the North Korean Workers' Party forcibly repatriating them, or sending them to prison; indeed, the Party had installed them in a first-class hotel. They had nothing in the way of personal items with them, and were completely dependent on the Workers' Party for everything from bedding and clothing to underwear, towels, and toothbrushes. Meals were luxurious, and a chef and an attendant were assigned to them exclusively. They were treated as honored guests.

Despite this, wrote Abe Kimihiro,

We were not very grateful for this treatment. In part, at the time, we took such things for granted; but in part we thought they were trying to placate us and we resisted the feelings of gratitude. But then we were really impressed when all of us received tailor-made suits. As we were being measured, we had a hard time suppressing our laughter.

"Huh, a suit. It's my first one."

"Yeah, me too. Who knew we would have to come to North Korea to get tailor-made suits?"

"Then we all felt the proper gratitude in our hearts." (pp. 163-64)

Here we can clearly see how they underwent a softening-up process. Though they tried to

resist it, such good treatment resulted in their "proper" gratitude. And this led gradually to feelings of *giri* ["obligation"] toward the Workers' Party, which in turn bound them more tightly to it. Their belief in their theories had already been bankrupted; in place of theory, they fell back on ingrained values. Their sense of obligation became their only spiritual prop. At the time, they coined a phrase, "revolutionary *giri*." To whom did they owe this obligation? To the Workers' Party, and to Kim Il Sung, who had extended such "heartwarming treatment" to them. This phrase of "revolutionary *giri*" remains a favorite among them even today.

Thus they were treated hospitably and provided with everything they needed, except freedom. They were forbidden to go out, and they were kept segregated from the "people." Abe Kimihiro wrote about how they tried to cope:

To release our frustration, we would sneak out and wander around different places. We would slip out after dark and climb a nearby hill-top to watch the surrounding villages. In winter we skated across the Daedong River to the other bank and visited the villages, then came back over a mountain. It was a thrill when we came across military training grounds or sentry boxes. Of course all this was a secret, but I think the statute of limitations has run out so I'm telling about it. (p. 177)

He meant the area around the guest house compound where they lived. Describing such ordinary walks as a "thrill" reveals the lack of personal freedom they had in their daily lives. They did not know the location of the compound, nor did anyone tell them how to get around. On those occasions when they went on a field trip or a tour, the Party always provided

cars with drivers. So they knew nothing of their surroundings except that they were in North Korea, somewhere in the outskirts of Pyongyang.

Every day their routine included ideological education. However, the instructors and professors sent to them by the Party paid no attention whatsoever to their discussions of theory. The only item on the curriculum was *juche* ideology.

They would rise at 6 a.m., eat breakfast, then spend the rest of the morning in study. After lunch there was a short break, followed by classes again. This was the routine, day after day, without change or breaks. After a day of "What is *juche*?" and "What must you do to master it?" there was always time allotted for discussion groups.

There was only one answer to each of the instructors' questions; to anyone answering otherwise, the same lecture would be repeated again and again. But the instructors never pressed for the "correct" answers. By the constant repetition of the same lecture, the group came to understand for themselves that there was only one correct answer.

Eventually, as the lectures continued, they finally got the point. And with that, the first stage of their "education" was complete: there was no escape except by giving the answer the instructors wanted to hear. They saw the light. Though they were insincere, they sought to give the answers the instructors expected. As far as the instructors were concerned, it didn't matter that their answers were insincere. What mattered was the process involved in eliciting the answers.

Though they didn't really believe in what they were saying, they answered according to the ideology of *juche*, and suppressed their discontent. But this process they were being subjected to gradually results in a spiritual disconnect, a dismantling of the self.

Everything begins to seem hollow, meaningless, pointless. At this point, a strange and new ideology can easily take root: only by accepting a new ideology and absorbing a new set of values and standards can one overcome the terrible sense of emptiness. The *Yodogō* hijackers eventually saw the light in this path. The instructors waited patiently for their students to reach this stage, and once no one any longer raised any objections, their teachings soaked in like water poured on sand.

It was an extremely effective way to brainwash the students: First probe into the psychology of the subject, then lead him into an independent acceptance of the correct ideology. This was the method of teaching *juche* ideology.

The "self-reliant" choice to accept the teaching means the student does not feel he is being coerced in any way. Instead, once an independent answer is made, more answers which do not contradict the first build up to a logical structure. Thus any doubts entertained along the way mean doubting one's own thinking, and require a "self-reliant" re-examination for illogic in one's own argument. It is the beginning of an endless process, an endless re-cycling around again and again. The only escape from this trap without going mad was to accept *juche* as the only truth.

Slowly but inexorably, the brainwashing continued, and finally bore fruit.

In his memoir, Tamiya Takamaro suddenly launched into the statement, "Self-criticism and mutual criticism are the most effective methods for forging a strong ideology, and also allow for a decisive summary of one's ideology." Then he continued, "I successfully rebuilt my own set of beliefs in this way, and so did my companions."

At this point, Tamiya's topic changed from his own process of ideological conversion to the process of his companions' achievement of political and organizational unity. I read on with some surprise at this change of pace in his

text.

It seemed that Tamiya himself had by this time stepped into the next phase. I understood this single fact and continued to read with increasingly mixed feelings rising in me. But let us continue to explore these matters, and look at some more of Tamiya's text. He wrote,

The best method for forging and strengthening one's ideology is through self-criticism and mutual criticism. First I prepared my own self-criticism, and then received the criticism of my comrades. In my self-criticism, I acknowledged that although I subjectively thought I was working on behalf of the people, in fact I was only interested in the narrow goals of the Red Army Faction, and my actions were all motivated by the interests of a small sectarian group. I criticized my tendency toward radical petit-bourgeois thought. Finally, I strongly criticized myself for not holding a properly *juche* attitude.

In a sense, we spoke of self-reliance more than anything else. Especially when we were thinking over our "line," and trying to live according to it, we had only ourselves to rely on. But the true meaning of "establishing a self-reliant attitude" means holding to a masterly attitude, and taking responsibility for one's own fate. But how deeply had I thought of Japan's fate, or spoken or acted responsibly? Perhaps my words and actions had been little thought out, based only on my own narrow and shallow experiences...

That time my comrades' criticism

of me was quite harsh, but I was grateful for it. Frank though their criticism was, it included a strong message of comradely loyalty, insisting that having come to North Korea with me as the leader, all of us must continue to advance along the correct road.

My comrades gave examples and criticized some actions of mine that I had not noticed before. One said I did not look on them as "comrades" but as "subordinates." Another commented on how when I spoke of the people fighting in Japan, I tended to speak critically without considering their hardships. One strict criticism questioned whether I was living each day thinking of Japan, and thinking of the people. I also began to understand how my least word could wound my comrades, resulting in an obstacle for our solidarity as a group.

Until then, I had thought that of all of us, I was the one who thought most and acted most on behalf of Japan and its people, so this criticism made me realize for the first time how arrogant I was. I made the devastating discovery that even when one thinks he is giving all he has for the people, actually achieving this is impossible. In this way, going through this criticism session was a great chance for me to reconsider myself.

In addition, I began to understand that the method of criticism is a very powerful tool for changing people. When I was in Japan, I was convinced that people did not

change easily, and that it was enough for those to change who wished to do so. However, when I underwent this criticism experience, I realized that by using this method, any human being could achieve a revolutionary existence. Following me, all the others began a complete analysis of their ideological beliefs through self-criticism and mutual criticism. [emphasis added by Takazawa] (pp. 192-94)

Upon reaching this point in Tamiya's memoir, I felt a stirring of uneasiness, of anxiety. I had come across something similar before. Dredging the bottom of my mind, I pulled up an old but clear memory from the distant past. This method of which he spoke was the same method that had been used in the snowy Japan Alps in 1972 in the "sōkatsu" and purge during the United Red Army Incident. Then, the processes of self-criticism and mutual criticism had ended in a purge and a massacre by the United Red Army of some of its own members.<sup>6</sup> I already knew the historical fallout from this event. A feeling of disquiet surrounded me as I continued to read.

This method of ideological analysis and personality remolding that Tamiya mentions is very commonly seen in North Korea, in weekly or monthly criticism meetings, either at the workplace or at district party meetings.... [It] is structured so that only by criticizing others can one become more revolutionary. Making criticism is part of one's disciplinary duties, and the criticism can be for anything from general lifestyle to daily acts and words, because everyday behavior is taken to indicate one's ideology. The criticism escalates in a spiral that cannot be stopped, since he who gives the most devastating criticisms gains the upper hand. Of course, there may be the rare example of success with the method, in situations where

there is total trust between the members of the group. But in his memoir, Tamiya clearly stated that "relations became more awkward as our thoughts and ideology began to differ."

The disintegration of the unity of the *Yodogō* group came through clearly in the memoirs. If giving harsh criticism showed great revolutionary disposition, the end result was that endless rounds of self-criticism and mutual criticism gradually wore away the distinction between friend and enemy, ending with the loss of all friendship. Soon enough the comrades who once swore to "live and die together" were targeting trivialities and fiercely denouncing each other. They mistakenly came to see finding an enemy within the organization as a meaningful political activity. In this, their standard of judgment was their newly-acquired *juche* ideology. From this time on, this ideology became their supreme guiding beacon.

The day came when they took down the three slogans they had posted on the walls of the guest house. Not only "We will defend and nurture simultaneous world revolution," but also their first resolution "We live and die together" was torn down and thrown away.



**Yodogō members announce their conversion to Juche ideology at a press conference in Pyongyang, May 1, 1972. From right front, Okamoto Takeshi,**

**Konishi Takahiro, Tamiya Takamaro, (unidentified person), Yoshida Kintarō, Abe Kimihiro. Photo from Kyōdō News, reprinted in Takazawa, Kōji, *Destiny: The Secret Operations of the Yodogō Exiles*, edited by Patricia G. Steinhoff. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2017, p. 403.**

The group of Red Army Faction members who had flown to North Korea were germinating the bud of disaster at the same time as, just across the Sea of Japan at a winter camp in the Japan Alps, the harried United Red Army was about to commit its own terrible mistake.<sup>7</sup>

There seemed to be a deep and fateful connection here, in that both cases were clashes with outside ideologies that resulted in calamity. In the United Red Army, there was friction over the Maoist principles of the Cultural Revolution. For the *Yodogō* hijackers, there was the encounter with Kim Il Sung's principle of *juche*, or self-reliance. Just this similarity is enough to give one shivers. It remains deeply puzzling that the dissolution of both groups in such a short time was not due to problems of theory or tactics, but to problems with the social values of duty, morale, and ethics.<sup>8</sup>

Having read thus far, I finally put away the manuscript. I was tired from my travels. And I felt a growing anxiety regarding what remained to be read.

Outside my hotel window, the sprawling city of Beijing was completely obscured by the night's darkness. Suddenly I sensed an evil presence flying in the pitch black, screaming grotesquely. It was the same evil darkness I had seen in the spring of 1972 in Karuizawa, looking at the Myōgi mountain range where the United Red Army purges had taken place.

I edited and published the *Yodogō* group's

memoirs several months later in Japan under the title *Twenty Years After Takeoff: To North Korea on the Yodogō*. Yoshida Kintarō's name is not included in the list of authors. In addition, just when the first proofs were ready for proof-reading, I received an urgent message from the *Yodogō* group requesting the deletion of

Okamoto Takeshi's segment of the manuscript. The reason they gave was, "Okamoto no longer wishes to return to Japan. Because the publication of this manuscript is a step in our move to return, his name cannot be listed with ours."<sup>9</sup>

**Translators** A group of Japanese University of Hawaii graduate students read *Destiny* while cataloguing the Takazawa Collection and proposed to translate it into English. Ryoko Yamamoto, Shinji Kojima, Eiko Saeki, Kazumi Higashikubo, Kazutoh Ishida, and Midori Ishida did the original rough translation of *Destiny*. With support from the University of Hawaii Japan Endowment, Lina Terrell, a graduate student who is also a professional translator, worked with Steinhoff to polish the translation.

**Takazawa Kōji**, the author of *Destiny*, is a former student activist in Japan who went on to become an author, editor, and independent investigative journalist. He was a student member of the New Left organization known as Bund (Kyōsanshugisha Dōmei) and became part of the Red Army Faction when it was expelled from Bund in the summer of 1969. He helped produce the Red Army Faction's publications and knew some members of the hijack group. In the 1990s he visited North Korea several times to meet with the *Yodogō* hijackers and published their writings in Japan. Over time he became suspicious of the stories they told him, and after his friend Tamiya died suddenly in 1995, he began tracing their tracks in Europe and Southeast Asia. He uncovered evidence that the group had been involved in luring young Japanese from Europe to North Korea. He published *Destiny: The Secret Operations of the Yodogō Exiles* in 1998. The book won the Kodansha Prize for Non-Fiction the following year. Although the remaining members of the *Yodogō* group in North Korea continue to deny their involvement in the kidnapping or luring of Japanese to North Korea, in 2002 the North Korean government gave a list of Japanese abductees to the Japanese government that included the three people he had linked to the *Yodogō* group. Takazawa donated his vast collection of Japanese New Left social movement materials to the University of Hawaii in 1993 [<http://www.takazawa.hawaii.edu>] and has added additional materials since, including all his research materials for *Destiny*.

**Patricia G. Steinhoff**, editor of the English translation, is professor of sociology and chair of the sociology department at the University of Hawaii. A Japan specialist focusing on the Japanese left, she has known Takazawa Kōji since the early 1980s, first as an informant and later as a colleague on projects involving the Japanese New Left. He facilitated the Japanese publication of her book on the Red Army, *Nihon Sekigunha: Sono Shakaigakuteki Monogatari* (Japan Red Army Factions: A Sociological Tale). Tokyo: Kawade Shōbō Shinsha, 1991, 1993. This book was later republished as *Shi eno Ideology: Nihon Sekigunha*. [Deadly Ideology: the Japanese Red Army Factions] Iwanami Modern Classics Series, Tokyo: Iwanami Publishing Company, 2003. When Takazawa donated his collection to the University of Hawaii, she became responsible for organizing and overseeing its cataloguing as a

manuscript collection within the university's Japanese Collection and developed the collection's bibliographic website. She has published numerous book chapters and journal articles about the Japanese New Left and is now revising and updating her Japanese book on the Red Army Faction for publication in English, along with a companion volume on the Japanese Red Army in the Middle East. In addition to adding an editor's introduction and a follow-up chapter to *Destiny* at Takazawa's request, she re-translated some passages to bring out nuances and added explanatory notes throughout the text. See an interview with the author about *The Red Army* [here](#).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The hijackers had stayed in this same hotel for four days after their arrival in Pyongyang, and then had been moved to a Workers Party guest house in the country some distance from the city, which has been their home ever since. On his first trip Takazawa did not visit their home. They came to Pyongyang to see him and he learned about what had happened from long conversations and the manuscripts that he had offered to publish for them in Japan. Although they went to Pyongyang as members of the Red Army Faction, they later came to be known in the media as the Yodogō group, after the name of the Japan Airlines plane they had hijacked.

<sup>2</sup> *Juche* ideology is the official ideology of North Korea, based on the writings of Kim Il Sung. The characters for *juche* 主体 are the same as the characters for self-reliance or subjecthood in Japanese 主体性. The Japanese philosophical concept of “shutaisei” or independent subjecthood, was a much debated and admired quality among New Left students in the late 1960s, but was understood in quite a different way from the North Korean *juche* concept. Takazawa wrote the word in *katakana* and we have kept it as *juche*, but in quotations sometimes render it as “self-reliance.”

<sup>3</sup> Shiomi Takaya, a philosophy graduate of Kyoto University, crafted the Red Army Faction's ideology while Tamiya organized and led its daring escapades.

<sup>4</sup> All citations in the text are to the book Takazawa published in Japan based on the hijackers' manuscripts, Tamiya Takamaro et al, *Hisho nijūnen: Yodogō de Choson e [Twenty Years after Takeoff: To North Korea on the Yodogō.]* Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1990.

<sup>5</sup> The term “giri” refers to a strong moral obligation in Japanese culture to repay one's benefactors. As radical left students, these men would have been dismissive of such a traditional cultural value, even though they would have felt its pull in their everyday lives. Calling it “revolutionary giri” allowed them to experience it positively.

<sup>6</sup> In ordinary Japanese parlance, a *sōkatsu* is simply an analysis of a recent activity, but here it was a demand for a personal re-evaluation of one's behavior and thoughts to produce ideological change. The United Red Army was formed in 1971 by remnants of the Red Army Faction and a Maoist group called the Revolutionary Left Faction, whose parent organization had broken with the Japan Communist Party to favor a Maoist line some years earlier. The merged group contained many members who were wanted by the police, and they retreated into the mountains to develop the group's ideology and prepare for future activity. A Maoist-inspired process of self-criticism and mutual criticism introduced by the Revolutionary Left Faction went out of control as the leaders began ordering physical attacks and harsh

punishments of their members. Their process of group criticism fed on itself, resulting in the death of a dozen members of the group during the winter of 1971-72. The group's leaders, Mori Tsuneo and Nagata Hiroko, called the demand for such an ideological self-criticism a "sōkatsu" and this new meaning was popularized in accounts of the purge. For a detailed account, see Steinhoff, Patricia G. 1992. "Death by Defeatism and Other Fables: The Social Dynamics of the Rengo Sekigun Purge." Pp. 195-224 in *Japanese Social Organization*, edited by T. S. Lebra. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

<sup>7</sup> The Japanese New Left struggled mightily to make sense of the United Red Army purge by analyzing it from its own Marxist ideological perspective as a policy error of disastrous proportions, hence a "terrible mistake." In English calling it a "mistake" seems to trivialize it, but both the participants in the purge and the people around them understood such an unintended policy error as a serious matter for which one needed to apologize and seek forgiveness.

<sup>8</sup> In Takazawa's view, both groups confronted ideologies that were distinctly different from Shiomi's theory that guided the Red Army Faction. However, when he examined the process more closely, they were not persuaded by these different ideological positions, but instead found themselves unexpectedly vulnerable to more fundamental, ingrained social values such as *giri* and deference to authority.

<sup>9</sup> Both Takazawa's friend Yoshida and Okamoto had disappeared from the group before he began visiting them. *Destiny* examines what happened to them and how the remaining group members tried to cover it up.