

Stories from Beyond the Grave: Investigating Japanese Burial Grounds in North Korea 悲劇はなぜ起こったか 朝鮮北部の日本人埋葬地が語るもの

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Translation and Introduction by Mark E. Caprio

*The ravages of World War II and its aftermath in both Europe and Asia provoked one of the most extensive human migrations hitherto witnessed in world history as refugees scurried to escape the destruction. After the guns of war had been silenced and peace restored, these displaced peoples either by choice or force embarked on a long, and often dangerous, journey back to their homelands. Hundreds of thousands of these refugees, many further fleeing post-World War II battles in "liberated" states, died en route. Ben Shephard, in *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (London, Bodley Head 2010), dubs this "largely ignored" story the "war's most important legacy" (p. 4). The figures that Shephard provides of European refugees are mindboggling: as many as 17 million foreigners and Germans displaced within Germany; 11 million Germans returning from their country's occupied territories; millions of displaced peoples from German-occupied territories, including Jews released from concentration camps, returning home.*

This history would be repeated three months later, with significant variations, when Japan announced its intention to surrender to the Allied forces. Postwar migration in Northeast Asia included an estimated six million Japanese repatriating from imperial outposts and Pacific War battlefields, and three to four million Koreans returning primarily from Manchuria

and Japan. Additionally, the region witnessed large-scale Chinese migration that included Taiwanese returning from Japan and mainland Chinese fleeing the beginnings of the civil war between Nationalist and Communist forces. Repatriation to and from Japan was envisaged as a two-way process: ships taking Japan-based Koreans to the peninsula would be reloaded with returning Japanese. Whereas in principle all Japanese were expected to repatriate, SCAP's policy was that the repatriation of non-Japanese in Japan would not be forced but voluntary. For various reasons, including the fact that Korea was in turmoil, a large percentage of Koreans and Taiwanese chose to forgo repatriation and remain in Japan.

Whatever their desires, not all Japanese residents in Korea were able to return to their homeland. In the following discussion, Kyoto University Professor Mizuno Naoki describes one population that died in northern Korea over the months that immediately followed the war's end. At the war's end approximately 400,000 Japanese residents lived in this region, of whom over 34,000 were laid to rest in one of the 71 known burial areas in North Korea. In late summer 2013 he joined a team of scholars to investigate the burial sites of these Japanese. The burial areas include formal cemeteries that existed from colonial times, and less-formal burial sites, some created literally where the Japanese died. The Japanese scholars examined six of these sites for the purpose of gathering information on the stories concerning the sites themselves and the people entombed within. Mizuno also provides important information on

the barriers that prevented these Japanese from repatriating, including Soviet policy in these northern provinces and the deterioration of U.S.-Soviet relations.

As with the European examples, these stories of Japanese are ones that have been ignored over the past seven decades. Rather, attention has been focused on the several hundred thousand Japanese (mostly military) that the Soviet military forcibly relocated to Siberia after the war for labor purposes. Mizuno's efforts offer a more humane side of postwar Japanese-Soviet-North Korean relations. He records examples of the cooperation provided by local and occupation officials who issued the Japanese papers for transport or tacitly looked the other way as they crossed the thirty-eighth parallel. Mizuno cites further cooperation by contemporary North Korean officials and local residents as a critical factor underlying any successes their investigations achieved.

There remain a number of sequels to the stories of these deceased Koreans. Living Japanese also remained in northern Korea beyond the establishment of the North Korean state in 1948. Tessa Morris-Suzuki has been active in bringing to light stories of Japanese in North Korea. She estimates that 600 Japanese who continued to reside in North Korea as late as 1956 no doubt have descendants who remain in the country. Additionally, many of the 6,300 Japanese citizens, including naturalized Koreans, Japanese wives and children of mixed marriages who relocated to North Korea with the 87,000 Japan-based Koreans from 1959, also continue to reside in North Korea. A number of their dappokusha offspring have recently begun to trickle back into Japan after fleeing North Korea. Strained relations between the Japanese and North Korean governments have prevented those Japanese too old or weak to escape who may have wished to return to their homeland, if only for a visit with long-separated relatives. These stories join the thousands of others that Mizuno and his

colleagues attempt to uncover in their on-going investigations. Mizuno notes the potential of the project to provide a common purpose for officials on both sides that could contribute to the warming of relations in other contested areas that separate the two states. At the same time one must consider why the Japanese government remains silent on the fate of these deceased citizens, while continuing to demand the repatriation of bodies of deceased Japanese more recently kidnapped by North Korea. mc

Between August 27 and September 5, 2013 I had the opportunity to visit the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea). My purpose for this visit was to join a team of Japanese who, at the request of the Japan-based Northern Bereaved Families Liaison Committee (*Kita izoku renrakukai*), were charged with the task of investigating burial grounds of the 34,000 Japanese who died in northern Korea from the time of Japan's defeat to the fall of 1946. At this time approximately 400,000 Japanese resided in northern Korea.¹ The remains of the majority of these Japanese lie in formal cemeteries and scattered burial areas throughout North Korea. The stories of Japanese internment in Siberia and Japanese children left behind in Northern China (Manchuria) by repatriating Japanese have received much publicity. However, those of the Japanese in postwar northern Korea, by contrast, have been for the most part ignored.²

Accompanying me in this investigation were three scholars: a modern Korean historian, a cultural anthropologist, and an urban architecture historian. We were joined by a dozen or so people from the Japanese media. In total we spent a total of eight days conducting these investigations at six sites in P'yŏngyang and in the hinterlands, a task we could not have accomplished without cooperation and assistance from the North Korean side. Though we were examining burial grounds this was not an excavation effort to dig up human remains. Even if we had found such remains our team

lacked the capacity to determine whether they belonged to dead Japanese or Koreans. Our purpose was simply to survey the burial sites and the surrounding areas to uncover stories that led to the location serving as the people's final resting place. These burial sites consisted of two different types: the formally established cemetery plots and the less formal randomly selected burial areas.



1. Author (right) listening to residents' accounts at the Panghyŏn site.

Our task relied heavily on notes and memoirs (*shuki*) left by some 300 Japanese returnees. These critically indispensable documents ranged from detailed accounts of the death and burial circumstances, to sketches of the burial areas, to simple notations of the deceased. We organized into lists information that contained potential clues for locating burial sites and made copies of map sketches. We also prepared maps of cities and other documents to aid our search of the six sites to which we gained access for this investigation. Thus, our mission sought to unite the records left by returnees with the present circumstances. Understandably, we discovered numerous discrepancies between the returnee's records and the present circumstances, particularly in distances recorded on their maps. However we were generally able to conclude that the two were in rough accordance. By talking with local administrative staff and long-term residents of

the area we gained a glimpse of the local history surrounding the burial sites and, in some cases, confirmed the reasons behind the discrepancies between records left by returnees and the present-day circumstances.

Japanese Cemeteries and Burial Sites in Northern Korea

We were permitted access to six burial sites (see map below). Unfortunately the numbers of deceased are but estimates as it is next to impossible to gain exact figures of the number of Japanese buried at these sites.

龍山 Ryongsan Cemetery (western suburbs of P'yŏngyang)

This public cemetery in P'yŏngyang reserves one area for the estimated 2,700 tombs of Japanese who died in the city. In 1957 it was moved one kilometer from the original site to make room for the construction of a transformer substation. Between 1971-72 it was again moved to the city's suburbs, to its present position. North Korean graves accompanied Japanese graves in both these relocations. The graves of the two peoples are distinguished by Korean graves being marked, while Japanese graves remain unmarked. The cemetery being located on a slope with generous southern exposure has encouraged discussion to convert it into an orchard but at present these plans are on hold.



2. Ryongsan Cemetery in the western suburbs of P'yöngyang. The front side has Japanese graves, the other side of the mountain is reserved for Korean graves.

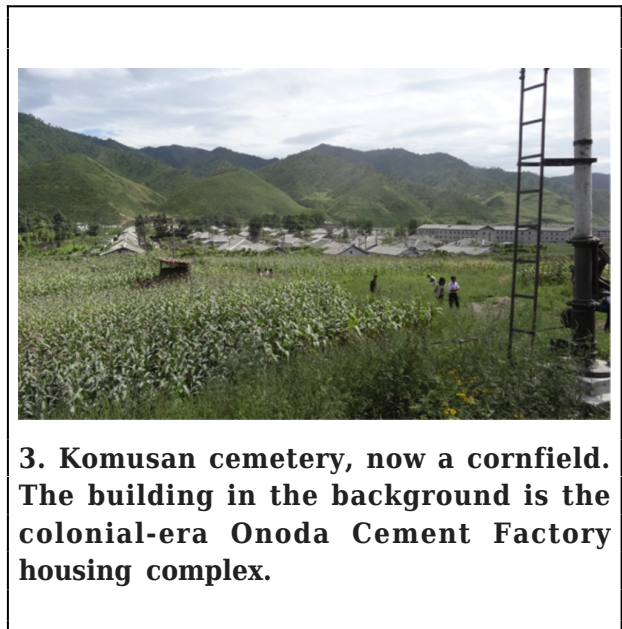
三合里 Samhamri (eastern suburbs of P'yöngyang)

After Japan's defeat in August 1945, the occupying Soviet armies concentrated Japanese soldiers and officers in barracks, before shipping them off to Siberia. In 1946, many Japanese soldiers who were returned from Siberia contacted cholera and died. This area remains a military administration zone. Facing one military facility is a small hill that serves as a cemetery. According to local residents, when in 1987 people dug foundations for their homes here "bones surfaced. We learned three years ago that they were the remains of Japanese. Even today bones continue to appear in the fields we till." A reported 1,300 Japanese are buried at Samhamri. A partial name list remains, though it remains difficult to identify specific graves.

古茂山 Komusan (Puryöng Gun, North Hamgyöng Province)

After Japan's defeat the Soviet forces converted the company housing of the Onoda Cement Factory into an area of concentration for Japanese forces in North Hamgyöng Province before transporting them to Siberia. At this

time a cemetery on the east side of the railway connecting Ch'öngjin with Höeryöng was been designated as a burial site for Japanese military personnel who died prior to being transported. This site has since been converted to a cornfield. Documents left by Japanese soldiers confirm another burial site situated on the west side of these rail tracks where their comrades who died after returning from Siberia were laid to rest. When we inquired as to this possibility a local People's Committee member informed: "The floods of 1960-61 washed bones from the foot of the mountain into the river. As the river carried away many of these remains we have no way of telling anything more about this burial site." Thus there remains a strong possibility that two burial sites were located in the Komusan area. While we were not permitted access to this second site, we left a request that it be included in future investigations. We can now estimate that about 3,300 Japanese died in Komusan.



3. Komusan cemetery, now a cornfield. The building in the background is the colonial-era Onoda Cement Factory housing complex.

富坪 Pup'yöng (Chöngp'yöng Gun, South Hamgyöng Province)

Japanese living in North Hamgyöng Province who fled the invading Soviet armies assembled in the South Hamgyöng Province cities of Hamhüng and Hüngnam. Not all could be

accommodated here and so in December 1945 many were relocated to the former Japanese military barracks in Pup'yǒng, which became a designated concentration camp for about 3,300 Japanese refugees, of whom 1,431 succumbed to starvation and epidemic (*densenbyō*). Among concentration camps in northern Korea this camp recorded the highest fatality rate. Cho Hŭisŭng, Director of the Social Science Academy Historical Research Institute, says of the local history of this gravesite: "Three years ago bones surfaced during the construction of a new highway. In our investigation into the ethnicity of these remains we learned of a Japanese cemetery located elsewhere, near the Pup'yǒng Culture Center." The vice-director of regional management added, "residents called this place 'Myokol' (valley of graves). Remains surfaced when this area was converted from a pine forest to a cornfield. We didn't know at the time that these were the remains of Japanese." Notes left by returnees reveal that during the cold winter, when digging became difficult, the dead were buried in mass graves rather than being given individual plots.



4. Pup'yǒng burial site where remains surfaced in a cornfield.

興南緑が丘 Hŭngnam Midori ga oka (South Hamgyǒng Province, Hamhŭng City Hŭngdǒk region)

In Hŭngnam was located the Japan Fertilizer Company (Nihon Chisso) which was part of a large industrial complex. There were thus many Japanese residents in the area. In addition to the Hŭngnam complex, Nihon Chisso had also constructed various facilities in North Hamgyǒng Province. Soon after defeat, Japanese refugees from North Hamgyǒng Province moved to Hŭngnam where they joined previous residents in designated concentration areas. Close to 3,000 Japanese died here from hygiene issues and epidemics. The majority of these people were buried at the foot of Samkaksan (Mt. Triangle). As the mountain is today off limits we were not permitted to visit the site.

Three hospitals for Japanese refugees were located in Hŭngnam. Of these two were branches of the Nihon Chisso main hospital. The third was a former dormitory house for company employees. This hospital was known as *Midori ga Oka* (Green Hills) Hospital. At present it goes by the name Hŭngdǒkli Chonghap Chinryoso (Hŭngdǒkli General Clinic). Those who passed away at this hospital were buried on a mountain to the south of the building. There are three burial sites in the city of Hŭngnam, but this was the only one opened for our investigation. Returnee notes informed of the hospital and a school in the immediate area, which proved consistent with the present. One local whom we were able to interview informed that his "father had worked for Nihon Chisso's soda factory from 1943. He lived on the other side of the hill in the living quarters that the company provided its Korean workers. Toward the end of the war he moved to an air raid shelter at the foot of the mountain, and then after the war built a house there. Seven or eight years ago while digging around my house I found human bones. Up until that time this area had been an acacia grove."

方峴 Panghyǒn (North P'yǒng'an Province, Kuisǒng City)



5. An agricultural storage facility located in Panghyŏn that served as a concentration facility for Japanese refugees from Manchuria.

This was a small town located along a train line. Refugees from Manchuria, mainly women and children, were dropped off here and concentrated in schools, agriculture storehouses, and other such buildings. During the harsh winter they sought both food and protection against the cold in shared housing with Koreans. Dysentery and other epidemics claimed the lives of 157 people, ninety percent of whom were children. Their final resting place was a common grave that sits on the southern slope of a mountain. A 78-year old male resident offered: "Every resident of Panghyŏn accepted a Japanese refugee into their home. We lived together. When a Japanese died a member of the regional People's Committee buried the person. I was a student in the public school at the time, and I didn't know where they buried these people. Around 1983, when I built my house, their remains surfaced. This area apparently was a common burial ground for Koreans from long ago and up until 1950 it was filled with graves. But they have since been relocated. Director Cho Hŭisŭng, who has conducted investigations in the area, added: "Military swords excavated in the area confirm the site to have been a

Japanese burial area. Additionally, hand mirrors and other Japanese items have also been found here. Until these discoveries we believed the remains to have been Korean. When people who lived in concentration areas died, their corpse had to be carried from the other side of this mountain to the common cemetery. Japanese also died of diarrhea as well."

Of additional value are the maps and death rosters that returnees compiled before they returned to Japan. These documents could facilitate our investigation of locating burial areas and determining who is entombed there.

Chart: North Korean Cemeteries and Burial Sites for Japanese³

Province	Number of Burial Areas (verified)	Number of buried	Main Cemeteries and Burial Sites
North Hamgyŏng	13	5,500	Komusan, Puryŏng Ch'ŏngjin, Sŏngjin, Unggi
South Hamgyŏng	12	14,900	Hambŭng, Hŭngnam, Pup'yŏng, Wŏnsan
North P'yŏng'an	19	2,300	Chŏngju, Kwaksan, Sŏnch'ŏn, Panghyŏn, Pakch'ŏn, Namsi
South P'yŏng'an	8	9,600	Ryongsan (P'yŏngyang) Samhamri (P'yŏngyang), Chimmamp'o, Kaech'ŏn
Hwanghae	8	300	Kyŏmp'o, Haeju, Sinmak
Kangwŏn	8	200	Chumunjin
Kyŏnggi	3	1,000	Kaesŏng (south of 38°)
Total	71	33,500	

Where are all the Cemeteries?

Between the 1940s and 1950s the Japanese Ministry of Welfare compiled a list of 71 known cemeteries in North Korea where Japanese are buried. However, those who died while repatriating to Japan were buried in makeshift gravesites along the road rather than in formal cemeteries. For this reason the total number of burial sites is potentially infinite. The Ministry included in its list only those cemeteries or burial sites that exceeded a fixed number of dead.

It is often difficult to differentiate between cemetery (*bochi*) and gravesite (*maisŏchi*). We distinguish between the two as follows: a Japanese cemetery indicates a colonial era "common cemetery" where Japanese were buried after the war. Common cemeteries of the colonial period where mainly Koreans were buried usually did not include Japanese. After

defeat, when time did not permit formal cremation ceremonies, Japanese too came to be buried in common cemeteries, but in an area segregated from their Korean counterparts. As these cemeteries remain in use today searching for the site is a relatively easy task. P'yŏngyang's Ryongsan cemetery and North P'yŏng'an's Panghyŏn cemetery fall into this category. Gravesites, on the other hand, were designated sites close to concentration areas of Japanese that served as makeshift burial areas for the dead. Rather than as a formal cemetery, these places were originally used as dry fields and forests and thus were not properly managed. These sites of course remain rather difficult to locate.

The estimates of the numbers of deceased Japanese buried in the cemeteries and gravesites listed in the above chart can only be given in the hundreds, rather than in exact numbers. Those sites rendered in bold were places where we could confirm the actual location as a burial site. For other places, such as in Wŏnsam where burials were conducted in a number of different places, a complete list of all burial sites has yet to be compiled. Also evident is that locating all sites remain works in progress, even though the fact that many Japanese are buried in a particular area is certain. We can assume the general location of still unconfirmed burial areas, problems of accessibility (either due to their being unreachable or off limits) prevents the investigation teams from confirming their exact locations.

Who were the Dead?

Who were these Japanese who died in northern Korea over the year following Japan's defeat? Of the estimated 400,000 Japanese who resided in the northern provinces of the Korean peninsula at the time of Japan's defeat, about 120,000 were affiliated with the Japanese military. After the Soviet military invaded northeast China (Manchuria), another 70,000

Japanese crossed into northern Korea as refugees. Of these, about 30,000 returned to northeastern China after being denied permission to cross the thirty-eighth parallel into U.S. occupied southern Korea.

The large number of dead among Japanese refugees in North Hamgyŏng Province, which endured the heaviest fighting between the Japanese and Soviet armies,⁴ distinguishes them from Japanese residents in other Korean provinces. After the Soviet invasion, many Japanese residents of North Hamgyŏng fled to neighboring South Hamgyŏng where they were interned in concentration areas and faced circumstances similar to refugees coming in from Manchuria. The Japanese victims in northern Korea can be grouped in the following four categories:

1. Japanese military personnel
2. Japanese residents in Korea from before defeat
3. Refugees from Manchuria
4. Refugees from North Hamgyŏng Province to other areas

It becomes possible to surmise the causes of so many Japanese deaths by considering the circumstances that each group faced after the war's end.

Japanese military personnel, upon being defeated, were disarmed and placed in concentration areas in different locations by the advancing Soviet military. From late September they began to be transported to Siberia, as well as Central Asia and Mongolia. After being sent to Siberia by the Soviet military, an estimated 27,000 sick and injured Japanese were returned to northern Korea. This "gyakusō" (reversed transport) began in April 1946. Despite receiving treatment in concentration area hospitals and medical clinics, the majority of these "returned" Japanese succumbed due to their weak physical constitutions. Many of these Japanese were buried in Komusan cemetery and P'yŏngyang's

Samhamri gravesite.

Members of the second group, the 200,000 Japanese residents of northern Korea in provinces other than North Hamgyŏng, were among the first to move into southern Korea for repatriation after the Soviet Union invaded. However, the majority of these residents remained in their places of residence even after the emperor's surrender announcement. Mounting Korean anti-Japanese sentiment and the Soviet military's arrival forced these people to think about repatriation. Their movement, however, was completely restricted from late September. Furthermore, their housing being requisitioned by the Soviets and Korean peace preservation corps (*poandae*),⁵ forced them to relocate to areas established for their concentration or shared housing with those whose houses had not been seized. Many people in this category were civil servants, teachers, police officers, and company employees. Their homes being official or company residences were particularly attractive to the Soviet military.

These Japanese, having lost their jobs, found alternative employment on Soviet-sponsored work details (manual labor), or in factories, shops, and farms run by Koreans. The income from these jobs allowed them to earn money or food to sustain their livelihood. Epidemics in the concentration area took the lives of many of these Japanese, a rather high percentage of whom were laid to rest in P'yŏngyang's Ryongsan Cemetery.

Refugees, who constitute the last two groups, encountered a unique array of dangers. Japanese refugees from northern China (Manchuria) were interned primarily in North and South P'yŏng'an Province; those who had resided in North Hamgyŏng Province were collected in South Hamgyŏng Province concentration areas. Family separations had increased after men were called to military duty during the war, thus leaving their families

without a reliable male caretaker. Refugees from Manchuria included a high percentage of women and children. Those interned in concentration areas had no place to seek employment. Their being restricted to the area prevented them from seeking employment outside the area. Means of attaining food either through purchase or barter being scarce forced these refugees to depend on Soviet rations for their survival. Unsanitary conditions and malnutrition caused many refugees to die of epidemics such as dysentery and typhus.⁶

Why were the Japanese Detained?

The tragedy of Japanese residents in northern Korea unfolded over the initial year following Japan's defeat in World War II. The question remains, however, as to why the Soviet military detained these people. The thirty-eighth parallel divided the Soviet and U.S. occupations on the Korean peninsula. Crossing this parallel became illegal, thus preventing Japanese and Koreans in the north from coming and going across this line. This is generally considered the reason why Japanese remained in northern Korea. However, it remains an insufficient explanation for the tragedy they encountered. In addition to the barrier that the parallel formed in restricting passage to the south, the movement of Japanese residents within northern Korea was also restricted. While initially the degree of these restrictions varied by location, by September 1945 Soviet military directives had succeeded in controlling Japanese movement in most of the provinces. From this time, Japanese had to request permission should they wish to change their place of residence. We see this in North P'yŏng'an's Wunsan Gun, where the Japan Mining Company managed a large gold mine. Here a directive was issued on September 10 that required Japanese to obtain permission "to change their residence" and "to travel a long distance from their residence." Failure to do so would result in severe punishment.⁷

Confining the Japanese allowed the Soviet military to better manage the people. But these restrictions also had a specific reason: it allowed the occupiers to search out Japanese military personnel and, once found, detain them in preparation for their deportation to Siberia. After defeat, Japanese troops were told to return to their units, where they were disarmed and sent to labor in the Soviet Union. However, in North Hamgyōng Province, many Japanese troops who had been separated from their units escaped to other regions. Japanese soldiers who had family in northern Korea were released from duty, or deserted their units, to return to their homes. The Soviet military sought out Japanese military personnel who had merged into civilian Japanese groups.

Here we see one important reason for the confinement of all Japanese in concentration areas. From fall 1945 to spring 1946 the Soviet military aggressively searched the concentration areas and group living quarters for Japanese military personnel; it also ordered Japanese Sewakai, Japanese groups organized across the Korean peninsula to assist Korea's Japanese residents after the war, to submit to them lists of demobilized troops. We see one such example in the city of Kyōmip'o (present day Songrim), Hwanghae Province, where Japan Iron Company's large ironworks complex was located. On November 25 the Soviet military issued an order for all Japanese military personnel who had returned from their units after defeat to assemble. This directive assured that "as demobilized soldiers are considered POWs the Soviet army is prepared to repatriate them to Japan." The next day 111 Japanese boarded a train heading for P'yōngyang. There is no evidence whether they ever made it back to their country.⁸

After the spring of 1946 the purpose that drove Siberia internment disappeared. When Joseph Stalin issued the order for this internment in 1945 the Soviet premier set a goal of transporting 500,000 Japanese military

personnel. By the beginning of the following year this number had been exceeded as the Soviet military had interned more than 600,000 by this time, with more than ten percent being transported originally from northern Korea. Moreover, the transport of Japanese from Manchuria had been halted from April 1946 after the Soviet military withdrew. These circumstances would indicate that the internment of Japanese military in northern Korea, too, should have been stopped around this time.

We might also consider that the 300,000 interned Japanese constituted a burden to the Soviets after they ended the program that transported Japanese to Siberia. The Soviet Union and Korean authorities, involved in the rather arduous task of organizing a political administration in the north (the North Korean Interim People's Committee had been formed on February 8, 1946), began to feel the burdens of having to feed the Japanese and provide for their medical needs. One might assume that they would have been eager to relieve themselves of this burden. And perhaps they were.

The image left of the Soviet military over the year following Japan's defeat centers on the violent treatment to which it subjected Japanese refugees. But in fact they distributed food to these people as well. There were problems in the Japanese being occasionally cut off from this food, and their regularly receiving less than that distributed to the Korean people. However, the Soviets did not leave the Japanese to starve during this period. The Japanese also received medical treatment in hospitals run by the Soviet Union in P'yōngyang and Hamhŭng. This treatment sought to control the spread of epidemics within and without the Japanese concentration areas. The poor harvest of 1945-46 throughout the Korean Peninsula caused a food shortage throughout the area. The burden of having to distribute food to this large population of

Japanese only added to the difficulties that Soviet and northern Korean authorities faced.

Indeed, from spring 1946 we see these authorities providing tacit approval to allow Japanese to cross the thirty-eighth parallel into southern Korea. The end of June also saw travel restrictions relaxed. Crossing the parallel remained strictly controlled, and no trains were permitted to cross it. Officially it was still impossible for people to gain permission to do so. However, unofficial cooperation by northern Korean authorities helped groups of Japanese to cross over into southern Korea.⁹ The Koreans provided them the papers they needed to travel, as well as transportation in the form of trains, trucks, and boats to take them to a point where they could walk across the parallel. One unique case saw a group of Japanese travel from P'yŏngyang in July being provided with a cargo train by North Korean Interim Committee Secretary Kang Ryanguk, who was related to the North Korean leader Kim Il Sung on his maternal side. He also provided the travelers with 14 to 15 bags of rice.¹⁰ Naturally this story is somewhat different from that experienced by most Japanese. Purchasing transportation on a truck or boat was beyond the financial means of most; often refugees who could afford the ride were forced off the transport vehicle en route, before they reached their anticipated destination.

In June 1946 an outbreak of cholera along the entire Korean peninsula forced the United States to halt crossings between the north and south altogether to control the spread of the epidemic.¹¹ At this time it requested Soviet cooperation, which it gained. The thirty-eighth parallel was then completely closed; Japanese movement south ground to a halt. Thus, while there were complications after the spring of 1946 northern Korean authorities demonstrated a positive attitude toward Japanese repatriation, and the Soviet military tacitly approved their return to Japan. However, despite the end of the Siberia

internment policy leading to Soviet encouragement of Japanese repatriation, other international factors, namely the deepening U.S.-Soviet rift, frustrated progress in Japanese repatriation.

U.S.-Soviet Maneuvering and Repatriation Complications

Japanese repatriation being halted in the Soviet-occupied northern Korea region from spring 1946 was one important issue that Soviet and United States representatives addressed in meetings convened by the Allied Council for Japan (ACJ), an advisory body of General Headquarters, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (GHQ/SCAP). On February 26, 1946 the Soviet Union ACJ representative dispatched a letter to General Douglas MacArthur that stated the Soviet's intention to repatriate Japanese from ports such as Wŏnsan and Chin'namp'o (present day Nampo). The letter further instructed that the responsibility for transportation and food costs was to be assumed by the Japanese. MacArthur, however, rejected this argument, and replied that the Soviet military should use the Japanese ships it had seized after Japan's defeat to carry these people home. This reply halted negotiations on this issue. The ACJ convened in June where the Soviet representative explained his country's dilemma: unless the Supreme Commander (MacArthur) provided vessels for the Japanese they could not be repatriated from northern Korea. To the Soviets, responsibility for the repatriation of these refugees lay with Japan, which remained under MacArthur's authority.

A second issue was whether all Japanese would be repatriated. At the end of June 1946 the Soviet Union announced that all Japanese in its areas of occupation, save for those interned in Siberia, would be allowed to return home. It requested that SCAP take the necessary measures for this purpose. SCAP responded by demanding that all Japanese, including the

Siberian internees, be included. Deliberations once again reached a standstill.¹² The Soviets wished to return all Japanese residents in northern Korea and Manchuria. Yet, it regarded those in Siberia as "POWs" and thus sought to exploit their labor for as long as possible. The United States responded by warning that both Japanese and international public opinion was making this an issue that would raise ill feeling toward the Soviet Union. This strong interest in the Siberian internees pushed aside the issue of Japanese who remained in northern Korea. In this way, resolution of this Japanese repatriation issue, though considered an important issue in early 1946, became hostage to Soviet-U.S. political maneuvering.

On November 27 of that year the two sides finally reached a tentative agreement (*zantei kyōtei*) that sought to resolve the Siberian internment issue. Just under one month later, on December 19, this agreement was formalized. But positive developments had already commenced as repatriation ships began returning Japanese home from the ports of Maoka (Karafuto [Sahalin]), Dairen (Dalian, China), and Nakhodka (Soviet Union). On December 16 two ships, the Eiroku-maru and the Daizui-maru, carrying a total of about 5,000 Japanese, left from the northern Korean port of Hŭngnam. Over the next year and a half more than 13 repatriation ships would transport 31,921 Japanese (including 22,195 military personnel) from northern Korea to Japanese ports. Prior to this exodus by sea more than 200,000 Japanese civilians who had previously been stopped at the thirty-eighth parallel were permitted to cross over into southern Korea to begin their repatriation via this extended journey.

Lingering Issues

I have detailed the on-site investigations and historical inquiry of Japanese burial sites in North Korea, along with Japanese detainment

and repatriation. These investigations remain a work in progress. Several outstanding issues require further attention. One such issue concerns the continued efforts to determine the locations of hitherto unknown cemeteries and burial sites. Much information remains to be uncovered from documents drafted by Japanese returnees. However, government bodies such as the Ministry of Welfare and Labor also possess critical documents that remain in archives closed to the public. In the 1940s and 1950s the Japanese government collected information in the form of testimony and reports that they requested from repatriating Japanese. These materials have not been made available to researchers and now have been all but forgotten. It is critical for the continuation of these investigations that the Japanese government reveals the location of these reports and make them available for investigation purposes.

Even if this information is made available, the cooperation of the North Korean government is required to fully utilize what it has to offer. Much can be learned regarding the correct location of these burial areas by talking with local officials and residents. Smooth progress in these investigations would be greatly facilitated by positive deliberation and negotiation between the Japanese and North Korean governments. At present, however, discussions on normalization have come to a complete standstill. Perhaps the issue of burial sites could be useful in restarting these negotiations. This issue is one, however, that begs resolution even before the two countries convene to settle their diplomatic squabbles. Members of the bereaved families are aging; residents of North Korea who have information on these stories of the burial areas are also decreasing in number. Time is not on our side.

In 2012 the Bereaved Grave Visitation Group (*Izoku bosandan*) made its first visit to North Korea. Since then there has been talk of the erection of a group tomb or a memorial

tombstone (*ireihi*) in P'yŏngyang or somewhere convenient for Japanese to honor these deceased relatives. This project, however, is not one that the bereaved families can complete independent of government involvement and support, including financial assistance. The Japanese government maintains an undeniable responsibility for the deaths of Japan's military personnel. It already has endeavored to collect the remains of the war dead in various battlegrounds spread across Asia and the Pacific; it must assume the same responsibility for those Japanese soldiers who died in northern Korea. Additionally, it cannot ignore the civilian deaths. As for a memorial to these people, it is rather difficult to imagine a memorial tombstone being erected on North Korean territory without Japanese government assistance. As this paper suggests, the Soviet Union must assume responsibility for the majority of Japanese deaths. Also, the role that the Soviet-U.S. rift played in delaying repatriation cannot be ignored. However, when we consider why Japanese civilians came to reside in northern Korea-Japanese prewar colonial rule over Korea and its war of invasion onto the Asian continent-the Japanese government's responsibility comes into focus. In the context of these historic events that culminated in Japan's defeat, the Japanese who relocated to Korea encountered arduous difficulties that placed them in a position that threatened their very lives. Ending this tragedy by clarifying the truth is required to ease the spirits of the dead. For this reason it is inconceivable to separate Japanese military from Japanese civilian.

Standing in the front of cemeteries and burial sites of Japanese who died in northern Korea, I feel hollowness in the often-heard pledge to "answer to the spirits of the honorable dead" (*eirei ni kotaeru*).

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Notes

¹ In total an estimated 700-800-000 Japanese resided on the Korean peninsula at the time of the war's conclusion. According to Ch'oe Yŏngho of Yŏngsan University in Pusan, Japanese relocating to the Korean peninsula in large numbers during the final months of the war to escape Allied bombing of Japan's cities make it difficult to arrive at an exact number. See his *Ilbunin sehwahoe* (Japanese Relief

Society) (Seoul: Nonhǒng, 2013).

² One important exception is the work of Morita Yoshio, *Chōsen shūsen no kiroku* (Records of the War's End in Korea) (Tokyo: Gannando, 1964). Tessa Morris-Suzuki examines Japanese who remained in North Korea until the mid-1950s in her "The Forgotten Japanese in North Korea: Beyond the Politics of Abduction." *Asia Pacific Journal*.

³ Numbers of buried from Ministry of Welfare, *Zokuzoku hikiage engo no kiroku* (Records of Returnee Relief, 3rd edition) (1963), 269. Place names are those that existed in 1945. Those place names rendered in bold were the ones we could confirm.

⁴ Translators Note: On August 8, 1945 the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and sent its armies into Manchuria the next day. Over the next week Soviet troops would enter northern Korea, arriving at the North Hamgyōng cities of Unggi on August 10 and Ch'ōngjin on August 13, followed by the South Hamgyōng city of Wōnsan on August 16. On August 24 Soviet troops reached P'yōngyang. The first American troops, an advance team, landed at Inch'ōn in southern Korea in early September, to be followed by the XXIV Corps arrival in Seoul on September 8.

⁵ Bruce Cumings writes that the *poandae* formed as a police unit soon after liberation to assist in collecting rice and taxes and coordinating the movement of people in northern Korea. This corps would later form the basis of the North Korean military. Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 394, 411-413.

⁶ Over the 1990s and early 2000s a number of Japanese published memoirs of their experiences in northern Korea. For a review essay on these narratives see Mark E. Caprio, "Japanese Narratives on Life in Late-Colonial Korea: From Wartime to Repatriation," *Journal of Korean Studies* 14 (2009): 117-32.

⁷ Morita Yoshio et al, eds. *Chōsen shūsen no kiroku;shiryō hen vol.3*, p. 509.

⁸ Sakurai Shūji *Kikan hōkoku: Shūsen kara dasshutsu made* (A Report to Japan Iron Company), p. 79. This publication was published informally and is available in a limited number of libraries.

⁹ Translator's note: The Soviet Union tacitly allowing Japanese to pass through southern Korea to return to Japan often drew criticism from Commanding officer John R. Hodge, who exchanged letters on this issue with his Soviet counterpart Colonel General Ivan Chistiakov.

¹⁰ Hikiage taikenshū henshūkai, *Ikite sokoku e 5: shi no sanjū hachidosen* (To the Living Homeland, 5: Death at the Thirty-eighth Parallel) (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai), 32.

¹¹ Tessa Morris-Suzuki examines the effect of the cholera outbreak in southern Korea, in the Pusan area, that sent thousands of Koreans on ships back to Japan in her "[Invisible Immigrants: Undocumented Migration and Border Control in Early Postwar Japan](#)," *Asian Pacific Journal* August 31, 2006.

¹² Yokote Shinji, "Stalin no Nihonjin sōkan seisaku to Nihon no reisen e no michi, 1" (Stalin's Japanese Repatriation Policy and Japan's Road to the Cold War, 1), *Hōgaku kenkyū Keio University* vol.82, no. 9 (2009).