

Exodus to North Korea Revisited: Japan, North Korea, and the ICRC in the “Repatriation” of Ethnic Koreans from Japan

朝鮮への移住再訪—コリアンの日本からの「帰国」における日本、北朝鮮、赤十字国際委員会

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The Human Faces of Repatriation

Fifty years ago, the mass repatriation of ethnic Koreans from Japan to North Korea was reaching its peak. In towns and cities all over Japan farewell gatherings were being held, as “returnees” to North Korea packed their bags and boarded trains that would take them to the port of Niigata where, after various formalities including a “confirmation of free will” by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), they would board Russian ships for the voyage to Cheongjin in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK). Over 49,000 people embarked on this journey in 1960 alone, and 93,340 over the full span of the “repatriation project”[帰国事業, 북성사업] from December 1959 to July 1984.

The emotions felt by those leaving Japan were varied and often complex. Many expressed joy and hope at the prospect of a new life in North Korea - even though the vast majority came originally from the southern half of the Korean Peninsula, and were going to a place they had never seen before. Some took a more somber view - traveling without high expectations, but

at least in the belief that a future in North Korea would be more secure than their life in Japan, where they had been deprived of citizenship and had no assured residence rights, very limited access to welfare and (in most cases) few educational or employment opportunities.

Some individual stories are particularly troubling. I will recount one here, not because it was typical (on the contrary, this was a quite distinctive case) but because it helps to highlight some neglected or misunderstood aspects of the repatriation project that I shall discuss below.

In 1960 ICRC officials, who were in Niigata to confirm that all returnees to North Korea were departing of their own free will, encountered a young man whom I shall call “Mr. Heo” (not his real name). According to the ICRC notes on his case, Mr. Heo had “had to flee from South Korea for political reasons” and entered Japan as an illegal immigrant when he was a teenager. He lived in Japan without official papers for a while, and then gave himself up to police. After several years’ confinement in Ōmura Detention Centre near Nagasaki, he had been released on parole just as the repatriation to North Korea was beginning.

Mr. Heo told the ICRC officials that in 1957 he had tried to appeal to the ICRC to be “granted permanent residence in Japan or an opportunity to migrate to another country, Argentina for instance”, but this appeal had

received no response. The notes on his case state that “[Heo] really does not want to go to North Korea, he prefers to remain in Japan”. However, as a deportee on parole, he had been given only a temporary Alien Residence Card, and was afraid of being deported to South Korea when it expired, since at that time those suspected of being “subversives” were often imprisoned in South Korea.

The officials noted that Mr. Heo “was visibly in a state of confusion, in fear and tears”. The ICRC officials therefore pointed out to him that his temporary Alien Registration Card was still valid for a year, and suggested that he postpone his departure and remain in Japan for the time being. However, they explained that they could not guarantee his right to remain permanently. That was a matter for Japan’s Immigration Bureau. After listening to this explanation, Mr. Heo “calmed down and promised to give us a definite answer later”. That afternoon, he met the ICRC officials again and told them that he had decided to leave for North Korea immediately. He was apparently repatriated the next day.¹ What happened to him thereafter is unknown.

Retelling the Repatriation

I first became involved in research about the repatriation to North Korea almost by chance in 2004, and during the six years in which I have been engaged in this research, historical knowledge about this complex and troubling story has expanded greatly, as growing numbers of Cold War archives have been opened, and the testimony of an expanding flow of refugees from North Korea has become available. At the time when I began to study the “repatriation project”, a widely held perception of this event went (in essence) as follows: After the end of the Asia-Pacific War, around 600,000 Koreans remained living in Japan, often in conditions of great insecurity. Although most originated from the southern half of Korea, many were politically sympathetic to the DPRK,

and (from 1955 on) to the North Korea affiliated General Association of Korean Residents in Japan [generally known as *Chongryun* 총련 in Korean and as *Sōren* 総連 in Japanese].

KOREANS IN JAPAN

Korean migration to Japan began before the formal annexation of Korea by the Japanese Empire in 1910, and expanded particularly rapidly during the 1920s and 1930s.

According to official figures, there were 136,709 Koreans living in Japan in 1925, 735,689 in 1937, and more than two million by 1945. Migrants came from a wide variety of backgrounds, but many were from poor farm families whose existence had been made more precarious by colonial agricultural policies. From 1939 onward, Japan introduced a series of increasingly coercive recruitment laws under which labourers from Korea were brought to Japan to work in mines and on construction projects. An estimated one third of the Koreans in Japan in 1945 had been recruited under these forced labour schemes.

After the liberation of Korea in 1945, the majority of Koreans in Japan returned to Korea, but, against a background of political and social confusion and increasing conflict on the Korean Peninsula, around 600,000 remained in Japan. During the colonial period, Koreans and Taiwanese in Japan had been nationals of the Japanese Empire, but at the end of the postwar occupation of Japan, the Japanese government rescinded the Japanese nationality of former colonial subjects living in Japan, leaving them without clearly defined rights. From 1947, former colonial subjects were also required to register under Japan’s Alien Registration Ordinance. Initially, Koreans were registered under the category *Chōsen* (*Joseon* in Korean - the historical name for Korea that had been

used in the colonial period, and continued to be used post-independence by North Korea), but after protests from the newly created government of the Republic of Korea (South Korea), from 1950 they were also allowed to register using the term *Kankoku* (*Hanguk* in Korean - the word for Korea used in the post-independence South). During the 1950s, the majority of Koreans in Japan continued to register themselves as belonging to *Chōsen*, and those that did so were often misleadingly referred to in English as “North Koreans in Japan”, though most originated from the southern part of Korea, and not all identified themselves with the North Korean regime.

In the middle of 1958, a mass movement arose amongst Koreans in Japan, supported by *Sōren*, demanding that they be given the right to return to North Korea - despite the fact that Japan had no diplomatic ties and no regular transport links to North Korea at that time. Soon after, in August 1958, North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung made an announcement welcoming Koreans from Japan to “return to the socialist fatherland”, and this added fuel to the repatriation movement. In response, the following February, the Japanese government announced that it was calling on the International Committee of the Red Cross to assist in overseeing a project to repatriate those Koreans in Japan who wished to go to North Korea. Despite intense opposition from South Korea, in August 1959, a repatriation agreement between the Red Cross Societies of Japan and North Korea was signed in Calcutta, and on 14 December 1959, the first repatriation ship set sail from Niigata to Cheongjin.

In my research, though I used some Russian, US, Japanese, and other archival and documentary sources, as a well as material from interviews, I focused particularly on a mass of newly declassified documents about the repatriation held in the archives of the

International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, for these documents turn out to reveal a very different, and previously untold, story. In particular, the documents confirmed three surprising aspects of the story:

1. Intense and highly secret negotiations about a large-scale repatriation had been taking place between the Japanese government, the Japan Red Cross Society (JRC), their North Korean counterparts and the International Committee of the Red Cross from 1955 - almost three years before Kim Il-Sung’s announcement.
2. The first concrete proposal for a mass repatriation of tens of thousands of ethnic Koreans to North Korea had come from the Japanese side in late 1955.
3. Despite their profound ideological antagonisms and differences of objective, there had been a remarkable degree of *collaboration* between the Japanese and North Korean sides. Each side in essence sought to use the other for its own ends. The repatriation was a co-production which would have been impossible without this interaction between the two sides, as well as ICRC facilitation.

Meanwhile, declassified Soviet material showed that North Korea had had little interest in promoting a mass repatriation from Japan until the middle of 1958, when the Kim Il-Sung

administration suddenly changed its position and began very actively to encourage an inflow of ethnic Koreans. These Soviet documents gave some hints as to the possible motives for the North Korean change of policy, but also left many questions unanswered.

Since I published an account of the repatriation story in a book entitled *Exodus to North Korea* (2007), further documents on the story have come to light, and new findings by other researchers have provided fresh insights to the background to the “repatriation project”. In particular, research by Park Jung-Jin has cast new light on a number of aspects of postwar Japan-North Korea relations including the repatriation project.² The fiftieth anniversary of the start of the repatriation also saw the publication of several new works on the subject, including two by *Yomiuri Weekly* journalist Kikuchi Yoshiaki. Kikuchi, as well as looking at the material which I used in research for *Exodus to North Korea* has extensively examined material produced by the left-wing Korean organizations in Japan, *Sōren* and its predecessor, the United Democratic Front of Koreans in Japan [*Zainichi Chōsen Tōitsu Minshu Sensen* - abbreviated to *Minsen*].³

These works have greatly expanded knowledge of several aspects of the repatriation project. Park Jung-Jin’s studies show how the repatriation fitted not only into Japan-North Korea relations but also into the complex politics of *Minsen* and *Sōren*, and into the relations of these organizations with the North Korean state. Kikuchi Yoshiaki’s researches have also shed interesting light on aspects such as the relationship between the repatriation from Japan and inflows of ethnic Koreans into North Korea from Sakhalin and China. At the same time, several of these more recent writings have questioned some of the main arguments which I put forward in *Exodus to North Korea*. In particular, Kikuchi writes, “the claim that moves towards a ‘mass repatriation’

to North Korea originated on the Japanese side (Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Exodus to North Korea*), in other words, the ‘Japanese stratagem theory’ [日本策略論] is clearly a misinterpretation. One of the reasons why this kind of misinterpretation has arisen is because Professor Suzuki has relied too much on the documents of the International Committee of the Red Cross and has not sufficiently examined the repatriation movements of *Minsen* and of *Sōren* in its early stages, or the moves on the North Korean side which are not dealt with in detail in those documents.”⁴ A similar criticism has also been made, in less temperate language, by Prof. Kawashima Takamine of Meiji University, who argues that the plan for a mass repatriation was put forward by Kim Il-Sung at a meeting with representatives of the Japan Socialist Party in 1955, and that, in taking up the repatriation issues, the Japanese Red Cross and Japanese government politicians were merely responding to requests from North Korea and *Zainichi* Koreans.⁵

I am going to return to these criticisms later, but first I want to make some general remarks about the issues raised by historical research on the repatriation project.

The Historiography of the Repatriation

Researching the history of the repatriation has, for me, highlighted two fundamental problems of history writing. The first is the question of how historians and other researchers use research materials; the second is the issue of the underlying motives which drive historical research. One of the difficulties of research on the repatriation story today is not a *lack* of evidence, but rather the problem of dealing with an enormous *abundance* of archival material. The material in the ICRC archives alone runs to many thousands of pages, and thousands more exist in archives in Japan, Korea, the US, Britain, Germany, and elsewhere. The team who made a 2007 NHK

documentary on the repatriation, for example, amassed some 15,000 pages of formerly classified documents about the project from around the world.⁶ (Unfortunately, the program then proceeded to use only a tiny handful of the wealth of material collected.) The issue therefore is how to extract a meaningful and historically accurate account from this wealth of detail about a very complex scheme involving several different countries and ministries, as well as international organisations. Since it is not possible to quote from all the documents, or to make them all available to readers, the task of the historian is, as far as possible, to examine the range of documents and to provide as balanced an account as possible of their overall content, as well as quoting from the particular records that reveal important facts. No account of the repatriation is ever going to be complete and faultless, but if we agree that the aim is to work towards as accurate and comprehensive picture as possible, then I think we can also agree about the basic methods that are necessary to pursue that aim.

But our *motives* for researching history are another matter. The impulses that impel people to study the past are varied and personal and, in a plural society, this is surely the way things should be. Some people study history for its own sake; others see it always as “the history of the present”, a source of understandings about the world in which we live today; others again seek practical ways to use a knowledge of history to overcome the legacies of historical injustice. To me, the repatriation project is of great historical importance because it sheds profound light on aspects of Cold War politics which still affect the nations and people of Northeast Asia today. Even more importantly, the repatriation project, for many and perhaps all of its participants, led to extreme suffering. An understanding of the history of the project may help us to comprehend how and why this happened, and provide some insights into ways to relieve the continuing suffering of former

“returnees” and their families. However, in using history to shed light on these contemporary problems, it is important to create a genuine dialogue between past and present, and to resist the temptation to force history into the (often simplistic) moulds that suit our present day concerns.

In this context, I want to refer briefly to the recent writings of Sakanaka Hidenori. Sakanaka was a senior official in Japan’s Immigration Bureau, which he joined in 1970, ten years after the start of the repatriation project. He became well known for his far-reaching but controversial visions of the place of the Korean minority in Japanese society, and after his retirement, in 2005 he established the Japan Aid Association for North Korean Returnees [*Dappoku Kikokusha Shien Kikō*], a body to assist former “returnees” from Japan to North Korea who have since fled the DPRK and returned to Japan. In practical terms, Sakanaka has done as much as anyone to assist these “returnee-refugees”. However, the way that he links a historical account of the repatriation to his contemporary campaign on behalf of the “returnee-refugees” is rather troubling. Sakanaka argues, quite simply, that the “repatriation project” amounted to a mass abduction of ethnic Koreans from Japan by the North Korean state: “the abduction of *Zainichi* Koreans under the name of ‘repatriation’”⁷, he argues, resulted in unmitigated misery, suffering, discrimination and persecution for the “returnees”, who long to return to Japan, which is their true “homeland”.⁸

But this depiction of the repatriation as an “abduction” denies all agency to the “returnees”, who were undoubtedly both pushed by forces from within Japan and lured by misleading propaganda from Chongryun and from North Korea, but who nevertheless did try to make their own choices within the limited range of possibilities open to them. It likewise elides the role of the Japanese state in planning

and promoting the exodus. While it is certainly true that the repatriation has brought great suffering to the “returnees”, and that this suffering has been directly caused by repressive North Korean policies, the nature of their experiences and sufferings in North Korea has not been uniform, and it is not possible to confirm whether all would wish to return to Japan. (In fact, while around 200 returnee-refugees have so far resettled in Japan, a substantially larger number have, through choice or circumstances, settled in South Korea. Through force of circumstances, the majority of the surviving “returnees” of course remain in North Korea, and are unable to express their true wishes openly.) A failure to recognize these complexities in the history of the repatriation risks generating a one-sided response to the equally complex contemporary problems and needs of “returnees” (including “returnee-refugees”) and their families.

The Origins of the Repatriation and the Role of the Japanese State

There are many aspects of the repatriation project which need further investigation, but here I want to return to the question of the role played by the Japanese government and the Japan Red Cross Society, both because this has been the most controversial aspect of my book on the repatriation, and because I think it is fundamental to understanding the full history. Kikuchi Yoshiaki, in assessing the roles of the Japanese and North Korean sides in the repatriation, divides the problem into three issues: (1) Why did the repatriation project occur? (2) Why did it become a “mass repatriation”? (3) Why did it become a tragedy?⁹ Kikuchi himself expresses some reservations about the term “mass repatriation”, but accepts the use of the term according to the following definition: “a repatriation exceeding several thousand or several tens of thousands of people, which cannot be carried out by a few sailings of repatriation ships over a short period of time,

but can only be achieved by a medium to long-term repatriation scheme”. This is a useful working definition which I shall also adopt.

Japan, Kikuchi argues, did play a role in (1) – the establishment of the repatriation project. However, the creation of the project itself was not a problem – on the contrary, Japan’s role (he argues) helped to make the repatriation project more humanitarian than it would otherwise have been. On the other hand, the reasons for (2) and (3) – the reasons why the project became a “mass migration” and also became a tragedy – can (according to Kikuchi) be firmly attributed to North Korea and *Sōren*. I agree that the sufferings experienced by the returnees in the DPRK are the responsibility of the North Korean state. A key problem lies, however, in our understanding of issue 2: Why did the repatriation become a mass outflow of people? For it was, after all, the scale of the repatriation that turned something that might have been a more limited story of human displacement and suffering into a much larger calamity affecting over 90,000 “returnees” and hundreds of thousands of their relatives both in North Korea and in Japan. The answers to this question are complex, and for reasons of space I cannot hope to answer it fully here. However, I do hope to present some further documentary evidence that helps to shed light on the emergence of the mass repatriation project.

Before looking at this evidence, it is first necessary to return to the starting point, and to pose two questions: What were the underlying origins and causes of the problem of repatriation to North Korea? What options were open to the Japanese state in responding to this problem?

In 1945 there were more than two million Koreans living in Japan, and although around two-thirds returned to South Korea in the months immediately following Liberation, over 600,000 remained in Japan. In particular, rising Cold War tensions quickly put an end to

postwar repatriation to the northern half of the Korean peninsula. As a result a number of Koreans whose roots lay in North Korea were unable to return home. A survey conducted in March 1946 found that just over half a million people sought repatriation to Korea south of the 38th Parallel, from which the vast majority of Koreans had migrated, and just under 10,000 to Korea north of the 38th Parallel. Against a background of deteriorating political conditions in Korea, most of these people decided to remain in Japan, at least for the time being. However, since only 351 Koreans were officially repatriated to North Korea during the Occupation period (1945-1952), it is possible that at least several hundred, and perhaps several thousand, were still awaiting repatriation to the DPRK after the Korean War.¹⁰

But the roots of the repatriation also lie in the uncertain status of the Korean community in postwar Japan. At the end of the occupation, the Japanese government chose to interpret its acceptance of the 1945 Potsdam Declaration as implying that all Korean and Taiwanese residents in Japan (who had previously held Japanese nationality under Japanese and international law) were now foreigners. This decision was taken despite earlier suggestions from Occupation authority legal staff that Koreans and Taiwanese in Japan should be given a choice between retaining Japanese citizenship or adopting that of their independent homelands. The change in status had very serious implications, because it meant that the provisions of Japan's recently introduced 1951 Migration Control Ordinance [later, Migration Control Law] were retrospectively applied to former colonial subjects, who had but recently been Japanese citizens. This law gave the Japanese government the power to deport foreigners who had committed crimes with a sentence of over one year's imprisonment, as well as those who were deemed subversive, were unable to provide their own means of subsistence, or

suffered from mental or certain physical diseases. In practice, Japan's Immigration Bureau used its own discretion in applying the law to Koreans and Taiwanese: law-breakers were given deportation notices, but the destitute and mentally ill were not. A universal or even rigorous application of the law to the impoverished Korean community in Japan would have produced massive deportations, seriously straining Japan's already tense relationship with South Korea and probably arousing widespread international criticism as well as domestic social unrest. However, the status of Koreans as foreigners under the Migration Control Law made their life in Japan very insecure, as they were never sure when the state might choose to apply the Immigration Control Law more rigorously.¹¹

Both South Korea (from the end of the occupation) and North Korea (from mid-1955 onwards) argued vigorously that Japan should explicitly acknowledge the special status of Koreans in Japan, and exempt them from the provisions of the Migration Control Law. South Korea in particular refused to accept Koreans who were scheduled for deportation because they had broken the law in Japan, and this led to an intensifying dispute during which, from October 1954, South Korea began to refuse to accept any Korean deportees from Japan at all. As a result, the number of Koreans held in the Immigration Bureau's Ōmura Detention Centre rose from 413 at the beginning of 1954 to 1,383 at the beginning of 1957.¹² Faced with indefinite detention in Ōmura, and (in some cases) fearing deportation to a fiercely anti-communist and politically repressive South Korea, a number of these detainees began to demand to be deported to North Korea instead. Meanwhile, by mid-1955, several hundred other Koreans in Japan were also requesting repatriation to the North, and in 1953 the left-wing organization *Minsen* also lobbied the Japanese government to allow a repatriation which would include several hundred *Zainichi* Korean technicians to assist

with postwar reconstruction. As the Japanese government repeatedly pointed out, there was nothing preventing individual Koreans from relocating to North Korea provided they could pay their own fare and arrange their own transport, and a small number of people did this. However, a problem arose in the case of would-be returnees who lacked the means to pay for their own repatriation.

What options, then, were open to the Japanese government as it sought to respond to these problems from the mid-1950s onward? First, it could simply have ignored or rejected the demands for assisted repatriation to North Korea. Such a rejection would undoubtedly have caused distress to some Koreans in Japan, and could have raised humanitarian and political problems. It is worth noting, though, that throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Japanese government firmly rejected demands from the DPRK and *Sōren* for the “free movement of people” - i.e., for people to be allowed to travel back and forth between Japan and the DPRK - also arguably a humanitarian issue.

A second option would have been for Japan to respond to the demands from both South and North Korea by creating a policy recognizing the special status of Koreans in Japan (an approach which was in fact gradually adopted following the normalization of relations with South Korea in 1965). This option could have been pursued whether or not the government gave its approval to a program of repatriation to North Korea. For example, the Immigration Bureau could have decided to cease the practice of deporting Koreans and Taiwanese convicted of criminal offenses, allowing them to remain in Japan after completing their sentences.¹³ The Japanese government could also have officially confirmed the right of former colonial subjects to claim welfare without fear of deportation or discrimination. These steps would have relieved the overcrowding of Ōmura Detention Centre and

would have greatly assisted the process of pursuing the normalization of relations with South Korea. They would also have made the position of Koreans in Japan much more secure, and the option of repatriation to North Korea much less attractive for many.

However, in the mid-1950s the Japanese government was adamantly opposed to pursuing this option. Instead, Japanese politicians and bureaucrats expressed increasing unwillingness to continue the discretionary practice of paying welfare to impoverished Koreans. In early 1956, as Japanese officials began to develop their own plans for a repatriation project, the Ministry of Health and Welfare launched a campaign which resulted in the reduction or termination of livelihood protection payments to approximately 75,000 *Zainichi* Koreans¹⁴; and crucially, when the Japanese government introduced a new comprehensive national welfare system in 1959 - the year when the mass “repatriation project” started - foreigners (including Koreans and Taiwanese) were explicitly *excluded* from this scheme. These measures undoubtedly made the option of repatriation more attractive than it would otherwise have been for those summarily cut from welfare rolls. Meanwhile, by the second half of 1955, as we shall see, the Japanese government itself was increasingly looking to repatriation to North Korea as a means to reduce the size of the Korean community in Japan, thereby (amongst other things) relieving the problem of Ōmura, but also to reduce the scale of welfare payments to the Korean community.

The First Steps Towards Repatriation

New details of the background to the repatriation project are revealed by an important Japanese government document declassified in the latter part 2007. This document outlines the history of the repatriation in the context of diplomatic

negotiations between Japan and South Korea, and (amongst other things) offers intriguing information on two issues: the “Lee Ho-Yeon Incident” of 1953-54, and the Foreign Ministry’s draft repatriation plan of December 1955. In the process, it provides vivid illustrations of the “co-production” between Japanese and North Korean sides which created the repatriation scheme.

According to this document, immediately after the Korean War armistice of 1953 some Koreans in Japan began to seek repatriation to North Korea. The left-wing *Zainichi* Korean movement *Minsen* took up their cause with the Japanese government, and officials of the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs discussed the issue. The officials noted that the simplest solution would be to allow the Koreans to travel to North Korea via China and to pay for the journey themselves, but that “if their departure is at their own expense, we cannot hope that many will go”.¹⁵ On the other hand, there was also concern that a repatriation supported by the Japanese Red Cross, let alone one supported by the Japanese government, would provoke an angry reaction from South Korea. The officials therefore decided to “observe moves by *Minsen*, and decide future ways to deal with the issue”.¹⁶

In autumn of 1953, Lee Ho-Yeon, Chairman of the Central Committee of *Minsen*, approached the Japanese Immigration Bureau seeking travel documents which would enable him to attend a conference in China and then return to Japan. In fact, however, it became clear that Lee was planning to go via China to North Korea. His aim was to discuss issues including the repatriation of Koreans from Japan to North Korea with members of the DPRK regime. As Kikuchi Yoshiaki points out, *Minsen* was particularly interested in developing a scheme to enable several hundred *Zainichi* Korean technicians to go to North Korea to assist with postwar reconstruction. By this time, however, Japan’s conflict with South Korea over the

Ōmura detainees was becoming increasingly serious, and the Immigration Bureau quickly realised that Lee’s negotiations with North Korea might “serve Japan’s interests”, and particularly that the “realization [of Lee’s visit] might make a slight contribution in relation to the deportation to North Korea of impoverished *Zainichi* Koreans and those who have received deportation notices etc. but whom South Korea will not accept.”¹⁷

So, after high-level consultation with the Foreign Ministry and the police and security agencies, Japan’s Immigration Bureau entered into a secret agreement with Lee Ho-Yeon, which would allow him to travel to North Korea and return to Japan, on the understanding that he was going to open discussions with North Korea about the possibility of repatriation. One clause of the deal between Lee and the Immigration Bureau has been blacked out in the declassified document, and remains secret to this day. In the event, however, nothing came of this unusual understanding between senior Japanese government officials and the *Minsen* Chairman. The Japanese government had insisted on strict secrecy from Lee, and was alarmed when, shortly before his planned departure in May 1954, he gave interviews to the press which threatened to reveal too much. The agreement was rescinded and his permission to travel was hastily cancelled. The Lee Ho-Yeon Incident indicates that by late 1953 both *Minsen* and sections of the Japanese bureaucracy had an interest in opening discussions with North Korea about repatriation, and were willing to collaborate in achieving this, but neither as yet seems to have had detailed plans for a mass repatriation project. However, as we shall see, a clear plan did emerge towards the end of 1955.

Meanwhile, on 6 January 1954, the Japan Red Cross had contacted its North Korean counterpart via the League of Red Cross Societies, asking for North Korean assistance in identifying and returning Japanese nationals

who were still living in the DPRK (and whose number was estimated at anything between several hundred and two thousand). The message from Tokyo stated that if the Japanese nationals were returned to Japan, the Japanese Red Cross would be “willing to assist your nationals in Japan desirous of returning to your country [the DPRK] in their repatriation.”¹⁸ The North Korean Red Cross replied that it was prepared to help the repatriation of Japanese in North Korea, but made no mention of the repatriation of Koreans from Japan.¹⁹ In September 1955, the newly appointed head of the Japan Red Cross Society’s Foreign Affairs Department, Inoue Masutarō, held discussions in Geneva with senior ICRC officials, during which he asked for ICRC help in repatriating the Japanese in North Korea, and foreshadowed a future request for help with the repatriation of *Zainichi* Koreans to North Korea.²⁰

As Park Jung-Jin has pointed out, by 1955 North Korea was taking a more active approach to seeking relations with Japan, while the international policy of the Japanese government under the Prime Ministership of Hatoyama Ichirō (in power from December 1954 to December 1956) favoured the possibility of opening at least limited links to some communist countries.²¹ North Korean Foreign Minister Nam Il had already made a statement on the treatment of *Zainichi* Koreans (including Ōmura detainees) in August 1954, and a further demand for the release of Ōmura detainees was issued by the North Korean Foreign Ministry on 15 October 1955.²² There are indications that by 1955 the DPRK viewed closer involvement with the *Zainichi* Korean community as a way of developing relations to Japan and also as an indirect route of communication with South Korea.

Following the creation of *Sōren* in May 1955, representatives of that organization traveled to Pyongyang to meet members of the North Korean leadership, and in October 1955 an unofficial delegation of Japanese socialist

parliamentarians also visited the DPRK and met Kim Il-Sung. It was on this occasion that, as Kawashima Takamine notes, the North Korean leader expressed a wish to help *Zainichi* Koreans “return” to the DPRK. It is clear that by 1955 North Korea had an active policy of encouraging the repatriation of Ōmura detainees and several hundred other *Zainichi* Koreans.²³ However, documentary evidence (including a report on the discussions held between Japan Red Cross Society representatives and North Korean officials in January-February 1956, discussed below) shows that at this stage North Korea saw repatriation as part of a wider policy of “stabilizing the livelihood” of Koreans in Japan. In other words, the North Korean government sought to persuade the Japanese government not only to allow some Koreans to “return” to the DPRK, but also to improve the access of *Zainichi* Koreans to welfare, employment and education. It also hoped to use the issues of repatriation and welfare rights as a lever to persuade the Japanese government to allow North Korean Red Cross representatives into Japan, thus increasing North Korea’s direct access to and influence over the *Zainichi* Korean community, and possibly opening a path to unofficial negotiations with the Japanese government.²⁴ Mindful of South Korean opposition, the Japanese government firmly denied such access.

Kawashima Takamine argues that *Sōren*’s 1955 activities and the Socialist Party’s October delegation to Pyongyang were the decisive events in initiating the repatriation project, and suggests that *Sōren* took advantage of the Japanese Red Cross negotiations with North Korea about the Japanese nationals in the DPRK, “making ‘hostages’ of the weakness of these Japanese” in order to push the case for repatriation of *Zainichi* Koreans.²⁵ This criticism is a puzzling one since, as we have seen, the first message from the Japan Red Cross Society to North Korea in January 1954 already linked the question of the Japanese in

North Korea with the question of the repatriation of *Zainichi* Koreans. Moreover, viewed in historical context, Kawashima's analysis surely overestimates the significance of the October 1955 Socialist Party delegation to Pyongyang. Socialist Party politicians were certainly among the most enthusiastic supporters of the repatriation to North Korea, and some (including Hoashi Kei) later played a role as intermediaries between the Japanese and North Koreans sides. But important background moves on the repatriation were already underway before October 1955, and it hardly seems likely that this small group of opposition politicians could have had the power to persuade the Japanese Foreign Ministry and ruling Liberal Democratic Party to take the significant steps on repatriation which (as we are about to see) they embarked on in December 1955 and January 1956.

Rather, the declassified Japanese documents show that, in the context of developments throughout 1955, senior Japanese government officials realised once again that a movement in favour of repatriation, this time supported by the newly-formed *Sōren*, coincided with their perception of the national interest. Against this background, on 15 December 1955, Section Five of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's Asia Bureau produced a draft "Plan for Resolving the Problem of Sending Volunteers for Repatriation to North Korea" [*Hokusen e no Kikan Kibōsha no Sōkan Mondai Shori Hōshin*, 北鮮への帰還希望者の送還問題処理方針]. This document for the first time put forward a concrete and detailed proposal for a repatriation of ethnic Koreans to North Korea, including a draft "Outline of Procedures for the Repatriation" [*Sōkan Tetsuzuki Yōkō*, 送還手続要綱]. There is no mention in the document of the number of expected returnees, but the scope of the plan and the proposed registration procedure clearly implies that the project was expected to be carried out on a substantial scale.²⁶

The Foreign Ministry plan proposed that repatriation be carried out on the basis of negotiations between the Japanese and North Korean Red Cross Societies, with the understanding of the relevant Japanese government ministries and "requesting the cooperation of the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan [*Sōren*]" in implementing the repatriation. The Japanese government would pay the travel costs of returnees within Japan, and asked the Japan Red Cross Society to undertake negotiations with its North Korean counterpart on the following basis

- "1. The people to be repatriated shall be impoverished people only.
2. The North Korean side shall be consulted as to whether the repatriates can be accepted or not.
3. The repatriation will be carried out on the basis of a register of names provided by *Sōren*.
4. The North Korean Red Cross will send repatriation ships to ports designated by the Japanese side (The costs of this will not be born by the Japanese side)."

The Plan also requested the Japan Red Cross Society to "use *Sōren* as its partner and request the organization's cooperation," in fact to enter into a written agreement with *Sōren*. "The two organizations will exchange documents to confirm the correct conduct of each item of business."²⁷ The "items of business" included:

- "1. *Sōren* will conduct a survey of impoverished people who wish to be repatriated to North Korea, compile a register of all those

wishing repatriation, and present this to the Japanese Red Cross.

2. The repatriation to North Korea of people not included in the register under this process will be firmly prohibited.”

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was to handle the task of dealing with South Korea (which was certain to be very hostile to the scheme), and the Ministries of Transport and Welfare were to provide transport for returnees within Japan, while the Immigration Bureau was to “place departure stamps on the ‘Repatriation Certificates’ issued by *Sōren*”.²⁸

Initially, some officials seem to have been considering using the ship used by Japanese nationals returning from North Korea as transport for this repatriation, but because of feared repercussions from South Korea, this idea was quickly dropped. Instead, at the urging of the Japan Red Cross Society, it was agreed that the ICRC should also be brought into the repatriation process.

As in the case of the agreement between the Immigration Bureau and Lee Ho-Yeon, one sentence of the 15 December 1955 remains blacked out – still secret today. What is clear from this document is that by December, significant elements within the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs had a well-developed vision of a large-scale repatriation to North Korea, to be conducted via the Japan Red Cross Society in close cooperation with *Sōren*.²⁹ The procedure outlined in the draft plan is in fact in many respects remarkably similar to that actually put into effect from December 1959 onward (though the scheme implemented from 1959 was not limited to the “destitute”.) Meanwhile, two days before this report was finalized, on 13 December 1955, Japan Red Cross President Shimazu Tadatsugu, with the approval of the Japanese Foreign Ministry and Ministry of

Justice, had written to the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva enclosing a petition from *Zainichi* Koreans who wished to return to North Korea (though not stating the names or number of the petitioners) and asking the ICRC’s help in carrying out the repatriation. On 16 December, Foreign Minister Shigemitsu Mamoru, replying to a question in the Diet Foreign Affairs Committee from LDP parliamentarian Yamamoto Toshinaga, expressed an intention to explore possibilities for a solution to the repatriation issue³⁰, and in the middle of the following month, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party also agreed that “Koreans in Japan who want to go home should be sent back”, and contacted the Japanese Red Cross to encourage them to pursue this aim.³¹

A Vision of “Mass Repatriation”

To summarise, then, moves towards a repatriation from 1953 onward came from several directions simultaneously. After the armistice in the Korean War, there were a number of Koreans in Japan who were eager to be repatriated to North Korea. There were almost certainly a larger number who had some vaguer aspiration to seek repatriation at some time in the future. (The question of numbers will be discussed in this section.) Both *Minsen* and its successor organization *Sōren* raised the issue with the Japanese and North Korean governments. Certain Japanese officials saw repatriation to North Korea as a way to resolve the problem of the Ōmura detainees and the much larger question of the tens of thousands of impoverished Koreans in Japan who were partly or wholly dependent on welfare. However, they were also very cautious about likely South Korean and US reactions to a repatriation of Koreans to the DPRK. The Japan Red Cross Society argued that the best way to achieve a repatriation in this context would be through the good offices of the ICRC. North Korea saw

repatriation and the Ōmura problem, as well as broader support for the “stabilization of the livelihood” of Koreans in Japan, as a means to advance its foreign policy aims by increasing its influence over the Korean community in Japan.

Diverse groups therefore had an interest in repatriation, and at times they cooperated across ideological lines in the hope of achieving their own aims. However, I argue here that the Foreign Ministry’s 15 December plan was the first detailed proposal for a mass repatriation from Japan to the DPRK. Kikuchi Yoshiaki, as we have seen, denies that the idea of a mass repatriation originated with Japanese politicians, bureaucrats or Red Cross officials.³² Instead, he claims that the only group to have any serious notion of a mass repatriation before 1958 was *Sōren*, which saw this not as an immediate aim but as a future possibility, and cited a long-term figure of 30,000 to 60,000: “According to ICRC documents, people associated with *Sōren* envisaged that, if the repatriation were realised, the number of people who would wish to return [to the DPRK] would be about 30,000-60,000. The *Sōren* side became involved in the repatriation movement with the expectation that, if the repatriation were put into effect, it would become a ‘mass repatriation’”.³³ Since Kikuchi says nothing about any Japan Red Cross or Japanese government predictions of tens of thousands of returnees, this statement gives the impression that the vision of a mass repatriation was pursued by *Sōren* alone.

The scale and nature of the repatriation being discussed by *Sōren* (and presumably also by the North Korean government) in 1955 can be approximately grasped from several events which took place in the second half of that year. On 15 July 1955, *Sōren* organized a gathering of would-be Korean returnees to North Korea in Tokyo. At this gathering, it was reported that the number of Koreans seeking

repatriation to the DPRK throughout Japan was 410, of whom about one hundred lived in Tokyo.³⁴ According to a report in the Japanese Communist Party newspaper *Akahata*, representatives of the would-be returnees visited the Japan Red Cross Society on 28 September 1955. This report cites a larger number: about 500 Tokyo-based *Zainichi* Korean technicians and others wishing to go to North Korea, and a number nationwide that was probably in the thousands.³⁵ As I have noted elsewhere, in a statement to the Japanese Diet Foreign Affairs Committee on 14 February 1956, *Sōren* officials cited an estimate of about 1,424 known would-be returnees nationwide, although they also expressed an aspiration for a larger “return” at some time in the future.³⁶ In April 1956, shortly before the return of Japanese repatriates from North Korea to Japan, a demonstration by *Zainichi* Korean would-be “returnees” to the DPRK was held outside the headquarters of the Japan Red Cross Society in Tokyo. At that time, on the basis of statements by the protestors, the Japanese media reported the number of Koreans seeking to return to North Korea to be around 2,050.³⁷

The Japanese Foreign Ministry’s plan of 15 December 1955 seems to have envisaged a large-scale movement of people, and specifically of “impoverished” Koreans. In later Japanese documents, from the beginning of 1956 onward, the expression “impoverished” started to be replaced by the more euphemistic phrase “certain Koreans residing in Japan”, but the meaning of this phrase was made clear in two reports written by the Japan Red Cross Society’s Inoue Masutarō: *The Repatriation Problem of Certain Koreans Residing in Japan* (October 1956); and *Fundamental Conditions of Livelihood of Certain Koreans Residing in Japan* (November 1956). The second of these reports provides a detailed statistical analysis of the Korean community in Japan, emphasizing its high levels of

unemployment and of marginal or “anti-social” employment (by which Inoue means areas of activity such as pachinko parlours, illegal brewing and scrap collecting). This report also emphasized that large numbers of Koreans were unable to survive without relying on welfare. Inoue went on to argue that these problems were deeply rooted in the history and structure of the Korean community in Japan, and would not be resolved by economic growth. The statistics, he concluded, demonstrated that: “whatever they try, certain Koreans cannot live on under present circumstances in Japan and there seems to be no prospect of solution in the near future and the only way left is repatriation.”³⁸

Inoue also had a specific estimate of the number of Koreans involved: 60,000. As I have written elsewhere, according to the Japan Red Cross Society, this was the number supplied to them by *Sōren* at some date before 13 January 1956.³⁹ At that stage, however, there was no indication that *Sōren* had actually carried out the survey proposed by the Foreign Ministry plan of 15 December 1955. Indeed, it would surely have been impossible for them to complete such a major survey in less than a month. It is, of course, quite possible that this figure had been given to the Red Cross by someone within *Sōren*, but I have so far been unable to find any evidence that *Sōren* or the North Korean government made use of the figure of 60,000 would be repatriates in its political support for repatriation in 1955-1958.

Further interesting light on this issue, however, is provided by the long and detailed report which Inoue compiled for ICRC President Boissier about his meetings with North Korean Red Cross and government officials in Pyongyang between 27 January and 28 February 1956. In this report, Inoue describes how, during a series of confidential meetings, he energetically sought to persuade his North Korean counterparts of the “necessity of mass repatriation” of *Zainichi* Koreans to the

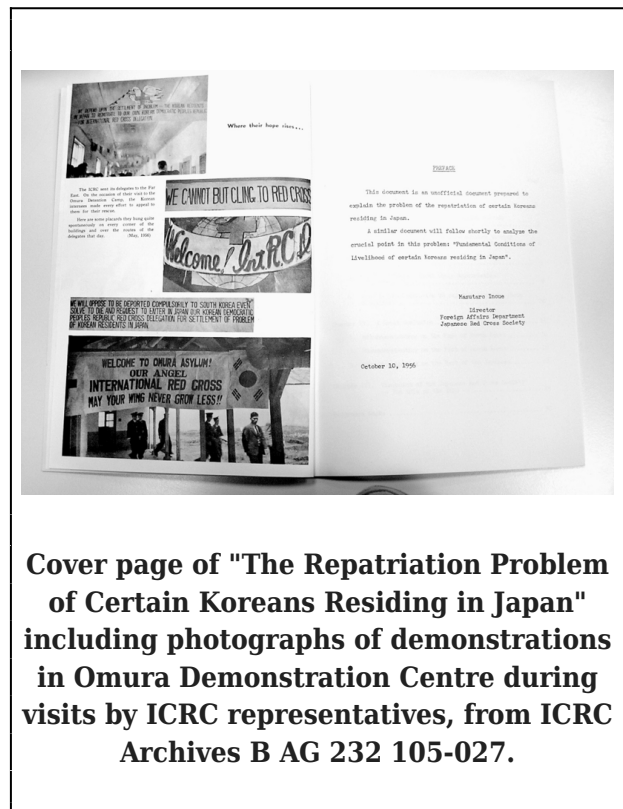
DPRK.⁴⁰ Reporting these discussions, he again reminded Boissier of the number of 60,000 returnees, stating “in fact, once the way of mass repatriation of Koreans in Japan be opened, it is evident that *all Koreans who cannot earn their living in Japan, will request to be returned to Korea*. The General League of Korean Residents in Japan [i.e. *Sōren*] has estimated *the number repatriated in this case will reach approximately 60,000, the figure that I reported to you*”.⁴¹ This statement suggests that the figure of 60,000 was a *Sōren* estimate of the number of people who would be repatriated if *all* Koreans who were unable to support themselves in Japan volunteered for repatriation (a very different matter from the number who were actually seeking repatriation in early 1956). Inoue goes on to observe that repatriating such a large number of people might be seen as boosting North Korea’s potential military resources, and thus violating the 1953 Armistice which ended the Korean War. It is not clear whether he actually cited the figure of 60,000 returnees in his discussions with North Korean officials, but he did raise the issue of the armistice and its relationship to mass repatriation. On balance, he argued, armistice would not be a problem. In his report to Geneva, he writes, “it seems to me that it is possible to consider that the mass repatriation of Koreans, suspended by the Korean War, has started again, and that the repatriation of 60,000 Koreans that is only 6% of all the Koreans formerly repatriated [in the period 1945-1950] cannot be considered to violate the armistice clause, especially when one stands on the humanitarian viewpoint.”⁴²

Inoue, however, also discovered that the North Korean side was not very interested in pursuing the topic of a mass repatriation of *Zainichi* Koreans, and instead “changed the subject of discussion from the problem of repatriation to the stabilization of livelihood of Koreans in Japan saying this latter is the more important one, for the number of repatriates is less than 1,000”.⁴³ It seems clear from this

report, indeed, that in early 1956 the North Korean authorities were primarily concerned with “stabilizing the livelihood” of *Zainichi* Koreans. Repatriation was lower on the DPRK agenda, and their estimate of the number of Koreans seeking repatriation to North Korea was nowhere near the level of 60,000. Inoue, on the contrary, sought to persuade his North Korean counterparts that “the mass repatriation of Koreans is the most appropriate way to stabilize the livelihood of Koreans and, at the same time, this is necessary for the Japanese side too. Without this repatriation, the problem will never be solved at present.”⁴⁴ A month after the Pyongyang meeting, he wrote to ICRC Executive Director Roger Gallopin that “it appears that the number of Koreans who will go back to Korea is about 60,000. This number is minimum, less than which there would be no effect for the stabilization of life of Koreans in Japan.” He also added that “if 60,000 Koreans will actually go home, there arises the problem of transportation”, and proceeded to present a detailed analysis of various routes in which such a large number of people could be moved from Japan to North Korea over a short period of time.⁴⁵

In the same month, Inoue also told a meeting of the Supreme Advisors’ Conference [Board of Councillors] of the Japan Red Cross Society that “in order to solve the problem of stabilization of livelihood of Koreans in Japan, it is indispensable to repatriate *at least 60,000 Koreans within this year*”. He reported to the ICRC that Socialist Party politician Matsuoka Komakichi had been particularly vocal in his support of this view, but also that all those attending the meeting “agreed with my opinion.”⁴⁶ When ICRC representatives William Michel and Eugène de Weck visited East Asia for discussions on the matter in April-May 1956, an official of the Ministry of Health and Welfare cited 60,000 as a possible number of “returnees” (noting that if this number of Koreans left for North Korea, the Japanese

government might consider covering their transport costs).⁴⁷ As we can see from the quotations above, the number 60,000 was being debated in Japan Red Cross and government circles, not as a vague future possibility, but as the number to be repatriated immediately.



Cover page of "The Repatriation Problem of Certain Koreans Residing in Japan" including photographs of demonstrations in Omura Demonstration Centre during visits by ICRC representatives, from ICRC Archives B AG 232 105-027.

The thinking behind Inoue’s stress on the necessity of repatriating 60,000 Koreans is clearly spelled out in his writings. As he commented in *The Repatriation Problem of Certain Koreans Residing in Japan*, “frankly, it is for the interest of the Japanese government to get rid of these troublesome Koreans. The Japanese government is spending yearly about 2.4 billion yen to support their livelihood. No country is obligated to keep a foreigner at the expense of its national treasury. A foreigner unable to earn his living is generally deported.”⁴⁸ As a democratic country, Inoue writes, Japan cannot simply deport impoverished Koreans en masse, but a voluntary repatriation of such Koreans is presented as being very much in Japan’s

interests. The crucial fact about these statements is that these are not just the views of a somewhat eccentric individual. Inoue's two reports were read and approved by senior figures in the Japan Red Cross Society including its President, Shimazu Tadatsugu, who officially transmitted them both to the ICRC and to the Japanese government. Moreover, as Shimazu informed the ICRC, although *The Repatriation Problem of Certain Koreans Residing in Japan* was described as an "unofficial" report, "the contents of this document have passed through careful examination of the authorities concerned of the Foreign Office and other Departments of the Japanese Government, therefore it can be considered as fully agreed by the Japanese government."⁴⁹

Shimazu himself reinforced the point by informing the ICRC in July 1956 that "Koreans in Japan cannot go back neither [*sic*] to North nor to South Korea. They cannot get any good means of livelihood in Japan lacking concurrent ability in the overpopulated country where even Japanese themselves can hardly find jobs. If they handle black-market business, they are sued, while the total amount of livelihood relief fund for them has been cut down, thus driving them into more difficult situation, in contradiction to the elevation of Japanese standard of living. Their only way of living therefore is to repatriate to North Korea where construction is demanding more labour."⁵⁰ According to William Michel's report to the ICRC on his visit to East Asia in 1956, the ICRC representatives had learnt from meetings with "the various [Japanese] ministries responsible" that "the Japanese government desires, for financial and security reasons, to put an end to the residence of about 60,000 Koreans on its territory."⁵¹

From Desire to Action

Did the desire to promote the large-scale exit of impoverished Koreans - whether for

humanitarian or for more cynical motives - remain nothing more than a desire, or was it translated into action? There seems to be no dispute that the Japanese Red Cross, working in consultation with the government, took a series of important steps from the end of 1955 onward to initiate a repatriation project.⁵² In 1956, responding to demonstrations by a group of 48 would-be returnees to North Korea, the Japan Red Cross Society sought energetically to find ships to carry the returnees, and to involve the ICRC in their repatriation.⁵³ As the declassified Japanese government document notes, "Japan Red Cross Foreign Affairs Department Director Inoue made great efforts to achieve the repatriation of these 48 people. His idea was that if this succeeded, using the method of ICRC travel documents, self-funded exit from Japan and foreign ships, the number of people could be steadily increased, and more and more volunteers could be repatriated. Eventually he even envisaged that the [Japanese ship] *Kōan* could be re-registered as a Swiss vessel, and a large number of repatriates could thus be shipped [to North Korea]"⁵⁴.



Repatriation ship prepares to depart Niigata Port

Throughout 1956 and 1957 the repatriation issue was indeed among the most significant projects taken up by senior Japanese Red Cross and ICRC officials. The steps they took to create the basis of a repatriation project were many and complex, and here I shall just very briefly highlight some of the most significant:

1. The Japan Red Cross Society, through ongoing correspondence with its North Korean counterpart⁵⁵ and at least two face-to-face meetings with North Korean Red Cross officials in January-

February and in June 1956, energetically sought to persuade North Korea of the “necessity” of a mass repatriation of *Zainichi* Koreans.⁵⁶ The June 1956 meeting involved detailed discussions on possible ways in which Japan and North Korea might share the costs of repatriating *Zainichi* Koreans who lacked the means to cover their own transport expenses.⁵⁷

2. After unsuccessful efforts to find other means to ship returnees to North Korea⁵⁸, as early as June 1956, the Japan Red Cross Society took the initiative of inviting its North Korean counterpart to join it in approaching the Soviet Union to ask for Soviet ships to be made available for repatriation. This approach was rejected, since at that time the Soviet Union had no diplomatic relations or direct shipping links with Japan. However, in June 1958, after diplomatic ties to the Soviet Union were normalized, the Japan Red Cross Society again proposed to *Sōren*, the pro-North Korean Japan-Korea Association [*Nicchō Kyōkai*] and a Japanese politician with close links to North Korea that they should contact the North Korean government to ask the USSR to provide repatriation ships.⁵⁹ These negotiations form the background to the use of two Soviet vessels,

the *Kryl'ion* and *Tobol'sk*, which were in fact loaned by the USSR to the North Korean Red Cross, and provided transport during the first years of the repatriation.

3. Very energetic lobbying from the Japan Red Cross Society, conducted with the full knowledge and support of the Japanese government, led by early 1957 to the drawing up of a draft set of guidelines for ICRC involvement in a large-scale repatriation to North Korea. These constituted a further major step in creating the basis for the repatriation project actually put into effect in 1959.⁶⁰

By early 1957, then, initiatives from the Japanese side had alerted the North Korean government to Japan's serious interest in a mass repatriation to the DPRK, persuaded the ICRC to draw up a draft plan for its participation in the repatriation, and opened initial negotiations on the shipping route that would ultimately be used to carry out the repatriation. However, these initiatives had also provoked a fierce response from South Korea, which threatened to retaliate by capturing and detaining an increasing number of Japanese fishermen. As a result, during 1957, the Japanese government switched the focus of its attention to resolving this crisis in the relationship with South Korea - particularly to the problem of the detained Japanese fishermen. It is very clear, however, that the repatriation plan had not been abandoned. Throughout 1957 and the first half of 1958, as well as working to resolve the crisis in relations with South Korea, the Japan Red Cross Society continued to lobby the ICRC to take the central

role in the repatriation, and to provide shipping for the project, since it was believed that this would be the most effective way of circumventing South Korean objections.⁶¹

To understand the repatriation project, it is essential to recognize that the North Korean side and the Japanese side were in constant (direct and indirect) communication, and each side reacted to moves by the other (though not necessarily in the way that the other side anticipated). Kim Il-Sung's decision in mid-1958 to back a mass repatriation of *Zainichi* Koreans was taken with the full knowledge that significant sections of the Japanese government strongly favoured mass repatriation, but were afraid of its likely impact on Japan-South Korea relations and of possible objections from the US, and therefore insisted on a central role for the ICRC. If we take this into account, certain aspects of North Korea's strategy become clear. In particular, North Korea's sudden adoption of the idea of a mass repatriation combined with its strong opposition to ICRC involvement can clearly be seen as a move calculated to wreak maximum damage on Japan's relations with South Korea at a crucial moment in their evolution.

The Confirmation of Free Will

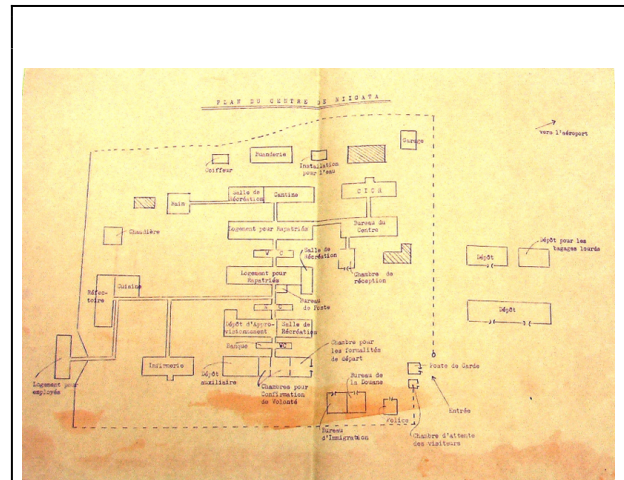
One further issue requires discussion here. Recent publications on the repatriation have suggested that the role of the Japanese government and Japan Red Cross Society in the creation of the repatriation project was indeed a humanitarian one, because it ensured that the ICRC carried out a "confirmation of free will" before returnees embarked on their journey to North Korea. Kikuchi Yoshiaki, while acknowledging that social prejudice towards Koreans in Japan was a factor behind the repatriation, also argues that "the Japanese government and Japan Red Cross Society carried out the repatriation in the presence of an ICRC 'confirmation of free will', which had not occurred in cases such as the repatriation

to South Korea immediately after the war. Even if this was far from being a sufficient condition to prevent the ‘tragedy’ which followed the repatriation, it was certainly a necessary condition for respecting the interests of the returnees”.⁶² He goes on to note that in fact some 25% of the 141,892 people who registered for repatriation between 1959 and 1967 changed their minds and remained in Japan. In other words, by bringing in the ICRC to oversee the operation – to interview every returnee in Niigata and ensure that each was departing voluntarily – the Japanese government and Red Cross saved many from a grim fate in the DPRK.

This, however, presents a somewhat confusing picture of the repatriation process. The vast majority of these cancelled departures had nothing whatsoever to do with the presence of the ICRC or its “confirmation of free will”. Almost all cancelled their applications before the confirmation of free will took place, or simply failed to board the trains which were supposed to transport them to Niigata. For example, by the end of May 1960, 23,712 people had actually been repatriated, 277 had chosen to remain in Japan, and several hundred more had changed their repatriation plans (for example, by choosing to leave on a later repatriation ship). However, of the 277 who stayed in Japan, 276 had changed their minds before going to Niigata, and four disappeared from the Niigata Repatriation Centre after completing their “confirmation of free will”. Only 6 actually changed their minds during the “confirmation of free will” before the ICRC representatives in Niigata.⁶³ Both the memories of former repatriates and the ICRC documents themselves show that many departing *Zainichi* Koreans had only a vague awareness of the role of the ICRC in the process.⁶⁴

In fact, the ICRC “confirmation of free will” had been subjected to so many restrictions and so many compromises that it had almost no impact

at all. ICRC representatives had very little opportunity to speak to repatriates except in the so-called “special rooms” in Niigata where the official confirmation of free will took place. Kawashima Takamine claims that I “fabricated” the name “special room”. He writes: “rooms for the confirmation of free will certainly existed at the Niigata Centre, but these were rooms that all returnees without exception entered before boarding the ships, and they were not particularly called ‘special rooms’”.⁶⁵ In fact, the rooms were routinely referred to as “special rooms” by the ICRC and Japanese authorities at the time. This term appears in the official “Guide for Mr. Returnee” produced by the Japan Red Cross Society in 1959 (in the Japanese version the term used is *tokubetsu na isshitsu*).



Map of the Red Cross Repatriation Centre in Niigata. The “special rooms” (marked here as “Chambres pour Confirmation de Volonté”) are in the centre at the bottom of the map. (Source: ICRC Archives, B AG 251 105-031.03)

Responding to vigorous objections to the process from North Korea via *Sōren*, the Japanese government had agreed that the confirmation would occur by family group, not individually, and that only a very limited range of standard questions could be posed to

returnees. Most remarkably of all, the compromise – worked out by a group including Japan Red Cross representatives, Japanese government officials and politicians Hoashi Kei (Japan Socialist Party), Iwamoto Nobuyuki (LDP) and Hozumi Shichirō (Japan Socialist Party) – included a structural modification to the “special rooms”.⁶⁶ As the amended guidelines for the repatriation process explained: “a ‘special room’ in the Red Cross Centre in Niigata is not a ‘secret room’ but an ordinary room from which the doors have been removed”.⁶⁷ Kawashima condemns my statement in *Exodus to North Korea* that the doors of the special rooms had been removed and replaced with screens. He claims this is a confused “invention”, and that the reference to screens refers to the repatriation registration windows that existed all over Japan, and not to the rooms in the Niigata Centre where the confirmation of free will took place.⁶⁸ As the documents cited here show, however, he is mistaken.

The curious architectural re-arrangement of the “special rooms” caused consternation in Geneva and prompted the following question from Otto Lehner, the ICRC’s chief representative in Tokyo, “Why no doors? If a repatriate wants to change his mind, why does he have to do so, so to speak, in public?” The response from a senior official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was that “the windows [i.e. “special rooms”] at Niigata will be ordinary office rooms with the doors taken off the hinges and screens, of course, put in their place; thus repatriates cannot be seen, but they can of course be heard; but it is not foreseen that there should be anyone hanging around the corridor separating the two groups of five offices constituting the ten windows through which repatriates will pass before finally leaving Japan”.⁶⁹ In fact, archival film footage of the Niigata Centre in the early stages of the repatriation clearly shows throngs of people queuing in the corridors immediately outside the open doorways, so that the repatriates were

in effect “speaking in public”.

The ICRC documentation provides some evidence of the pressures which *Sōren* applied to *Zainichi* Koreans to induce them to join the repatriation. (or, in more exceptional cases, to prevent them from repatriating). Though attempts to document sporadic reports of violence or threats against reluctant “returnees” proved difficult,⁷⁰ it was clear to the ICRC representatives in Japan that a large part of the process was being organized by *Sōren*. As one representative put it, “we have the impression that the applicants [for repatriation] are scrupulously following Soren’s instructions because they consider this as the most appropriate and promising way to start a new life in North Korea”.⁷¹ The documents on the repatriation also make it clear that the Japan Red Cross Society, Japanese government and police were perfectly aware of the pressures being exerted by *Sōren*. Knowing this, and knowing that *Sōren* officials were a forceful presence within the Niigata Red Cross Centre, why did they acquiesce in a compromise arrangement in which the “confirmation of free will” was always in danger of being overheard by agents of *Sōren*? The willingness to compromise this far, despite vigorous objections from the United States as well as South Korea,⁷² only makes sense if we take seriously Inoue Masutarō’s statement that the ICRC confirmation of free will was above all a matter of political strategy: “a means to obtain the approval of the ROK side”⁷³ (or at least to deflect the force of ROK opposition). Indeed, as the recently declassified Japanese government material illustrates, the confirmation of free will was almost always debated by officials in the context of deflecting South Korean or US objections to the repatriation, rather than in the context of assuring the future welfare of “returnees”.

Meanwhile, of course, deportations from Japan to North Korea were also underway: of those embarking on the repatriation ships, over 2,300

were *Zainichi* Korean deportees from the Ōmura Detention Centre. Most of them were people who, like “Mr. Heo”, had been released on parole, but on short-term visas which would soon expire. 421 of the deportees, however, had been taken straight from Ōmura and placed on the repatriation ships.⁷⁴ For these “returnees”, the only choice was between deportation to South Korea or departure to the North. A number of the deportees (including Mr. Heo) pleaded to be allowed to stay in Japan or be deported to a third country, but it is unclear whether any of these pleas were accepted.⁷⁵ Sakanaka Hidenori’s description of the repatriation as a mass abduction by North Korea seems particularly problematic when applied to the deportees. North Korean propaganda can certainly be blamed for having influenced their decision to choose deportation to the DPRK rather than to the ROK. But many were people who had fled the ROK for political reasons, and the future that would have awaited them in South Korea was not a happy one. It is difficult to see how people deported to the DPRK by Japan’s Immigration Bureau can be described by Japanese commentators as having been abducted by North Korea.

New Home: North Korean propaganda image of "returnees" settling into their new home

The evidence presented here shows that some members of the Japanese bureaucracy and Japan Red Cross Society, as well as some ruling party and opposition politicians, played a role, not simply in creating the repatriation scheme, but specifically in pursuing and creating a “mass repatriation”. It also highlights the extent to which, almost from the start, these people envisaged *Sōren* as a potential partner in the repatriation process – a role which (it could be argued) the organization in fact came to fulfill. In this sense, I would argue, they share with *Sōren* and the North Korean government a particular responsibility towards those who suffered as a result of the repatriation. Several questions about Japan’s role in the organization of the repatriation also remain to be answered. Why did the Japanese government not insist on a more effective and tightly controlled ICRC “confirmation of free will”? Why did it not seek to find alternative destinations for Korean deportees who justifiably feared deportation to either half of the Korean Peninsula?

Unanswered Questions



A further crucial question concerns the failure of the Japanese government to publicize information (which it received as early as the second half of 1960) showing that many “returnees” were suffering as a result of the harsh conditions in North Korea.

Intelligence on the repatriation gathered by the government included letters sent back by “returnees” to their families in Japan. These letters revealed that the standard of living was similar to that of Japan in the desperate final phases of the Pacific War, that many basic commodities including food were in short supply. By August 1961, the Japanese Ministry

of Foreign Affairs was secretly sharing this information with allied governments (including the United Kingdom) but despite this knowledge (as far as I can determine) took no steps to reassess the future of the repatriation scheme.⁷⁶



The Well 2: Life in North Korea. Drawing by a "repatriate refugee" of women and children hauling water to the top of an apartment block

And, finally, why did the Japanese government take no measures to provide some possible avenue of return to Japan for repatriates (including Japanese nationals) who faced difficulties once they arrived in North Korea? While it compromised drastically in response to North Korean opposition to the ICRC "confirmation of free will", the Japanese government resolutely opposed North Korean demands for an opening of doors to greater two-way movement between North Korea and Japan, and insisted on the creation of a repatriation which was a "one-way street". Those leaving Japan had no right of re-entry.⁷⁷

None of these criticisms or questions diminishes the responsibility of the North Korean government for bombarding Koreans in Japan with utterly misleading propaganda about the repatriation, and then subjecting

many to terrible persecution once they had "returned".⁷⁸ But the complexities of the repatriation story need to be told, and the questions raised above still need to be answered. As intensifying economic and political problems in the DPRK propel fresh waves of migration across the borders of Northeast Asia, the search for answers becomes more pressing than ever.

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Notes

¹ Special Case, Tokyo r. no. 204, op. no. 135, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 105-028, *Problème du rapatriement des Coréens du Japon, dossier XVIII*, 17/01/1961-28/12/1964.

² Park Jung-Jin, *Reisenki Nicchō Kankei no Keisei, 1945-1965 nen*, Tokyo, University of Tokyo PhD thesis, 2009.

³ Kikuchi Yoshiaki, *Kita Chōsen Kikoku Jigyō: 'Sodai na Rachi' ka 'Tsuihō' ka*, Tokyo, Chūkō Shinsho, 2009; in Sakanaka Hidenori, Han Sok-Kyu and Kikuchi Yoshiaki, *Kita Chōsen Kikokusha Mondai no Rekishi to Kadai*, Tokyo, Shinkansha, 2009, pp. 197-318. There is no standard English translation for *Zainichi Chōsen Tōitsu Minshu Sensen*, which is variously translated as "Koreans' United Democratic Front in Japan", "United Front of Democratic Korean Residents of Japan" etc.

⁴ Kikuchi Yoshiaki, "Kikoku Undō, Kikoku Jigyō to Kikokusha no 'Higeki'", in Sakanaka, Han and Kikuchi, *Kita Chōsen Kikokusha Mondai no Rekishi to Kadai*, pp. 197-318.

⁵ Kawashima Takamine, "Kita Chōsen Kikoku Jigyō, Ima, sono Shinjitsu o Kataru: Tessa Morris-Suzuki shi no Kyōgi ni Tsuite", *Hikari Sase!* No. 4, 10 December 2009, pp. 84-104; Kawashima expresses his disagreement by describing my research as being full of "fabrications" [*kyokō*] and "malicious lies" [*akushitsu na uso*], and writes that my "title of Professor at the Australian National University has given ridiculous credibility to these malicious lies. The Australian government, which has paid attention to immigration policy, should feel truly regretful about this." I do not wish to burden this text with detailed responses to Professor Kawashima's opinions, but, in the hope of moving towards a more complete and accurate picture of the repatriation, I have outlined my responses to some of his key claims in the footnotes below.

⁶ NHK Special, *Kita Chōsen Kikokusen: Shirazaru Hanseiki no Kiroku* [North Korea Repatriation Ships: An Fifty-Year Unknown Record], first broadcast 10 October 2007 ([Link](#), accessed 3 March 2008).

⁷ Sakanaka Hidenori, "Kita Chōsen Kikokusha Mondai no Honshitsu", in Sakanaka, Han and Kikuchi, *Kita Chōsen Kikokusha Mondai no Rekishi to Kadai*, pp. 7-114, quotation from p. 77.

⁸ Sakanaka, "Kita Chōsen Kikokusha Mondai no Honshitsu", p. 44.

⁹ Kikuchi, "Kikoku Undō, Kikoku Jigyō to Kikokusha no 'Higeki'", pp. 303-317.

¹⁰ See Kōseishō Engokyoku ed., *Hikiage to Engo Sanjūnen no Ayumi*, Tokyo, Gyōsei, 1978; Kim Yeong-dal, *Zainichi Chōsenjin no Rekishi*, Tokyo, Akashi Shoten, 2003, pp. 103-104.

¹¹ Information from a declassified Japanese government document suggests that, in the context of repatriation debates in 1956, Japanese government and / or Red Cross officials discussed the possibility of implementing the clause in the Immigration Control Law allowing the state to deport Koreans who were unable to support themselves without welfare payments. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs “regretfully” [遺憾ながら] rejected this idea because “one can easily imagine that this approach would provoke South Korea”. [そのような方途は韓国政府を刺激することが十分予想されるので]; *Nikkan Kokkō Seijōka Kōshō no Kiroku, Sōsetsu Vol. 6 - Zainichi Chōsenjin no Kikan Mondai to Kikan Kyōtei no Teiketsu*, document 126 of the third release of official material pertaining to Japan-ROK relations, released 16 November 2007, p. 71.

¹² See Hōmushō Nyūkoku Kanrikyoku, *Shutsunyūkoku Kanri Hakusho, Shōwa 34-Nen*, Tokyo, Ōkurasho Insatsukyoku, 1959, p. 95.

¹³ Although at the end of 1957, in response to intense pressure from South Korea, the Bureau did allow one group of such deportees the right to remain in Japan, it refused to relinquish the right to deport lawbreakers until after the normalization of relations with South Korea. Even then, this right was not abandoned, but the range of offenses for which Zainichi Koreans could be deported was restricted. See “Nihonkoku Kyojū suru Taikanminkoku Kokumin no Hōteki Chii oyobi Taigu in kansuru Nihonkoku to Taikanminkoku no aida no Kyotei”, April 1966, pp. 3-4.

¹⁴ Professor Wada Haruki, in a review of *Exodus to North Korea*, rightly points out that my statement in that book that “the number of Koreans receiving livelihood protection was reduced by about eighty-one thousand” is

incorrect. According to a report in the *Tokyo Shinbun* (evening edition), 24 May 1956, payments to 24% of Korean recipients were terminated, and payments to 30% of Korean recipients were reduced. The total number of Korean recipients at the beginning of the campaign was 117,073. Thus, the total number of people affected by the cuts was around 75,000. Some commentators argue that, since a sharp rise in the number of applicants for repatriation did not occur until the latter part of 1958, the large number of would-be returnees could not have been a product of the welfare cuts. This is an oddly mechanistic argument. Since there was no clear route for repatriation to North Korea in 1956-1957, those whose lives were affected by the welfare cuts could not have been expected instantly to volunteer for repatriation. However, there is abundant circumstantial evidence that the effects of, as well as fears about, welfare reduction and termination were among the important factors influencing the decision of Koreans to seek repatriation once a route had been established and North Korea had begun to offer housing and welfare to returnees. See Kikuchi, “Kikoku Undō, Kikoku Jigyō to Kikokusha no ‘Higeki’”, p. 238; Park, *Reisenki Nicchō Kankei no Keisei*, p. 322.

¹⁵ 「自費出国、中共経由が望ましいが、自費出国であれば多数が期待できない」。 *Nikkan Kokkō Seijō ka Kōshō no Kiroku, Sōsetsu 6 op. cit., p. 1.*

¹⁶ *Nikkan Kokkō Seijōka Kōshō no Kiroku, Sōsetsu 6, op. cit. p. 1.*

¹⁷ 在日朝鮮人貧困者や強制退去を受けている者等韓国側が引取に応じないものの北鮮[ママ]への送還について、本件の実現が若干資するところあり—*Nikkan Kokkō Seijōka Kōshō no Kiroku, Sōsetsu 6, op. cit., pp. 14-35, quotation from p. 28*

¹⁸ Telegram from League of Red Cross Societies, Geneva, to Red Cross DPRK, Pyongyang, 6 January 1954, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 055-001, *Ressortisants japonais en Corée-du-nord*, 22/01/1954-11/05/1956.

¹⁹ Telegram from Red Cross DPRK Pyongyang to League of Red Cross Societies, Geneva, 6 February 1954, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 055-001.

²⁰ For further details of these discussions, see Morris-Suzuki, *Exodus to North Korea*, pp. 85-87.

²¹ Park Jung-Jin, “Kikoku Undō no Rekishiteki Haikei: Sengo Nicchō Kankei no Kaisho”, in Takasaki Sōji and Park Jung-Jin eds., *Kikoku Jigyō to wa nan datta no ka: Fūin sareta Nicchō Kankeishi*, Tokyo, Heibonsha, 2005, pp. 54-92.

²² See “Statement of the Foreign Minister of the DPRK in protest against persecution of the Korean nationals in Japan”, 30 August 1954, and “Statement of the spokesman of the Foreign Ministry of the DPRK in connection with the question of the Korean internees in Omura camp”, 15 October 1955, both in *On the Question of 600,000 Koreans in Japan*, Pyongyang, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959, pp. 22-28.

²³ Further evidence on this issue comes from subsequent Soviet documentation. In mid-1958, during the discussions with the Soviet Chargé d’Affairs in which he revealed his newly-made decision to encourage a mass repatriation, Kim Il-Sung recalled that “two or three years ago [i.e. in 1955-1956], our economic position did not make it possible for us to raise the idea that, for example, one hundred thousand families of Koreans living in Japan might return to the DPRK and be provided with homes and

work.” It was only after further years of economic reconstruction and growth that the North Korean government had finally come to see such a mass repatriation as a realistic policy; “Record of Conversation with Comrade Kim Il-Sung, 14 and 15 July 1958”, in Diary of V. I. Pelishenko, 23 July 1958, Foreign Policy Archives of the Russian Federation, archive 0102, collection 14, file 8, folder 95.

²⁴ This approach is spelled out clearly in a message from DPRK Foreign Minister Nam Il, sent to Japan by the North Korean Red Cross on 31 December 1955. Kawashima claims that I have behaved “maliciously” in quoting sections of this telegram to support the argument that repatriation was just part of a wider North Korean policy towards *Zainichi* Koreans. The Nam Il message, however, unmistakably deals with the education of *Zainichi* Korean children, the supply of textbooks to Korean schools in Japan, the problem of travel between Japan and North Korea and the North Korean request for its Red Cross representatives to enter Japan, as well as the problems of repatriation and the Ōmura detainees. It also refers to Shigemitsu Mamoru’s 16 December 1955 statement in the Diet Foreign Affairs Committee. See “Full text of the statement by Nam Il, Foreign Minister of the DPRK”, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 105-002.

²⁵ 「朝鮮総連は、結成されて間もない一九五五年七月に、北朝鮮政府へ帰国事業について、それを切望し、問い合わせをしていたのである。日本が、一九五四年一月、北朝鮮朝鮮残留日本人の帰還を求めてはじめた問い合わせを利用し、その残留邦人という弱みをいわば人質として、残留邦人帰還交渉を在日朝鮮人帰還事業へと、転換させていたのが北朝鮮帰還事業の契機である。社会党議員はその橋渡しを行ったのである。」 (“In July 1955, immediately after its formation, *Sōren* expressed its desire for a repatriation project and made enquiries about this to the North Korean government. The first Japanese enquiry to the North Korean

government about the Japanese nationals remaining in North Korea, which had been made in January 1954, was exploited, turning the negotiations on the return of Japanese overseas into a project to repatriate Koreans in Japan, and making “hostages” of the weakness of these Japanese. Socialist Party parliamentarians acted as the intermediaries in this process.”); Kawashima, “Kita Chōsen Kikoku Jigyō” op. cit., p. 103.

²⁶ *Nikkan Kokkō Seijōka Kōshō no Kiroku, Sōsetsu 6*, op.cit.p. 47. (for full Japanese text see Appendix 1)

²⁷ *Nikkan Kokkō Seijōka Kōshō no Kiroku, Sōsetsu 6*, op. cit., pp. 47-50.

²⁸ *Nikkan Kokkō Seijōka Kōshō no Kiroku, Sōsetsu 6*, op. cit., p. 51.

²⁹ Although Kikuchi Yoshiaki refers to the newly released document in his writings, he makes no mention of the information that it contains about the Lee Ho-Yeon Incident or about the December 1955 Foreign Ministry plan.

³⁰ *Kokkai Gijiroku: Shūgiin Gaimu Iinkai*, 16 December 1955.

³¹ For a discussion of Shimazu’s letter and the discussion in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the LDP, see Morris-Suzuki, *Exodus to North Korea*, pp. 88-92. (Japanese translation: Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Kita Chōsen e no Ekusodasu: ‘Kikoku Jigyō no Kage o Tadoru*, Tokyo, Asahi Shinbunsha, 2007, pp. 105-107) Kawashima Takamine quotes my statement that “strangely” Shimazu’s letter did not give the names or number of people who signed the petition. Taking exception to the word “strangely”, Kawashima claims that I am accusing the Japanese Red Cross of “inventing” the

existence of the July 1955 Tokyo repatriates’ gathering and the petition from returnees. My book, however, clearly mentions the existence of the (relatively small-scale) gathering of would-be returnees in July 1955, and adds “perhaps this was the source of the petition that Shimazu sent to Geneva in December”. The word “strangely” therefore obviously does not imply that the Japan Red Cross forged the petition. It refers to the somewhat surprising fact that they forwarded an important petition without including the names of the signatories, and without stating how many people had signed it. See Morris-Suzuki, *Exodus to North Korea*, pp. 88 and 90 (Japanese translation pp. 106 and 108); Kawashima, “Kita Chōsen Kikoku Jigyō” op. cit., p. 98.

³² “We cannot say that the Japanese government was the first to move towards a ‘mass repatriation’. When the Japanese Red Cross began, from the end of 1955, to seek to carry out a repatriation under the ICRC... this was a move based on repeated demands by pro-*Sōren Zainichi* Koreans for repatriation to be carried out. This assistance for those wishing repatriation, as humanitarian assistance, fulfilled the ideals and mission of the Japanese Red Cross.” Kikuchi, “Kikoku Undō, Kikoku Jigyō to Kikokusha no ‘Higeki’”, pp. 307-308.

³³ Kikuchi, “Kikoku Undō, Kikoku Jigyō to Kikokusha no ‘Higeki’”, pp. 307-308.

³⁴ Kim Yeong-dal and Takayanagi Toshio, *Kita Chōsen Kikoku Jigyō Kankei Shiryōshū*, Tokyo, Shinkansha, 1995, p. 349.

³⁵ *Akahata*, 30 September 1955.

³⁶ Morris-Suzuki, *Exodus to North Korea: Shadows from Japan’s Cold War*, p. 96.

³⁷ *Asahi Shinbun*, 7 April 1956.

³⁸ Inoue Masutarō, and *Fundamental Conditions of Livelihood of Certain Koreans Residing in Japan*, Tokyo, Japan Red Cross Society, 1956, p. 57.

³⁹ The information sent from the Japan Red Cross Society to the ICRC speaks of 60,000 as being the “number of Koreans wishing to return to the North as said by the North Korean League”; “Exposé synoptique du télégramme de la Croix-Rouge japonaise du 13 janvier 1956”, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 105-002. I quoted this statement in Morris-Suzuki, *Exodus to North Korea*, op. cit., p. 93. Prof. Kawashima also quotes this passage, and then claims that I have told a “malicious lie” [*akushitsu na uso*] by stating that “from December 1955 on, this number was cited again and again by the Japanese Red Cross as the likely number of returnees” and that “the origin of this figure is a mystery”. Kawashima, “Kita Chōsen Kikoku Jigyō” op. cit., p. 100. However, the origin of the figure is patently a mystery - as explained in this article, it is very different from the figures presented by *Sōren* to other audiences, and there is no way of telling on what basis it was calculated, or who did the calculation. I hope, however, that the discussion in this article has shed a little more light on the matter.

⁴⁰ Masutaro Inoue, *Report of the Phyongyang Conference held by Japanese and North Korean Red Cross Societies (January 27th-February 28th 1956)*, March 17 1956, p. 3, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 055-001, p. 17.

⁴¹ Inoue, *Report of the Phyongyang Conference*, op. cit., p. 17.

⁴² Inoue, *Report of the Phyongyang*

Conference op. cit., p. 18.

⁴³ Inoue, *Report of the Phyongyang Conference* op. cit., pp. 18-19.

⁴⁴ Inoue, *Report of the Phyongyang Conference* op. cit., p. 19.

⁴⁵ Letter from Inoue Masutarō to Roger Gallopin, 26 March 1956, ICRC Archives, B AG232 105-002, *Problème du rapatriement des Coréens du Japon, dossier I - Généralités*, 27/02/1953-11/10/1957.

⁴⁶ Letter from Inoue to Boissier, 31 March 1956, ICRC Archives, B AG232 105-002, emphasis added.

⁴⁷ “Dérroulement de la visite des délégués du CICR au Japon”, 27 May 1956, p. 1, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 105-002, p. 7; an article published in the *Asahi* newspaper in August on the ongoing demonstrations by would-be repatriates also noted that by that time the number of volunteers for repatriation was estimated at about 3,000, but that the “relevant Japanese authorities” [日本の関係当局] expected “at least 60,000” to depart if a repatriation scheme were established in the future; *Asahi Shinbun* (evening edition), 8 August 1956.

⁴⁸ Japan Red Cross Society, *The Repatriation Problem of Certain Koreans residing in Japan*, October 1956, pp. 17-18; in ICRC Archives 232 105-027, *Documentation concernant le rapatriement des Coréens et des pêcheurs japonais détenues à Pusan*, 10/10/1956-04/03/1959.

⁴⁹ Letter from Shimazu Tadatsugu to Leopold Boissier, 28 February 1957, ICRC Archives B

AG 232 105-002.

⁵⁰ Letter from Shimazu to Boissier, 19 July 1956, ICRC Archives B AG 232 105-004, *Problème du rapatriement des Coréens du Japon, dossier III: rapatriement de 48 Coréens en Corée-du-Nord*, 28/05/1956-03/12/1957.

⁵¹ ICRC, minutes of the Conseil de la Présidence, Thursday 19 June 1956, p. 6, in ICRC Archives B AG 251 075-002, *Mission de William H. Michel et d'Eugène de Weck, du 27 mars au 2 juillet 1956, visites aux Sociétés nationales et problème du rapatriement de civils entre la Corée et le Japon, première partie*, 01/03/1956-06/08/1956. The minutes go on to state that 60,000 people is equivalent to 60% of the Korean population of Japan - evidently a misprint for 10%.

⁵² Kikuchi Yoshiaki indeed refers to many of these steps in his sole-authored book though (perhaps for reasons of space) skims over them in his co-authored work. Almost all of these steps are also omitted from the “Chronology of the North Korean Repatriation Project” appended to the back of this latter book. Sakanaka, Han and Kikuchi, *Kita Chōsen Kikokusha Mondai no Rekishi to Kadai*. pp. 320-337.

⁵³ It was in the midst of this process that the North Korean government issued Cabinet Order No. 53, “On Stabilizing the Living of Korean Citizens Arriving from Japan”. Kawashima Takamine presents this document as though it were a major revelation, but I had in fact already discussed its existence and quoted from it in *Exodus to North Korea* (p. 130). Kawashima also promises future significant revelations about the “phantom first repatriation ship”; see Kawashima, “Kita Chōsen Kikoku Jigyō” op. cit. This ship,

arranged through the energetic activities of Inoue Masutarō, was the Norwegian vessel *Hai Lee*, which set sail for North Korea from Mōji on 6 December 1956 with 20 of the original 48 repatriates and three others on board. The remaining 28 (again with Inoue’s assistance) left for North Korea from Hakata on a Japanese fishing vessel on 31 March 1957 and arrived in Cheongjin on 4 April - see *Nikkan Kokkō Seijōka Kōshō no Kiroku, Sōsetsu 6*, op. cit., p. 64. Prof. Kawashima’s further revelations are eagerly awaited.

⁵⁴ *Nikkan Kokkō Seijōka Kōshō no Kiroku, Sōsetsu 6*, op. cit., pp. 63-64.

⁵⁵ For example, Shimazu to Li Byung-Nam, 6 June 1956, ICRC Archives B AG 105-002.

⁵⁶ Inoue Masutarō, “Report of the Red Cross Conference Held by the Japanese and North Korean Red Cross Societies, January 27th-February 28th 1956”, ICRC Archives B AG 232 055-001, pp. 17 and 19; Shimazu to Li Byung-Nam, 6 June 1956, ICRC Archives B AG 105-002; Inoue to Boissier, 2 July 1956, ICRC Archives B AG 232 105-002; Inoue to Boissier, 16 June 1956, ICRC Archives B AG 232 105-004. During the first of these meetings and through letters and telegrams, the North Koreans were informed that Japan insisted on involving the ICRC, and that ICRC participation was needed in order to overcome objections from South Korea.

⁵⁷ Inoue to Boissier, 2 July 1956, ICRC Archives B AG 232 105-002; see also Inoue to Boissier, 16 June 1956, ICRC Archives B AG 232 105-004, which makes it clear that the meeting was at Inoue’s initiative. Park Jung-Jin has written of this meeting that “its topic was the problem of the repatriation of the 47 (later 48) people conducting a sit-down strike outside the Japanese Red Cross Headquarters. The result

of the meeting was that both sides would accept ICRC visas and pursue a plan for them to enter through Hong Kong or Shanghai and travel via China.” (Park, *Reisenki Nicchō Kankei no Keisei*, p. 320). However, Inoue saw the meeting in the context of the longer-term issue of repatriation. The 47 (48) returnees had already agreed to cover the cost of their own travel to North Korea. The outcome of the Tientsin talks was a verbal agreement that, in the case of returnees who could not cover their own expenses, Japan would pay the cost of travel for those who had been forcibly recruited as labourers or served in the Japanese armed forces during the war, and North Korea would pay the costs of other returnees. Because of the delicate situation of negotiations with South Korea, North Korea was asked in the first instance to pay the travel costs of all returnees who could not afford to pay for their own travel, with the idea that Japan would start to pay its contribution later, once negotiations with South Korea had progressed. See Inoue to Boissier, 2 July 1956, ICRC Archives B AG 232 105-002.

⁵⁸ These included an approach to the Hong Kong based British shipping firm Butterfield. The chairman of the shipping firm was informed by JRC President Shimazu that the aim of the approach was “to establish a first precedent that North Koreans in Japan can be repatriated in mass safely without raising any protestation of the South Korean Government whatsoever”. Shimazu to Carey, 11 June 1956, in ICRC Archives B AG 232 105-004. Ultimately, South Korea obtained knowledge of this plan and pressured Butterfield to withdraw.

⁵⁹ Inoue Masutarō, “Report: Visit to the Omura Detention Camp, June 28 1958, p. 8. ICRC Archives, B AG 232 105-006, *Problème du Rapatriement des Coréens du Japon, dossier V: année 1958*, 10/10/1958-15/12/1958. Memo from International Committee of the Red Cross

Japan Delegation (Harry Angst) to ICRC Geneva, “Distribution of Monetary Relief from the North Korean Red Cross Society among the inmates of the Omura Immigration Center on June 28 1958”, 3 July 1958, p. 4. ICRC Archives, B AG 232 105-006.

⁶⁰ Shimazu to Boissier, 12 January 1957, ICRC Archives B AG 232 105-005; Boissier to Shimazu, 26 February 1957, ICRC Archives B AG 232 105-005.

⁶¹ See for example Shimazu to Boissier, 12 January 1957, ICRC Archives B AG 232 105-005; Durand to Angst, 1 May 1957, ICRC Archives B AG 232 105-005, *Problème du rapatriement des Coréens du Japon, dossier III*, 16/07/1956-08/01/1958.

⁶² Kikuchi, “Kikoku Undō, Kikoku Jigyō to Kikokusha no ‘Higeki’”, p. 303.

⁶³ André Durand, “Aide Memoire: Rapatriement des Coréens du Japon”, 23 June 1960, pp. 7-8, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 105-019, *Problème du rapatriement des Coréens du Japon, dossier XVI*, 1960 14/01/1960-30/12/1960.

⁶⁴ ICRC chief delegate André Durand noted that Koreans in the Niigata Centre often mistook the ICRC representatives for “Russians or Americans”; Durand to ICRC, 14 March 1960, in ICRC Archives, B AG 105-016, *Problème du rapatriement des Coréens du Japon, dossier XIV*, 05/01/1960-08/04/1960.

⁶⁵ Kawashima, “Kita Chōsen Kikoku Jigyō”, p. 88.

⁶⁶ *Nikkan Kokkō Seijōka Kōshō no Kiroku, Sōsetsu 6*, op. cit., p. 206.

⁶⁷ 新潟センターの「特別な一室」の意味は、いわゆる「密室」ではなくドアのない普通の部屋である。“Supplementary Explanations on Certain Aspects of Actual Operations of Repatriation Work”, 28 October 1959, in ICRC Archives, B AG 105-013, *Problème du rapatriement des Coréens du Japon, dossier XI*, 11/10/1959-29/12/1959; for Japanese versions, see Nihon Sekijūjisha, *Nihon Sekijūjisha Shishikō*, vol. 7, Tokyo, Nihon Sekijūjisha, 1986, pp. 204 and 208. Kawashima, “Kita Chōsen Kikoku Jigyō”, p. 88.

⁶⁸ Kawashima, “Kita Chōsen Kikoku Jigyō”, p. 89.

⁶⁹ See ICRC Archives, “Concerning Meeting with M. Miaki, Gaimucho, Asian Department, MM. Kasai and Inoue JRCS and, for the ICRC, Mr. Lehner, Hoffmann, Gouy and Borsinger”, 31 October 1959, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 105-013. This document is also cited and referenced in *Exodus to North Korea*, p. 213 (Japanese translation p. 279). As the quotation from the relevant document given here shows, Professor Kawashima is mistaken.

⁷⁰ See André Durand, “Aide Memoire: Rapatriement des Coréens du Japon”, op. cit., p. 12.

⁷¹ George Hoffman, “Weekly Report for the Period from 2 November till 7 November 1959” in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 105-013.

⁷² Telegram from Douglas MacArthur II, US Ambassador in Tokyo, to US Secretary of State, 30 October 1959, in National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, decimal file no. 294.9522/10-3059.

⁷³ Inoue to Boissier, 31 May 1957, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 105-005.

⁷⁴ Immigration Control Bureau, “Monthly Report on Repatriation to North Korea no. 59”, Nov. 30 1964, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 103-030.

⁷⁵ For example, memo from International Committee of the Red Cross Japan Delegation (Harry Angst) to ICRC Geneva, “Distribution of Monetary Relief from the North Korean Red Cross Society among the inmates of the Omura Immigration Center on June 28 1958”, 3 July 1958, p. 4. ICRC Archives, B AG 232 105-006. Angst mentions the case of two deserters from the South Korean navy who fear deportation to either half of Korea, and seek refugee status either in Japan or a third country.

⁷⁶ See “Information for Judgement of North Korean Situation”, report prepared by Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, and given to British Foreign Office (in English) as part of an exchange of information; see British National Archives, file no FO 371-158554.

⁷⁷ As early as January 1957, Shimazu Tadatsugu had made it plain that “the entry of North Koreans from North Korea to Japan is not permitted. In other words, re-entry to Japan of those Koreans wishing to repatriate to North Korea is not approved in principle except in some rare humanitarian cases. It seems that the North Korean side is intentionally mixing the ‘freedom to choose places of residence’ which is a humanitarian problem with the ‘free comings and goings between nations’ which is a political problem”. Shimazu to Boissier, “The Repatriation Problem of Koreans in Japan”, 12 January 1957, in ICRC Archives, B AG 232 105-005, 12.12.1956-12.01.1957; in practice, the humanitarian cases seem to have been very rare indeed. When one “returnee” who was in Cambodia for a sporting contest sought political asylum in the Japanese Embassy in Phnom Penh in 1966, he was handed over to the Cambodian authorities, who returned him

to North Korea.

⁷⁸ For further information on those sufferings, see Han Sok-gyu, *Nihon kara “Kita” ni Kaeta*

Hito no Monogatari, Tokyo, Shinkansha, 2007; Ishimaru Jirō, *Kita Chōsen Nanmin*, Tokyo, Kōdansha, 2002; see also Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Exodus to North Korea*, op. cit, ch. 19.